UNIT 15 : THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE MARATHAS

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- describe the rise of the Marathas under Shivaji,
- discuss Shivaji's military exploits and his administrative measures in the Maratha kingdom,
- discuss the events leading to the ascendancy of the Peshwas and
- analyse the causes for the downfall of the Marathas.

15.2 INTRODUCTION

The 17th century medieval India witnessed the emergence of several regional kingdoms across India in general and the Deccan region in particular. The Maratha kingdom was one such kingdom which played an important role in the political history of Medieval India. In fact, the history of Medieval India, specially the Mughal period shall be incomplete without mentioning

the rise of the Marathas. In this unit, we will be looking into the rise of the Maratha power and their contributions to the history of India.

15.3 RISE OF THE MARATHAS

From the time of the Bahmani kingdom, the Marathas showed their importance in the political affairs of the Deccan. The Marathi troops served as *bargirs* (loose auxiliaries) under the Bahmani rulers, while some prominent Maratha families served as *mansabs* or *jagirs.* The Maratha *mansabdars* were not independent rulers, like the Rajputs; rather, they appeared more as military adventurers. Even after the fall of the Bahmani kingdom, the Marathas continued to serve the independent Muslim states that emerged in South India. The Maratha chiefs enjoyed increasing power and influence in all the leading states of Deccan. Some Marathi mansabdars like Shahji Bhonsale of Poona acted as kingmakers in Deccan so much so that by 1636 A.D. Shahji Bhonsale had set up a semi- independent principality.

The rise of the Maratha power in India started from the reign of Shivaji. However, it cannot be denied that there were other factors at work too. The factors behind the rise of the Maratha power are mentioned below:

First of all, the geographical location of Maharashtra which was surrounded by huge mountains, the unproductive nature of the soil, the scanty rains etc all robbed the Marathas of any luxury, and rather helped them to develop tough qualities like courageousness and self-reliance and a sense of pride and dignity.

Secondly, prominent Marathi Bhakti reformers like Tukaram, Eknath, Ramdas, Yaman Pandit etc, created a spirit of unity and brotherhood through spreading the message of deep faith upon God and religious equality among the people across the Maratha states.

Thirdly, the language and literature also played an important role in uniting the people of Maharastra. The Bhakti reformers composed their songs in Marathi which resulted in forging a spirit of unity among the people and successfully aroused a sense of pride in the common cultural heritage.

Fourthly, the knowledge of the guerilla tactics of warfare and its successful implementation always helped the Marathas to defend their country from the outsiders. SMeanwhile, during their stint as as *jagirdars* and *mansabdars* under the Deccani Sultans, they had gained sufficient military knowledge.

SHIVAJI- Shivaji was born on 19th February 1630 in the hilly fort of Shivner near Junar. His father was Shahji Bhonsale who was the *jagirdar* of Poona under the Nizam Shahi ruler Adil Shah of Ahmadnagar and his mother was Jijabai. From childhood, three people greatly influenced Shivaji's life and career - his mother Jijabai, his guardian Dadaji Kondadeo and his spiritual guru Swami Ram Dass. At the age of 12, Shivaji had organized an army consisting of young adventurous youths and started military expeditions in the nearby areas.

In 1647 C.E. Shivaji assumed full charge of his jagir in Poona. In this very year, taking advantage of internal clashes, Shivaji conquered a few more territories of Bijapur. In 1648, Sultan of Bijapur arrested his father Shahji on the charge of treason. However, in 1649 Shivaji released his father by handing over the forts of Bangalore and Kondana to the Sultan.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

1. Where was Shivaji born?

   .....

2. Who was Dadaji Kondadeo?

   .....

3. Who was the spiritual teacher of Shivaji?

   .....

15.4 SHIVAJI AND HIS CONQUESTS

Shivaji started his real career of conquests when he captured the estate of Javli from Chandra Rao More in 1656 AD. The conquest of Javli was an important event for Shivaji as it made him the undisputed master of Mavala. Apart from that, thousands of Mavali troops entered under his service which strengthened his army.

