

Rise of the Maratha Power

The history of the Mughul empire in India cannot be complete without reference to the rise of the Marathas under their great leader Shivaji, who and his successors played an important part in bringing about the downfall of that empire. In this chapter an attempt has been made to give a connected narrative of the rise of the Maratha power and the institutions which they built up for the governance of the people in their charge.

Marathas before Shivaji

Before the rise of Shivaji the Marathas, whose original home was Maharashtra, *i.e.*, the western edge of the Dakhin plateau, were scattered like atoms in South India. They were a poor downtrodden people, engaged mainly in agriculture, with a few top-ranking families in the service of the Muslim kingdoms of the Dakhin, and figuring as military commanders and jagirdars. They were granted jagirs and enjoyed the status of second or third-rate nobles at the court of these kingdoms. But as a people, the Marathas had homogeneous society of their own, which was characterised by social and economic equality, besides a common religion and culture, and outlook on life. There were very few rich men among them and Marathi was their common language and Hinduism their common religion. They were a simple and hardy people, devoted to their faith and hospitable to their guests. They were self-reliant, courageous, brave and proud. Three hundred years' Muslim domination made them more cunning than chivalrous. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Maharashtra witnessed a religious movement which brought forth many religious teachers some of whom belonged to the lower castes and rubbed shoulders with the highest in the country. These teachers preached the Bhakti cult, emphasised the essential equality of all irrespective of caste and economic position, and laboured hard to foster a sense of Hindu unity. The names of Tukaram, Ram Das, Vaman Pandit, Eknath and a few others are even now household words throughout Maharashtra. Their teaching, some of which were committed to writing, developed the Marathi language and produced a community of creed and life and democratic temper, and therefore a solidarity which was

modern state of Mysore, and parts of the districts of Bellary, Chittur and Arcot in Madras. In addition to these, he had imperfectly conquered the Kanara region which included the principalities of Sunda and Bednur and southern part of Dharwar.

Outside the above regions, a large area in the Dakhin was under his sphere of influence, though it did not recognize his sovereignty. This area consisted of a large part of the Mughul Dakhin from where Shivaji levied *chauth* or one-fourth of the standard assessment of the land revenue.

Shivaji's kingdom contained two hundred and forty forts and yielded a revenue of seven crores of rupees, but the actual collections were much less, probably one crore only.

Administration

As was the practice in medieval times, Shivaji was a despot with all powers concentrated in his hands. But as he stood for the welfare of his subjects he might be called a benevolent despot. He had eight ministers to assist him in the work of administration. The ministers, however, did not form a cabinet in the modern sense of the term, for they were responsible to Shivaji alone, who appointed and dismissed them at will. But he left much work in their hands and except in matters of formulation of policy, he seldom interfered with their work. Nevertheless, the function of the ministers was purely advisory. Among the ministers the Peshwa enjoyed a higher status and royal confidence, but not supremacy over his colleagues.

The ministers, called the Asht Pradhans, were :

- (1) **The Prime Minister or Peshwa** officially known as *Mukhya Pradhan*. He was responsible for the general administration and welfare of the kingdom, and, therefore, his main duties were to control other officers and promote harmony in the administration. He represented the king in his absence and put his seal below the king's to all royal letters and despatches.
- (2) **The Auditor or Majumdar or Amatya**. His duty was to check all the accounts of income and expenditure and to countersign all statements of accounts, whether of the kingdom as a whole or of the particular districts.
- (3) **The Chronicler or Waqia-Nawis or Mantri**. He was in charge of compiling a daily record of the king's activities and to watch over his invitation lists, meals, etc., so as to guard against plots.
- (4) **The Superintendent or Shuru-Nawis or Sachiv**. His duty was to see that all royal letters and despatches were drafted in

the proper style. He had to revise the letters and despatches. One of his duties was to check the accounts of the parganas.

