

MARATHA EMPIRE: AN ADVANCED STUDY

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ABSTRACT: For the purpose of understanding how Peshwas, a family of ministers, rose to the position of the chief executive officer under the Maratha kings and ultimately wielded power throughout the empire. The Maratha confederacy was created in the 18th century after Shivaji's kingdom of Maharashtra in western India was forced to fall under Mughal domination. After the death of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, Maratha's power was restored by Shivaji's grandson Shahu (1707). He gave control to the Brahman Bhat dynasty, which became hereditary Peshwa under his rule (chief ministers). He also wanted to expand northward using peshwas-controlled soldiers. The peshwas' influence grew throughout Shahu's latter years. When he died in 1749, they assumed power. It became increasingly difficult for the prominent Maratha families—Sindhia, Bhonsle, and Gaekwar—to maintain dominance over northern and central India. Panipat's defeat by the Afghans in 1761 and the death of the youthful peshwa Madhav Rao I in 1772 terminated the effective power of the peshwas. After that, the Maratha state was a confederation of five chiefs under the nominal authority of the peshwa at Poona (now Pune), western India. Despite the fact that they occasionally banded together, such as against the British in 1775–82, more frequently than not they fought. Baji Rao II sought protection from of the British after he was beaten by the Holkar dynasty in 1802, and the confederacy was abolished by British intervention in 1818. Even though the confederacy was founded on Maratha nationalist sentiments, its chiefs' rivalries torn the organisation apart. Peshwas rose to power for a variety of reasons. Tari Bai, in contrast to Chhatrapati Shahu, was self-centered and narrow-minded. Maharashtra had no one to rely on to keep the peace. Shivaji's Asht-Pradhan, which he invented, was also ineffectual. The Maratha nobles were vying for control in these circumstances. The Shahu Peshwas used their expertise to solve these issues. They excelled as diplomatic and military leaders. To the Marathas, they represented the dream of extending their influence and power into the northern part of the subcontinent. They ascended to the top of the Maratha hierarchy via hard work and leadership, and they steered them toward becoming India's dominant force. In the beginning, Shahu had a Peshwa named Balaji Vishwanath (1713-20 A.D.). Sar Subahdar of Poona & Daulatabad when Shahu arrived in Maharashtra following his escape from Mughal incarceration. For his part, he allied with Shahu and sent Tara Bai's commander-in-chief Dhanaji Jadav to support Shahu's ascent to power, which enabled him to seize control of Maharashtra.

KEYWORDS: Maratha Empire, Pune, Mughal, Peshwas, British, Baji Rao, Asht-Pradhan

INTRODUCTION:

Debating the country's past is a popular pastime in India. As a result, these debates often fail to comprehend the richness and nuance of pre-modern India's sociopolitical milieu. Overemphasizing interstate warfare's sectarian and religious dimensions, or anachronistically seeing a progressive ideal of tolerance in some mediaeval ruler's kingdom, is a common criticism of Indian history.

A new Bollywood film, Bajirao Mastani, has sparked a controversy about India's Maratha Empire's legacy (1674-1818), which has dominated recent historical discussions. Maratha warrior-hero Chhatrapati (Emperor) Shivaji built the Maratha Empire in the late 17th century to respond to the turmoil and misrule in the Deccans [1]. Mughal rule spread into southern India during this time. The Maratha Empire, which was founded by a Hindu warrior people from the western Deccan peninsula, is revered by Hindu nationalists [2]. Since this state reversed centuries of slowly rising Muslim political hegemony on the subcontinent, they held it highly. The Mughal monarchs in Delhi were their pawns by the mid-18th century when it became the largest state in South Asia. From 1720 to 1740, Bajirao Mastani chronicles the life and career of the Maratha Empire's Peshwa, or Prime Minister, Bajirao Ballal Balaji Bhat. When Mastani, the Muslim wife of Bajirao, married him after the death of his first wife, he experienced social issues at home [3].