In 1656, the Mughals planned to invade Bijapur. Shivaji showed his shrewd diplomacy and entered into negotiations with the Mughals at first, but later on he concluded a pact with the Bijapuri Sultan and plundered the region up to Ahmadnagar and conquered Junnar. At that same time, a war of succession broke out in the Mughal Empire, Shivaji saw his opportunity. He forced the Portuguese for the payment of revenue.

Shivaji's increasing influence threatened the Sultan of Bijapur. He sent an expedition against the Marathas under the command of Afzal Khan in 1659 AD. After a prolonged war, Afzal Khan hatched a conspiracy to arrest Shivaji by inviting him for a meeting. However, the plot failed resulting in the death of Afzal Khan. Soon after, the Maratha forces invaded Kolhapur and captured the fort of Panhala.

The exploits of Shivaji made him a legendary figure in the Deccani states and the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb was highly anxious about the rise of the Marathas near his frontier. Aurangzeb posted Shaista Khan as the governor of the Deccan. However, the defeat of Shaista Khan upset Aurangzeb. Taking advantage of it, Shivaji raided Surat, in 1664 AD and procured huge wealth.

After the failure of Shaista Khan, Mughal Emperor Auranbzeb deputed Raja Jai Singh of Amber for an expedition against the Marathas. Without much resistance the Mughal forces attacked the fort of Bajragarh and besieged Purandar in 1665 AD. The success of Jai Singh forced Shivaji to conclude a peace treaty with Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1665 AD. According to the terms of the treaty of Purandar, Shivaji handed over 23 forts to the Mughals and he was to pay a huge sum of money to the Mughal

court. Apart from that Shivaji agreed to send his son Sambhaji to the royal court of Mughal and agreed that, when needed, Shivaji would help the mighty Mughal forces in their expeditions.

The Mughal - Maratha relation took a bitter turn, when Shivaji visited the royal Mughal court. Shivaji was placed under house arrest for nine months. However, he managed to escape from there. Henceforth, Shivaji became determined to strengthen his kingdom. Taking advantage of the Mughal- Afghan conflict in North- West, Shivaji captured a number of Mughal forts. In 1670 AD, Shivaji plundered the Surat fort for the second time and collected a huge booty from there. During the next four years, Shivaji recovered various forts including Purander, Panhala and several territories like Berar, Kanara and Khandesh.

The year 1674 AD was a landmark in the history of the Marathas as Shivaji formally crowned himself at Raighar. The ceremony proclaimed the establishment of an independent Hindu Kingdom in the teeth of Muslim dominion. The coronation ceremony of Shivaji greatly boosted his confidence and now he decided to expand his kingdom. He raided Baglan, Khandesh and Kolhapur in which he acquired huge amount of booty. After that, Maratha army plundered Veroda, Kolhapur and Golconda. In 1676 AD, Shivaji marched against Bijapuri Karnataka. In 1678 AD, Shivaji demanded territories from his half-brother Vyankoji as part of paternal jagir. When Vyankoji refused to do so Shivaji seized the districts of Arni, Kolar, Hoskote, Bangalore, Balapur and Shira. Shivaji died in 1680 CE.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

4. In which year Shivaji captured Javli?

   .....

5. Who was Raja Jai Singh?

   .....

6. When was the Treaty of Purandar signed?

   .....

15.5 ADMINISTRATION UNDER SHIVAJI

Shivaji was not only a great warrior, but also a good administrator too. Although Shivaji's system of administration was largely borrowed from the Deccani states, yet it was not based on discriminatory principles of religion and caste.

A. CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION:

In his system of administration, Shivaji controlled the government and his word was law, albeit, in actual practice. Shivaji was assisted in the administration by the council of eight members what was known as 'Astha Pradhan'. Shivaji's council of **'Astha Pradhan'** consisted of-

- **Peshwa or Mukhya Pradhan:** He was the second best leader of the Marathas after Shivaji. He supervised and controlled the entire administration and looked after the financial matters of the state.
- **Amatya or Majumdar:** He was the finance minister of the Maratha state and looked after the income and expenditure of the state.
- **Waqianavis or Mantri:** Basically he was responsible for the affairs of intelligence, posts and households. He kept the records of the king's activities and also looked after the proceedings of the Royal Court.
- **Surunavis or Chitnis or Sachiv:** He looked after the Royal Secretariat and checked the Royal orders and official communications.
- **Dabir or Samant:** He acted as the foreign secretary of the king who looked after the foreign affairs and matters relating to war and peace.
- **Sar-i-Naubat or Senapati:** He was appointed as the Commander-in- Chief of the Maratha force. He looked after the recruitment, organization and discipline of the army. During the time of war, it was his duty to arrange the requisite number of forces.
- **Pandit Rao or Danadhyaksha:** He was the chief religious adviser of the king. He granted religious endowments to the temples and

financial aid to the saints, scholars and educational institutions.

- **Nyayadhish:** He was in charge of justice who looked after the civil and military cases of the state.

B. PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION:

For the sake of administrative efficiency, Shivaji divided the whole kingdom into four *provinces* and a Subedar or Mamlatdar was appointed who was solely answerable to the Central Government. The provinces were again divided into number of *Prants* which were sub divided into *Parganas* and *Tarfs*. Subedar and Havildars were appointed to look after the administrative activities of the Parganas and Tarfs. The smallest unit of the Maratha administration was the village, headed by Patel or village headman, who was mainly responsible for the collection of land revenue of the village. Patel was assisted by Kulkarni, who maintained the accounts of the villages.

Shivaji abolished the system of granting jagirs to the ministers and started paying cash instead of kinds. The system of heredity in official positions too was totally abolished by him.

C. MILITARY ADMINISTRATION:

Shivaji was a military genius and no wonder he set up a highly efficient military system of administration. He introduced the system of keeping a regular standing army for the defence and expansion of his kingdom. The basic part of the army of Shivaji was infantry and cavalry. The cavalry was of two kinds- the bargirs, who received horses and arms from the state, and the *silahadars* who brought their own equipment. The infantry too was divided into regiments and brigades. In the Maratha army Nayak, Havaldar, Jumaldar, Hazari etc got important position but they were controlled by Sar-i- Naubat.

The forts played an important part in the military organization of the Marathas. Troops were carefully deployed in the forts and three officials of equal status were appointed to guard against treachery. Shivaji also built a strong naval force which was stationed at Kolaba. With the help of navy, Shivaji plundered the trading vessels of the Mughals and collected trade tax

from the merchants.

Shivaji introduced the cash payment method to his soldiers but sometimes the chiefs received *saranjam* or revenue grants. Strict discipline was maintained in the army and no women or dancing girls were permitted to accompany the soldiers.

D. REVENUE ADMINISTRATION:

To strengthen the economic condition of the state, Shivaji paid proper attention towards the revenue administration. His revenue system was mostly guided by Malik Amber of Ahmadnagar. The Maratha revenue settlement was based on the measurement of land by a fixed system. The *Kathi* system of Amber was adopted as the unit of measurement. Shivaji kept direct relation with the farmers so that he could look after the welfare of the peasants and help them at the time of natural disasters.

Besides the land revenues, *Chauth* and *Sardeshmukhi* contributed in the increase of income of the Maratha kingdom. *Chauth* was one- fourth of the land revenue paid to the Marathas so as not to be subjected to the Maratha's raids. *Sardeshmukhi* was an additional levy of 10% (1/10th) on those lands of Maharastra over which the Marathas claimed hereditary right but which formed part of the Mughal Empire.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

7. Who was Waqia navis?

   .....

8. Who was the administrative head of a village during the reign of Shivaji?

   .....

9. Where did Shivaji build his naval base?

   .....