- (5) **The Foreign Secretary or Dabir or Sumant.** His duty was to advise the king on matters relating to foreign states and on questions of war and peace. He had also to receive foreign ambassadors and envoys and to keep in touch with the activities of other powers.
- (6) **The Commander-in-Chief or Sar-i-Naubat or Senapati.** He was in charge of the recruitment, organization and discipline of the army. He had also to arrange for the disposition of the troops on the fields of battle.
- (7) **The Ecclesiastical Head or Sadr and Muhtasib or Pandit Rao or Danadhyaksha.** His main duties were to fix dates for religious ceremonies, to punish heresy and to disburse among the Brahmans large sums of money set apart by the king for charity. He was the judge of canon law, royal Almanac and Censor of Public Morals.
- (8) **The Chief Justice or Nyayadhish.** He was the highest judge in the kingdom and responsible for civil and military justice and for endorsing judicial decisions regarding rights of lands, village headship, etc.

All the ministers except the Ecclesiastical Head and the Chief Justice were required to command armies and lead expeditions. "All royal letters, charters, and treaties had to bear the seals of the king and the Peshwa and the endorsement of the next four ministers, i.e., other than the Commander-in-Chief, the Ecclesiastical Head and the Chief Justice."

Local Government

Shivaji's kingdom was divided into four provinces, each under a viceroys. The northern provinces included Dang, Baglan, the Koli country south of Surat, Konkan north of Bombay and the Dakhin plateau (Desh) southwards to Poona. It was under Moro Trimbak Pingle. The next province or the southern division consisted of Konkan south of Bombay, the Sawant-Vadi and the North Kanara coast. It was governed by Annaji Datto. The third was the south-eastern division and comprised the districts of Satara and Kolhapur of the Dakhin plateau, the districts of Belgaon and Dharwar to Kopal west of the Tungabhadra in Karnatak. It was under Dattaji Pant. The fourth province consisted of the recently conquered country extending from the Tungabhadra opposite Kopal to Vellore and Jinji, i.e., the northern, central and eastern parts of the modern state of Mysore and portions of the districts of Madras, Bellary, Chittur and Arcot. This may be called a non-regulated province, as being a recent conquest, it was held by an army of occupation.

Besides these provinces, Shivaji had almost conquered the Kanara highlands including the south Dharwar district and the states of Sunda and Bednur. This region was not actually in Shivaji's possession at the time of his death but was under his suzerainty and paid him tribute.

The provinces were sub-divided into parganas, each of which must have had a collector with a contingent of troops under his command. But we have no knowledge of the administrative details of these sub-divisions.

Army

Shivaji's army was a well-organized and disciplined force and at the time of his death consisted of 45,000 *paga* and 60,000 *silahdar* cavalry, and one lakh of Mavle infantry. He left 32,000 horses in his stables, in addition to 5,000 which were given to the Bargirs. The number of his elephants is variously given as 1,260, 125 and 300. The last figure seems to be more likely.

The most important part of the army was the famous *paga* or state cavalry. Twenty-five troopers (Bargirs) formed a unit which was placed under one *havaladar*. There was one *jumladar* over every five *havaldars* and one *ek-hazari* over every ten *jamadars*, i.e., 1,250 men. The highest rank in the *paga* was *paanch-hazari* and at the head of the entire *paga* cavalry was supreme commander or *sar-i-naubat* of cavalry. One water-carrier and one farrier were supplied for each unit, i.e., 25 troopers.

There was another kind of cavalry called *silahdars* or troopers who supplied their own horses and arms. These ranked lower than the *paga* horsemen, but were under the same *sar-i-naubat* of cavalry.

The infantry was the next important branch of the army. In this nine soldiers or privates (*paiks*) formed a unit and were placed under one corporal, called *nayak*. Over every five *nayaks* there was one *havaladar*, over every two or three *havaldars* one *jumladar*, and over ten *jumladars* one *hazari*. Still higher rank was the *saat-hazari*. Over *saat-hazari* there was the *sar-i-naubat* of infantry. "Shivaji's Guard Brigade of 20,000 select Malve infantry was splendidly equipped, dressed and armed at great expense of the state."

