



10. The Expansion of the Maratha Power

At the beginning of the Maratha war of independence, the Mughals were on the offensive whereas the Marathas were on the defensive. This situation however was reversed at the end of the war of independence. The Mughals were thrown on the defensive against the Marathas. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Marathas subdued the Mughals and extended the Maratha power to cover practically the whole of India. We shall study this in the present chapter.

Release of Shahu Maharaj : After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb, there ensued a struggle among his sons for the throne of Delhi. Prince Azamshah was in the South. At once, he marched towards Delhi to seize the imperial throne. Prince Shahu was in his captivity. Azamshah believed that if Shahu Maharaj was released, there would arise a conflict between him and Maharani Tarabai for the *gadi* of the Maratha Chhatrapati. Azamshah felt that this would sap the Maratha strength and therefore, released Shahu Maharaj.

Coronation of Shahu Maharaj : Immediately after his release, Shahu Maharaj marched towards Maharashtra. He was joined by some Maratha *Sardars*, but Maharani Tarabai did not accept his claim to the throne. The armies of Shahu Maharaj and Maharani Tarabai fought a battle at Khed on the bank of the Bheema. Shahu Maharaj



Shahu Maharaj

won the battle. He captured Satara. He got himself crowned. Satara became the capital of the Maratha kingdom.

For a while, the mutual opposition between Maharani Tarabai and Shahu Maharaj continued. Maharani Tarabai proclaimed her minor son Shivaji II as the Chhatrapati at Pahnala in 1710 CE. This gave rise to an independent Maratha Kingdom at Kolhapur besides the one at Satara.

The early part of Shahu Maharaj's life was spent in Mughal camps. So, he had seen Mughal politics from close quarters. He knew the finer points of Mughal and especially North Indian politics.

He knew the strengths and weaknesses of the Mughal empire very well. Also, he was acquainted with the influential people in the Mughal Court. All these factors helped him deciding the new direction of Maratha politics in the changing circumstances.

Aurangzeb's successors had given up his policy of destroying the Maratha power. So the Marathas adopted a new policy. Instead of fighting with the Mughal power, they decided to protect it and expand their own empire in that role. They believed that restoring an old temple is as good as building a new one.

The Mughal power faced the threat of the Irani and Afghani invaders from the north-west and also of the local Pathan, local Rajput, Jat and Rohilas rulers. The internal competition and tussle in the court had also weakened the Mughal power. Due to all these the Delhi Court needed the help of the Marathas.

Balaji Vishwanath : After Shahu Maharaj was released by the Mughals, he

made Balaji Vishwanath, a Peshwa. Balaji hailed from Shrivardhan, in Konkan. He was competent and experienced. He convinced many *Sardars* that Shahu Maharaj was the real heir of the Maratha empire and made them join hands with him.

Kanhoji Angre was the chief of Maratha Navy. He chose to side with Maharani Tarabai and attacked the territories of Shahu Maharaj. This gave rise to a difficult situation. Under these circumstances, Shahu Maharaj sent Balaji to fight against Kanhoji Angre. Balaji avoided the war and won Kanhoji over to Shahu Maharaj's side.

Chauthai and Sardeshmukhi rights :

After strengthening the position of Shahu Maharaj in Maharashtra, Balaji turned his attention to the politics in the North. The Delhi court, after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb, was marked by bickering and confusion. The Sayyid brothers, Abdulla (Hasan) and Hussein Ali had become very influential. With their help, in 1719 CE Balaji obtained from the Mughal Emperor, the grants or *sanads* to collect *chauthai* and *sardeshmukhi* from the Mughal territory in the Deccan. These *sanads* gave the Marathas the rights to collect one fourth part (*chauthai*) and one tenth part (*sardeshmukhi*) of the revenue from the Mughal territory in the Deccan.



Bajirao I

Bajirao I :

After the death of Balaji Vishwanath, Shahu Maharaj appointed Balaji's son, Bajirao I the *Peshwa* in 1720 CE. He expanded the Maratha Empire during his term of 20 years.