For example, despite the fact that weapons had been available on the subcontinent since the 15th century, they were rather uncommon. Historically, the most common usage of gunpowder was in large-caliber cannon. With cannon, the Maratha fleet was likewise successful in keeping European ships at bay for more than half a century.. Nevertheless, the cavalry plainly had an advantage over poorly armed and poorly trained infantry and elephant forces, which had limited utility in battle despite being sought after in India's history at this time. When the Mughal army couldn't catch up to the Maratha cavalry, they raided into Mughal territory and returned with their spoils before they could be captured. Fighting European armies equipped with cannon proved challenging because of their reliance on horses and lack of firearms in the infantry.

The film's depiction of the Maratha Empire's penchant for raiding triggered a national conversation regarding the Maratha Empire. They say the Marathas simply intended to rule for themselves, and so they were "never Hindu," but this ignores the reality that any Indian state had a dominant religion of its ruling elite at this time, no matter how they applied it to the political realm or how they defined their religion. Maratha Empire critics claim that they were the "Mongols" of South Asia since they only waged war for four-fifths of the income generated by other kingdoms, whether Hindu or Muslim, regardless of their religion. Many Hindus were killed in the 1742 and 1750 Maratha attacks on Bengal and Jaipur, respectively. All of this, though, is a waste of time. Of course, like any other in the 18th century, the Maratha Empire aimed to maintain itself, even if it meant battling Hindus and allying the Muslims. It was inevitable that alliances of convenience would be formed between rulers of different religious denominations as the fragmented empire of the waning Mughal Empire crumbled. To be sure, the Marathas, like all Hindu empires, were affected by Islamic culture, especially in the areas of religion as well as architecture and military.

The destruction of several prominent Hindu temples and the imposition of a jizya tax under the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1659-1707) would not have occurred under Maratha authority, which is why many Hindus left the Mughal Empire under or after Aurangzeb's reign. The Marathas, without a doubt, were Hindus who wished to establish Hindu political hegemony on the subcontinent's subcontinent. The Christian states of Iberia during in the reconquista had a similar interest in fighting and allying themselves with whomever was convenient at the time.

OBJECTIVE:

It is the goal of this study to investigate and examine the position of Peshwa, the Maratha chief minister, who was originally in charge of the advisory council of the raja Shivaji (c. 1659–80). Shahu, Shivaji's grandson, nominated Balaji Vishvanath Bhat as the next Peshwa-chief. ship's Balaji Baji Rao became the de facto king of the Marathas after Shahu's death in 1749, paving the way for the great Maratha Empire.

ASSERTION OF PESHWA'S EMPIRE BY THE MARATHAS:

It's not every day that a single individual establishes an empire that stretches across the vast Indian landmass. Over a twenty-year span in the 18th century, his journeys from Delhi to Srirangapatnam & Gujarat to Berar were unparalleled in terms of speed and distance. He excelled at spotting his opponent's strengths and vulnerabilities and then springing a trap when he thought he had the upper hand. Every military leader's dream is to win every fight. For Bajirao to be successful, he needed both the ability to think strategically and the ability to carry out his plans. Bajirao Shahu's father, Balaji Vishwanath, was able to secure Chhatrapati Shahu's future by getting a 'legal permission' from the disintegrating Mughal and by getting a 'legal permission' from the disintegrating Mughal carving out separate fields of operations for the restless Maratha chiefs, allowing them to increase their influence and authority. When Balaji Vishwanath died in 1720, he left behind a lot of unfinished business. Just 20 years old, Bajirao was Shahu's choice to be his next Prime Minister over the other contenders. However, when Bajirao refused to work with the old order and selected individuals outside the conventional Marathas, he made the decisions to work with Malhar Rao Holkar, Ranoji Scindia, and Udaji Pawar instead. From this point on, the path to empire-building began.

First, Bajirao helped establish the Nizam ul mulk's control in Aurangabad by assisting him in the battle of Sakharkhedla, which he was honoured for by the Nizam. Then, in 1725 and 1726, he made two trips to the southern part of the country: Chitradurg and Srirangapatnam. He returned to Satara after receiving an urgent call from his king in order to counter the threat posed by the Nizam. Shahu's very survival had been threatened