It was Shivaji's practice to employ his army for eight months to invade foreign dominions and bring supplies. The army spent four months of rains in cantonment and was sent out after Dusshera to invade the country selected by the king. At the time of departure a list was made of all the articles in the possession of all the soldiers and officers, and when they returned they were searched and whatever was found in excess was taken by the state.

Shivaji's army was highly mobile and disciplined, and carried little baggage. No women were permitted to accompany the troops. Even the king had as little of baggage as possible. On account of its

organization, rigor was irresistible in

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organization, rigorous discipline and extreme simplicity, Shivaji's army was irresistible in the seventeenth century.

Revenue administration

The Maratha revenue settlement under Shivaji was based on measurement of land by a fixed system of mensuration. The area of each village was ascertained in detail and an estimate was made of the expected produce of each *bigha* of land. Of the produce two-fifths were taken by the state and the remaining left to the cultivators. New cultivators were given seed and cattle, the value of which was recovered by the government in a number of instalments. The revenue was accepted in cash or in kind and was realised directly by the government officers.

Shivaji's revenue policy was *ryotwari*, and he was against revenue farmers and zamindars. He did not permit the zamindars, Deshmukhs and Desais to exercise political authority over the peasantry. As far as possible, Shivaji was against the grant of jagirs in lieu of salary to his officers. But whenever he gave assignments of land, he saw that the assignees had no political power in their jagirs.

We have no means of ascertaining the names and rates of other taxes besides the land revenue. But there must have been import and export duties and excise taxes.

An important source of Shivaji's income was *chauth* or one-fourth of the standard revenue of the country which belonged to the neighbouring states and were raided by Shivaji to lay them under contribution. He used to realise the *chauth* every year. Another important source of income was *sardeshmukhi* or one-tenth of the standard revenue from these states.

Religious policy

Though an orthodox Hindu, Shivaji was respectful and tolerant to all religions. He gave full freedom of conscience and worship to Muslims and respected their saints and holy places. If he made endowments for Hindu temples, he gave grants to Muslim saints' hermitages. He built a hermitage for Baba Yaqut of Keloshi. He invariably respected the Quran and whenever in his raids copies of that book fell into the hands of his men, they were delivered to his Muslim followers to read. He respected Muslim women and never allowed his troops to dishonour them. The historian Khafi Khan, who was by no means friendly to Shivaji, praised him for his tolerance to Muslim religion and for the honourable treatment he meted out to Muslim women and children who fell into the hands of his army during the course of his raids. He made no discrimination against Muslims in the state services, in the army and navy, and employed them even in confidential capacity.

Shivaji was a devout Hindu and he took steps to encourage Vedic scholarship. He set apart a large sum of money for the encouragement

of learned Brahmans. His guru was the famous saint Ram Das from whom Shivaji derived religious inspiration, but the saint had no influence on Shivaji's state policy or administration. It is said that seeing that Ram Das went out every day to beg alms, Shivaji made a gift of all kingdom to him. The guru accepted the gift, but returned the kingdom to Shivaji to rule over it as vicar, advising him to hold himself responsible for all his acts to a higher authority. Shivaji agreed and adopted the red ochre colour of Ram Das's robe for his royal dress (*Bhagwa Thanda*) "in order to signify that he fought and ruled in the livery of his ascetic Lord Paramount and conducted himself as ever in his great Task-Master's eyes."

Character of Shivaji

Shivaji was a dutiful son, attentive husband, a loving father and a kind friend. He adorned his mother, respected his father and loved his wives and children. He was a friend of the poor and down-trodden. Though not educated in the formal sense, he was highly learned and well-informed. He was gifted with extraordinary intelligence, supreme commonsense and the power of critical discrimination, supreme intensely religious, abstemious and free from vice. Though an orthodox Hindu, he was not a religious bigot like his contemporary Aurangzeb and saw truth in every religion, and adored saints, both Hindu and Muslim.