Nizam's defeat at Palkhed : The Mughal emperor Farukhsear appointed Nizam – ul – Mulk the Subhedar of Deccan. In 1713 CE Nizam tried to establish his separate existence at Hyderabad. The Emperor had given the Marathas the rights to recover *Chauthai-Sardeshmukhi* from the Mughal areas. Nizam was against it. He captured some part of the Pune *Pargana*. Bajirao decided to checkmate the Nizam. He defeated the Nizam at Palkhed near Aurangabad. The Nizam accepted the Maratha right to collect *Chauthai-Sardeshmukhi*.

As the Mughal power had become weak, Bajirao knew that there was more scope to expand the empire towards northern side. Shahu Maharaj supported his policy.

Malwa : Malwa in today's Madhya Pradesh was part of the Mughal empire. Bajirao sent Malharrao Holkar, Ranoji Shinde and Udaji Pawar under the leadership of his brother Chimajiappa to Malwa. There, they strengthened the posts.

Bundelkhand: Bundelkhand means some part of today's Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh – areas around Jhansi, Panna and Sagar.

King Chhatrasal had established his own kingdom in Bundelkhand. The Mughal Subhedar Mohammad Khan Bangush of Allahabad attacked Bundelkhand and had defeated Chhatrasal. Chhatrasal appealed to Bajirao for help.

Bajirao took a large army and went to Bundelkhand. He defeated Bangush. Chhatrasal honoured Bajirao. This is how Marathas established their supremacy in Malwa and Bundelkhand.

Bajirao demanded from the Emperor the office of the *Subhedar* of Malwa. As the Emperor declined this demand, Bajirao

marched on Delhi in 1737 CE. The Mughals were taken by surprise.



Do you know ?

Chhatrasal wrote a letter to Bajirao. In that he wrote, जो गत आह गजेंद्र की वह गत आई है आज. बाजी जान बुंदेल की, बाजी राखो लाज. (My situation is like the elephant whose leg is caught by the crocodile. You are the only one who can save me.)

The battle of Bhopal : The Emperor felt uneasy on account of Bajirao's Delhi expedition. He invited the Nizam to protect Delhi. Nizam marched against Bajirao with his huge army. Bajirao defeated him at Bhopal. Nizam agreed to secure the *sanad* of Malwa *subhedari* for the Marathas from the Badshah.

The defeat of Portuguese : The territories of Vasai and Thane on the Konkan coast were in the possession of the Portuguese. The Portuguese rulers oppressed their subjects. Bajirao sent his brother Chimajiappa to subdue the

Portuguese. Chimaji conquered Thane and the adjacent areas. In 1739 CE, he laid siege to the Vasai fort. The fort was very strong. The Portuguese had a powerful artillery. In spite of all this, Chimaji continued the siege with perseverance and forced the Portuguese to surrender. The fort of Vasai and large parts of the Portuguese territory passed into the hands of the Marathas.

Death of Bajirao : Nadirshah, the Emperor of Iran, invaded India. Following the order of Shahu Maharaj, Bajirao set out for the North with a big army to defend the Mughal power. By the time he reached Burhanpur, Nadirshah had returned to Iran with an enormous booty looted from Delhi. In April 1740, Bajirao breathed his last at Raverkhedi on the banks of the Narmada.

Bajirao was a great General. With his valour, he established the Maratha supremacy in the North. He won status for the Maratha power as a formidable power in the whole of India.

In his time, the Shinde, Holkar, Pawar, Gaikwad families attained prominence.



Exercise

1. Write the meaning.

- (1) Chauthai –
- (2) Sardeshmukhi –

2. Write the answer in one word.

- (1) Balaji was from this town in Konkan
- (2) He ruled Bundelkhand
- (3) Bajirao died at this place
- (4) He defeated the Portuguese

3. Write about them in your own words.

- (1) Kanhoji Angre
- (2) The Battle of Palkhed

- (3) Balaji Vishwanath
- (4) Bajirao I

4. Give reasons.

- (1) Two separate Maratha States were formed.
- (2) Azamshah released Chattrapati Shahu Maharaj from his custody.
- (3) Delhi needed the help from the Marathas.

Activity

Get a biography of Maharani Tarabai and present an inspiring event in her life.