by the Nizam and Sambhaji of Kolhapur. Bajirao surrounded the Nizam at Palkhed without his artillery and compelled him to submit, the first time in the crafty Subahdar's long career he faced this ignominy in a running fight defined by fast advances. The Nizam not only agreed to everything, but he was also compelled to abandon his support for Sambhaji of Kolhapur. Montgomery of Alamein referred to Bajirao's battle plan at Palkhed as a 'masterpiece of strategic mobility'. His brother Chimaji, who backed and sometimes outperformed Bajirao in battle, fought and killed the Mughal subahdar at Amjhera the next year, stamping the authority of the Marathas on their territory in the Malwa region. As a key link between India and the Deccan, this province was critical. Muhammad Bangash invaded Bundelkhand at the same time, posing a threat to the region's ailing monarch Chhatrasal. According to legend, people believe Chhatrasal dispatched a traveling bard to Pune with an emissary to deliver a message to Bajirao.

AFTER SHIVAJI, PESHWA BAJIRAO IS THE MOST IMPORTANT HISTORICAL FIGURE:

In order to surprise Bangash and save Chhatrasal, Bajirao sped along an uncharted road. Immediately after the Jaitpur Siege, Bangash sought negotiations. Bajirao received a third of Chhatrasal's kingdom as a token of his gratitude. Also, he gave him Mastani, a relationship that occupied the rest of Bajirao's ten-year life span. Bajirao was welcomed by friendly monarchs like Jaipur and Udaipur and respected by opponents like Bangash, who even accompanied the Peshwa's mother Radhabai on a trip to Kashi. However, there was hatred against the Peshwa from other Maratha chiefs, and the conflict at Dabhoi proved disastrous for Senapati Dabhade when he once again came out against Bajirao with the Nizam's help. A campaign in 1733 against the Abyssinian chiefs of Janjira followed, where Bajirao's land offensive combined with naval prowess of Sekhoji Angre took all the Siddis' territory but Janjira itself into Bajirao's hands. Sekhoji's death and his brothers' involvement in a civil war put an end to what seemed to be a promising future. Chimaji appa, Bajirao's brother, stepped into the Konkan and assassinated Siddi Sat, who had unleashed an oppressive reign in the Konkan while Bajirao was busy elsewhere.

Bajirao was able to subdue an opponent in Palkhed or Bhopal utilising only cavalry-mounted troops. Shahu's instruction to let the Nizam live each time allowed him to escape. It was the invasion on Delhi that exposed the Mughal weakness and awoke Nadir Shah's desire for power. In 1739, Nadir Shah attacked Delhi and slaughtered thousands of people in the Sunehri masjid with an unsheathed sword while praying for mercy. Sadat Khan was compelled to commit himself, while Mughal stalwarts such Nizam ul Mulk were degraded to the status of supplicants. The world saw the Mughals for what they were: a decaying corpse. By then, the Marathas led by Chimaji Appa had liberated the north Konkan coast from Portuguese proselytising. When Nadir Shah was still in Delhi, the fort of Vasai was taken at a high price. Bajirao gathered all the troops he could and marched to Burhanpur in order to halt Nadir Shah's progress to the south.

The Mughal Empire fell apart rapidly after Aurangzeb's death. The Marathas became India's most dominant regional power after it was split into smaller groups. Although there were independent kingdoms in India, the Marathas terrorised them all [5]. The Mughal emperor became a pensioner of the Marathas. Chauth and Sardeshmukhi were seized from the monarchs of Rajasthan (Avadh), Bengal (Hyderabad), Hyderabad Karnataka (Maharashtra), and Mysore by the dynasty. The Marathas ruled over a vast area stretching from Punjab in the north to Cape Comorin in the south and Gujarat in the west to Bengal in the east. But the Maratha might crumbled in its first encounter with the English. They lost their first war, were crushed in the second, and were annihilated in the third. This was the first time they had faced the English [9].

CONFLICT WITH THE BRITISH DURING THE LATER YEARS OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE:

In the defeat of the Marathas by the English, several factors have been attributed. Here are a few examples:

THE MARATHAS'S INTERNAL WEAKNESS:

The Marathas' dominion was not tightly linked around a single ruler. There were five chiefs in the alliance, and they were often at odds with one another. Only under the reign of Peshwa Madhav Rao I did the Marathas retain their nominal unity. The Peshwa's successors were unable to keep their subordinate chiefs under control. Many times, Sindhia, Bhonsle and Gaekwad's self-interested policies were followed against one other's interests, resulting in armed conflict. The British were quick to seize the opportunity. One by one, they were given the opportunity by the Maratha leaders to interfere in their internal matters and wage war

against them [4]. As a result, the Marathas' inability to unite against the English remained a liability throughout the war.