He was a great military genius who instinctively adopted the guerilla system of warfare which was well "suited to the racial character of his soldiers, the nature of the country, the weapons of the age and the internal condition of the enemies." His army was so well recruited, organized, trained and disciplined that it had become irresistible in the 17th century. A great organizer that he was, Shivaji had everything provided beforehand during a campaign. He was an idol of his soldiery with whom he shared the toils and fatigue of a battle. He was the first Indian ruler in the medieval age to perceive the necessity of building up a navy. He built dockyards and ships for trade as well as for protection.

As a ruler and administrator Shivaji achieved conspicuous success. He created a powerful state, gave it good system of administration and did everything possible in that age to advance the moral and material interests of his subjects. He kept a firm control over his officers, civil and military, and personally looked after the minute details of his administration, though he was wise enough to delegate much of routine business to his subordinates and to give them plenty of discretion in matters connected with their daily duties.

A remarkable thing about him as an administrator was that he had so organized his government, local as well as central, that it could continue functioning efficiently in his absence. This was a novel thing as the historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar remarks, in an oriental monarchy

As a ruler Shivaji gave his subjects not only peace and universal toleration but also equal opportunities for all without distinction of caste or creed, and opened government service to talent. His system of administration was beneficent and free from corruption and partisanship. The establishment of Marathi in preference to Persian as the court language and the compilation at his instance of the Sanskrit dictionary, *Raj-Vyavahar Kosh*, made it possible for the Marathas to develop their national language. Thus, as a ruler Shivaji not only placed before himself a high political ideal but also successfully endeavoured to realise it for common good.

Shivaji was a statesman of a high order, one who could instinctively perceive the possibilities of his time and gather the best element in the country around him for the fulfilment of his life's ambition—the establishment of a Hindu *Swaraj* in Maharashtra. He called the Marathas to a new life and welded them into a nation. When he began his task, the Mughul empire was at the height of its glory and he had other powerful enemies, like the sultans of Bijapur and Golkunda, the Sidis of Janjira and the Portuguese of the west coast to face. And yet he succeeded in the teeth of the greatest opposition from these powers. Shivaji's greatest contribution, therefore, as a statesman was the life he breathed into the Maratha race. He was a great constructive genius and a true 'hero' as king, who proved to be a source of inspiration to the posterity as well as to his contemporaries.

"He taught the modern Hindus," writes Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "to rise to the full stature of their growth. Shivaji had shown that the tree of Hinduism is not really dead, that it can rise from beneath the seemingly crushing load of centuries of political bondage, that it can put forth new leaves and branches. It can again lift up its head to the skies."

Did Shivaji want to establish a Hindu empire for the whole of India ?

The historian Sardesai is of the opinion that Shivaji did not restrict his vision to Maharashtra, but wanted to secure freedom for the Hindus of the entire sub-continent of India. He gives the following arguments in support of his view : (1) Shivaji's main object was to win religious freedom and not territory. As early as 1645, he wrote to Dadaji Naras Prabhu about his scheme of *Hindavi Swaraj*, meaning thereby his desire to strive for Hindu religious autonomy for the whole of India. Maratha men of thought and action after Shivaji interpreted his ideal and ambition in the above light. (2) "Shivaji's levy of *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* was conceived in the spirit of an all-India instrument of expansion." (3) A contemporary Jaipur poet believed that Shivaji aspired to the imperial throne at Delhi and praised Jai Singh for having subdued such an ambitious man as the Maratha king. (4) Shivaji's journey to Agra was undertaken to acquire a first-hand knowledge of

Northern India and to see whether it was ready to throw off the Mughul yoke. (5) His defence of his kingdom by means of land and sea force, his brushing aside the narrow prejudice against sea voyaging and his re-admitting into Hindu society Hindu converts to Islam, show that he had placed before him a high ideal of political and moral regeneration of the entire Hindu community. (6) While engaged in conflict with the sultans of Dakhin and the Mughuls, Shivaji did not fight against Rajput chiefs and attempted to come to an understanding with them.