15.6 ASCENDANCY OF THE PESHWAS

- **MARATHA KINGDOM AFTER SHIVAJI**

After the death of Shivaji in 1680 AD, Sambhaji captured the throne but due to his inability and poor diplomatic skills, he failed to attain popularity among his subjects. Meanwhile, in 1681 AD, Prince Akbar, the rebellious son of Aurangzeb took shelter in the Maratha kingdom which once again started the Mughal- Maratha dispute. After attaining victory over Deccan, Aurangzeb turned his attention towards the Marathas and in 1687 AD, he made a surprise attack and captured Sambhaji and later executed him.

In 1689 AD, the step brother of Shambhaji, Rajaram was proclaimed as the king by the council of ministers at Raighar. In 1689 AD, the Mughals occupied Jingi and arrested all the members of Shambhaji's family along with his son Sahu who remained captive till the death of Aurangzeb.

After the death of Rajaram, his widow Tara Bai put her infant son Shivaji II on the throne and became the regent. Tara Bai was an efficient ruler and under her able guidance the Maratha forces attacked Berar in 1703 AD and conquered Gujarat in 1706 AD. In the same year, the Marathas looted the Mughal camp at Ahmadnagar and also plundered Burhanpur, Surat and Bharouch. But the situation began to change when Sahu, the son of Sambhaji was released by the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah. Sahu claimed the Maratha throne and this led to a civil war between Sahu and Tara Bai at Palkhed. In 1708 AD, Sahu established his control over Satara and Tara Bai retired to Kolhapur with her son Shivaji II.

During his difficult times, Sahu was supported by a loyal, reliable and capable officer Balaji Vishwanath. So, he was appointed to the post of Peshwa as a reward of his service to Sahu. As the Peshwa became all in all in the Maratha state so in due course of time Peshwas established their own supremacy in Maharastra.

- **Ascendancy of the Peshwas:**

During the reign of Sahu a new system of Maratha administration was evolved under the leadership of Balaji Bishwanath, the Peshwa of Sahu.

With this new change a period of Peshwa domination began in Maratha history. Several factors helped the Peshwa's to rise as the supreme authority of the kingdom.

Firstly, from the time of Shivaji to Tara Bai, the Peshwas proved themselves as capable administrator and brave soldier. The Peshwas strengthened the Maratha power and led it to its zenith. Secondly, the weak successors of Shivaji created chaos and aroused confusion in the kingdom. But the Peshwas with their wisdom and sacrifice awakened the self confidence among the Marathas. Thirdly, the people were fed up with the continuous war of succession and they needed changes in the political field. The Astha Pradhan and the king failed to meet their needs. It was the Peshwas who took up the task of enhancing the power of the kingdom. Lastly, due to the weak rulers like Sahu and his ministers, the Marathas lost their glory and prestige in the eyes of the common people. Consequently, the affairs of the state passed over to the Peshwas.

Balaji Bishwanath started the Peshwa supremacy in the Maratha state. He added power and prestige to the post of Peshwa and eclipsed those of the other ministers. Taking full advantage of the internal conflict of the Mughal officials, Balaji Bishwanath successfully collected *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* from the Deccani states. Due to his excellent diplomacy, Balaji Bishwanath concluded an agreement with the Sayyid Brothers of Deccan by which the Mughal Emperor Farukhsiyar recognized Sahu as the king of Swarajya. The provinces of Khandesh, Gondwana, Berar, certain districts of Hyderabad and Karnataka were restored to Sahu who was also assigned *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* of the six provinces of the Deccan. Later on in 1719 AD, Balaji Bishwanath also helped the Sayyid Brothers in overthrowing Farrukhsiyar from the throne of Delhi. He also cemented the office of Peshwa as hereditary and became the de-facto ruler of the Maratha kingdom.

Balaji Bishwanath was succeeded by his son Baji Rao I, who was a brilliant commander and considered the greatest exponent in guerilla tactics after Shivaji. The Maratha power reached its zenith under his leadership.