A well-ordered and well-governed empire was never something the Marathas ever aimed to achieve. They never assumed the burden for enhancing their subjects' economic, cultural, and moral well-being. It was still their primary goal to loot, especially in areas where they had little real authority. Because of this, they were unable to obtain the support of their people and the Indians as a whole when confronted by a foreign power [6]. The Marathas had lost their humanity by the time they engaged in a war with the English. The Marathas were able to defeat every other local force due of their simplicity, hard work, and willingness to battle regardless of the odds. Their losses grew steadily over time. They were no better than all the rest of the native rulers since they had lost their morality and, as a result, their vigour.

DEFICIENCY OF POLITICAL FORESIGHT:

A lack of political knowledge and foresight plagued the Marathas. Once they had consolidated their position as India's dominant power, the only prudent course of action was to dismantle the Mughal Empire and take on the responsibilities and authority that came with being the Imperial power. Many parties at the court and outside just wished to control the Mughal Emperor and utilise his name and prestige in order to achieve their own interests, as they had done before. As a result, India was unable to attain political unity and, as a result, the riches of the country were unable to be used to face the challenge of a foreign foe or benefit the people of India.

LEADERSHIP INCOMPETENCE:

By the end of the 18th century, all of the Maratha kings were dead. After that, Bajji Rao II, Daulat Rao Sindhia, Jaswant Rao Holkar, and Nana Phadnavis assumed control of the Marathas' leadership. There was Bajji Rao, Daulat Rao Sindhia, Jaswant Rao Holkar, and Nana Phadnavis among them, all of them were incompetent. Because of this, the Marathas were lacking in leadership [7]. English leaders such as Lord Wellesley, Lord Hastings, and Arthur Wellesley, as well as General Lake and other Civil Officers like Elphinstone and Malcolm, for example, were all outstanding examples of this country's leadership potential. The Marathas' defeat by the English was almost definitely due to this.

WEAKNESS IN THE MARATHAS' SOCIAL STRUCTURE:

Since Shivaji's reign, the Marathas have grown increasingly powerful thanks to the sense of pride in their Maratha heritage that they have developed. Aurangzeb's spine had been fractured by this ghost. The spirit, however, was lost after that. The caste system appeared in full force. Because they were Brahmanas, the Peshwas were frequently challenged by other Maratha lords. The Maratha society was further splintered by the military's feudal structure and the tax collection system based on hereditary chiefs. The Marathas were definitely weakened by society's fragmentation into many and occasionally opposing parties.

SYSTEM OF JAGIRDARI

Jagirdari arose among Marathas during the fight of independence over Aurangzeb when each Maratha commander was allowed to hold the land he had won as his own jagir. According to Peshwa Bajji Rao at least two people should own a jagir, who fought to eliminate this scourge. He successfully fought against by the Senapati on this matter. But after his death, individual Maratha chiefs maintained their own jagirs, and his efforts faded away. As a result, a confederation of Maratha kingdoms was formed, as well as the Maratha empire was no longer one. Aside from that, Marathas gave jagirs to their officials in order to facilitate the collection of Chauth and Sardeshmukhi, which resulted in an expansion of the jagirdari network. A centralization of economic and, by extension, military resources was not permitted under the system. It had a devastating effect on the Maratha dynasty.

LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT ECONOMIC MATTERS AMONG THE MARATHAS:

This state, Maharashtra, lacks a lot of good soil. The economic resources of the Marathas' empire were not properly developed. Because of this, it lacked the means to sustain an empire. It was possible for the Marathas to compensate for this shortcoming when they conquered vast areas in both the north and south of the country.

However, it was ignored. Chauth, Sardeshmukhi, and looting from the territories of other native monarchs were their chief sources of wealth. However, the amount of money that could be earned through this method was erratic and insufficient. As a result, the Maratha empire never saw long-term prosperity. The Marathas ruined their empire and the people of India as a whole by ignoring the economics of the areas they controlled and plundering the areas of other local rulers.