The above arguments do not seem to have much force in them and are far from convincing. It does not require much argumentation to show that Hindu religious autonomy in the Mughul empire was an utter impossibility, for in practice it would have been conceded an *imperium in imperio* and therefore could not have been conceded to any ruler, much less by Aurangzeb. Although it may be conceded on the base of Shivaji's *Swaraj* was broad enough to embrace ultimately the whole of India, it is doubtful whether he ever entertained any such ambition. He was a realist and not a visionary and we have no concrete evidence to show that he ever entertained any such ambition. It is now established beyond a shadow of doubt that Shivaji spent twenty-five days, all told, in his return journey from Agra to Raigarh and had no time or opportunity to acquaint himself with conditions in Northern India. His journey to Agra was not undertaken with that object in view. Further, it is wrong to say that he did not fight against the Rajputs, unless by this we mean fighting with the Rajput chiefs as principals and not on behalf of the Mughul emperor. There was no occasion for this as far as Shivaji was concerned.

On the other hand, Shivaji did not take steps to rouse the country against the Mughuls and he only protested against the re-imposition of *jiziya*. He maintained no contact with powerful Hindu rebellious elements in Northern India, such as the Jats, the Satnamis and the Sikhs. Although as a clever general he did appeal to the Hindu sentiments of Jaswant Singh and Jai Singh, he had no concrete scheme of an alliance with them or any other Rajput chief for the overthrow of the Mughuls. He failed to make use of the services of the enthusiastic Chhatra Sal Bundela, gave him no assistance and only advised him to go back to Bundelkhand* and raise the standard of revolt against Aurangzeb. These facts militate against the theory of an all-India Hindu empire.

Causes of Shivaji's failure to build an enduring state

There were several causes of Shivaji's failure to build an enduring state. In the first place, his reign was very short, just of ten years, and he was engaged all through in fighting with his numerous enemies, and had very little time for consolidation.

* Jadunath Sarkar : *Shivaji and His Times*, pp. 180-81.

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Secondly, the condition of the Maratha society in the 16th century was such that it could be reformed only by a long, patient and sustained effort of generations of selfless workers. In that age of instability everyone clung to his *watan* or hereditary land, and for every plot of land there were more than one claimant due to either the expansion of the family and the division of the *watan* among the members, or the replacement of one owner by another by the local governors or sultan. This had given rise to constant disputes among the people in Maharashtra. After the establishment of his supremacy, Shivaji was obliged to give his decision about disputed *watans* with the result that the disappointed suitors ranged themselves against him and joined his enemies, such as the sultans of Bijapur and Golkunda or the Mughuls. Shivaji had, therefore, not only to fight his enemies, but also his own people throughout his life.

Thirdly, in the 17th century, people in Maharashtra as in the rest of India were divided into minute groups or castes with great jealousy towards one another. The Brahmans despised the non-Brahmans and were themselves torn by such divisions among them as Desh Brahmans and Konkan Brahmans, Chitpavans and Karahdes. They hated one another and meted out an uncharitable treatment even to Shivaji who had proved to be their saviour, and did not allow him to utter the Vedic mantras at his coronation. The implacable prejudice made a common action difficult, and real and permanent national solidarity an impossibility.

Fourthly, Shivaji's political success created a reaction in favour of Hindu orthodoxy. The upper classes in Maharashtra on account of the importance given to them in the Maratha state began to emphasize the life of ceremonial purity which was opposed to the simple and homogenous life of the poor. The result was a gulf between the two main classes of the Maratha society. Thus, as Sir Jadunath Sarkar writes, "Shivaji's political success sapped the main foundation of that success.....In proportion as Shivaji's ideal of Hindu *Swaraj* was based on orthodoxy, it contained within itself the seed of its own death."

Finally, whereas Maharashtra as a whole gained considerably on account of its political independence under Shivaji, no well-thought-out and organized attempt was made to educate the people and to improve their intellect and character. The common folk remained as ignorant as ever and took little interest in the fortunes of the race. On account of this basic failure the Maratha kingdom, so laboriously built up by the exertion and genius of Shivaji, fell within ten years of the founder's death.

SHAMBHUJI, 1680-89

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then ten years old, But