Between 1731-33 AD, Baji Rao I conquered the territories of Gujarat, some parts of Bundelkhand and Janjira. He also defeated the Nizam- ul- Mulk and concluded the treaty of Durai Sarai in 1737 AD by which Baji Rao I got Malwa and Bundelkhand. Similarly in 1739 AD, in a massive campaign against the Portuguese the Marathas captured Salsette and Bassein. During his Peshwaship the Maratha families of Gaekwad, Holkar, Sindhia and Bhonsle emerged.

In 1740 AD, Baji Rao I died and his son Balaji Baji Rao, better known as Nana Saheb, became the Peshwa. In 1749 AD, Sahu died and now Balaji Baji Rao became the official head of the Maratha administration and as a symbol of this fact he shifted the government to Poona and made it his headquarters. Like his father, Balaji Baji Rao too extended the Maratha Empire in all directions. He successfully consolidated the Maratha control over Malwa, Gujarat and Bundelkhand, defeated the Bundela chiefs of Orchha and captured Jhansi. In 1743 AD, he undertook an expedition against Alivardi Khan of Bengal and captured Orissa. In 1751 AD, the state of Mysore and the other minor principality of South were forced to pay tribute. Apart from that, in 1752 AD, the Marathas helped Imad- ul- Mulk to become the the *wazir.* Meanwhile, a treaty was signed with the Mughal Emperor Ahmad Shah in which Balaji Baji Rao agreed to protect the Mughal Empire from internal and external enemies in return for the *chauth.* After that the Marathas proceeded to bring Punjab under their control and expelled the agent of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the warrior king of Afghanistan. Soon a conflict between the Marathas and Ahmad Shah Abdali was started which was known in the history of India as the Third Battle of Panipat. On 14th January 1761 AD, both the forces met at Panipat and the Maratha army was completely routed out. The Maratha lost efficient commanders like Vishwas Rao, Sadashiv Rao Bhau etc. Balaji Baji Rao breathed his last on 23rd June, 1761 AD.

After the death of Balaji Baji Rao, his 17 year old son Madhav Rao took the charge of the post of Peshwa and his uncle Raghunath Rao was appointed his regent. Due to the defeat of the Marathas in the Third Battle of Panipat, the enemies once again tried to take revenge upon the Marathas.

Because of the skilful diplomacy and courage, Madhav Rao defeated the Nizam of Hyderabad, and compelled Haider Ali of Mysore to pay tribute. He succeeded in consolidating the power of the Marathas in North India by defeating the Rohelas and subjugating the Rajput states and the Jat chiefs. In 1771 AD, the Marathas came to exercise considerable influence on the Mughal Court by re-instating Emperor Shah Alam to Delhi. In 1772 AD, Madhav Rao breathed his last. After his death, the Peshwaship lost its power. And the struggle for power among the Maratha chiefs continued.

Meanwhile, the Maratha chiefs had carved out semi- independent states in the North. Gaekwad of Baroda, Bhonsle of Nagpur, Holkar at Indore and Sindhia at Gwalior were among the most prominent. On the other hand, at Poona, Madhav Rao's younger brother Narayan Rao succeeded him as Peshwa. He was soon killed by his uncle. In 1774 AD, Madhab Rao Narayan, son of Narayan Rao was announced as the new Peshwa and Nana Phadnavis became his regent. In the meantime Raghunath Rao, the murderer of Narayan Rao took shelter with the British. Hence began a new chapter in the history of Marathas as they began a long drawn battle with the British. In the three Anglo-Maratha battles that were fought, it was an attempt on the part of the Marathas to regain their lost glory while the British attempted to establish their stronghold in that region.

15.7 CAUSES FOR THE DOWNFALL OF THE MARATHA

While the Marathas proved superior to the various Muslim powers, they were inferior to the British in material resources, military organization, diplomacy and leadership. In fact, the causes of their downfall were both inherent and circumstantial. The following factors were responsible which led to their downfall.