THE MARATHAS' MILITARY WEAKNESSES:

The Marathas were clearly outmatched in terms of military might by the English. It has been attributed to a variety of reasons by various academics. It has been said that "the Marathas recruited people of many races into their army when they adopted European ways to battle." Because of this, their army was no longer a national army and lacked the customary might of a national force. As a result, this was their fundamental flaw." Many other historians disagree with this point of view. Furthermore, it has been asserted by certain historians that the English defeated the Marathas because they abandoned their traditional guerilla warfare tactics and adopted European ones. However, the view is just partially accurate. Guerrilla warfare may be effective in the Deccan plateau, but it is unlikely to be particularly successful in the plains of northern India. As a result, the bulk of historians believe that the Marathas' military mediocrity was due in large part to their failure to perfect European methods of battle [8]. The factories set up by the Peshwa and Sindhia to manufacture guns and arsenals were unable to generate enough high-quality material. A similar failure to reach perfection was experienced by the troops of the Maratha Empire who were trained by the French using European principles. The Marathas' reliance on the French for military training and command was also a vulnerability, as the French typically abandoned them when things got tough.

THE ENGLISH HAVE BOTH SUPERIOR DIPLOMATIC SKILLS AND A SOPHISTICATED SPY SYSTEM:

The Marathas were less diplomatic than the English. The Marathas' feuds have always been a good thing for them to take advantage of. That's not all: The English had their sights set on all of India's political affairs, too. Because of this, they were able to isolate and defeat each of the Maratha leaders one by one. The Marathas, on either hand, were completely blind to the fact that the English were their most formidable adversaries. The English had a well-organized network of spies working for them. The Maratha army's strength, organisation, maneuvers, and relationships amongst the Maratha chiefs intrigued every Englishman. The English were constantly in an advantageous position because of this. In contrast to the Marathas, the English were motivated by nationalism and imperialism in their war against them. Because the Marathas had already begun to decline by the time English influence in India developed, they were unable to resist the English onslaught and were defeated and degraded as a result.

DURING THE MARATHA WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, THE JAGIRDARI SYSTEM DEVELOPED:

Only during Peshwa Baji Rao's lifetime did he eliminate this system. Eventually, after his passing, the system came into being on its own. As a result, the Maratha confederacy was formed, which shattered the group's unity. Because of this, the Maratha leaders were unable to centralise their military and economic resources and, as a result of this, they were weakened by it.

CONCLUSION:

After Aurangzeb's death, the Mughal Empire descended into civil war, with all of his sons vying for control of the throne. Chhatrapati Shahuji backed Farrukhsiyar, one of the claimants. Balaji Vishwanath was named Peshwa (Prime Minister) after the Marathas marched to Delhi and deposed Emperor Bahadur Shah, installing Farrukhsiyar as the new emperor. The new sovereign issued a decree that granted the Marathas the authority to collect taxes in the Mughal region under Maratha control while awarding swarajya to the Maratha heartland in gratitude for their help. Additionally, Shahuji's mother was freed by Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath from Mughal custody. The Peshwa's policy of expansion began with Balaji Vishwanath, who was appointed on November 16, 1713, and saw the Marathas reach their greatest extent. Much of what is now central and

southern India was added to the kingdom by Peshwa Baji Rao I, Balaji's son. Meanwhile, the Mughals were reduced to a simple puppets by the Maratha Chhatrapati. The immense effort the Maratha people put in to crown Shivaji as king and establish the Maratha Empire in 1674 shows their dedication to creating a traditional Hindu kingdom on the subcontinent. The fact that most rajas ruled over smaller territories or were ruled by the Mughals meant that great Hindu imperial coronations were rare at the period. Shivaji hosted and fed 50,000 visitors, including Brahmins (Hindu priests) from across India, and had himself weighed against seven metals and several costly spices, all before washing in water brought over from Ganges river, sacred to Hindus, in order to be crowned king of India. A traditional title for great Hindu and Buddhist rulers, the umbrella (Chhatrapati) was given to him as a crowning honour in the gods Varuna and Vishnu tradition, suggesting that the universe was now under the protection of the great king's umbrella. Marathas certainly established an empire immersed in Hindu culture & symbolism, even though it wasn't explicitly so in political terms.

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