- ***First,*** mutual rift, petty rivalry and complete lack of unity among the Maratha chiefs resulted in their failure to give a united stand against the British army. The British officials took advantage of the disunity of the Marathas and used the situation in their interest and ruined

the Maratha power.

- ***Secondly,*** the lack of capable leadership proved fatal for the survival of the Marathas. After the Third Battle of Panipat, the Marathas suffered from the lack of able leadership. In such a situation they could not organize themselves to face the British attack.
- ***Thirdly,*** the lack of farsightedness in the policy of the Marathas, failed to generate support from the contemporary powers.
- ***Fourthly,*** administrative mismanagement was another cause for the downfall of the Marathas. Due to their administrative chaos, at the time of distress they could neither gain public support nor the help the administrative machinery.
- Casteism was another cause for the fall of the Marathas. Baji Rao II favoured the Brahmins in matters of distribution of jobs and patronage for religious merits. This gave rise to resentment among the Marathas and weakened their strength as a strong race.
- The other factor was the failure of the Marathas to strengthen their economic and financial condition. Thus, on one hand they lost the sympathy and goodwill of their subjects and on the other, due to lack of money, they could not maintain their army and run the state administration smoothly.
- A weak spy system led the Marathas to its downfall. While the army lost due to lack of discipline and command, the inefficient spy system exposed the Marathas to surprise British attacks. The Marathas were caught unawares of the enemy's military action due to the weak spy system. In such a situation their defeat and downfall was inevitable.
- The other cause as the historians believed were the giving up of the age old guerilla war tactics by the Marathas.

15.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MARATHA RULE

Among the regional Indian powers, the Marathas occupied an

important position in the political history of India. The Marathas rose as an invincible political power under the successful leadership of Shivaji in the Deccan. Among the various powers in India who stood out against the mighty Mughals and the British, were the Marathas. They were the people who made the last attempt to build their supremacy on the ruins of the Mughal Empire. For nearly two centuries, both the Mughals and the British fought against the Marathas for political supremacy in India. The Marathas under the leadership of Shivaji established an independent Hindu Kingdom in the teeth of Muslim dominion in Deccan. They not only survived but also dominated the political affairs of the Deccani states and later on under the domain of the Peshwas, they almost brought northern India under their control.

With the rise of the Marathas, once again Hinduttva and Brahminism emerged in the political field of India. Their unity and love for the country helped them tremendously to become a leading political power in India. The Marathas emphasized social equality in every sphere of their life. Shivaji and later on the Peshwas recruited groups of highly mobile and peasant pastoralists in the Maratha army. The Maratha rule also showed us the use of guerilla war as a tool in the modern war tactics. Shivaji and the Maratha chiefs used this guerilla tactics extensively. In fact, Shivaji achieved victory over Afzal Khan and Shaista Khan by using this famous tactics. Thus, the significance of the Maratha rule cannot be undermined in Indian history.



15.9 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, you have learnt about–

- the various factors that led to the Marathas to emerge as strong powers in Deccan,
- Shivaji's contribution in building the Maratha state,
- Shivaji's various measures for the smooth running of the administration,

- the contribution of the Peshwas for the expansion of the Maratha kingdom in all parts of India, and
- the causes that led to the disintegration of the Maratha power.



15.10 FURTHER READING

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15.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q. No.1: Fort of Shivaner near Junar.

Answer to Q. No.2: The grandfather of Shivaji

Answer to Q. No.3: Swami Ram Dass.

Answer to Q. No.4: 1656 AD.

Answer to Q. No.5: A great commander of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

Answer to Q. No.6: 24th June 1665 AD.

Answer to Q. No.7: Minister of intelligence, posts and households under Shivaji.

Answer to Q. No.8: Patel.

Answer to Q. No.9: Kolaba

15.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

(A) Very Short Questions (answer each within 50 words):

Q.1. Why were the Maratha troops important for the Deccani Sultans?

Q.2. Name the people who influenced the early career of Shivaji?

Q.3. What is meant by *'Astha Pradhan'?*

Q.4. Who was Nana Phadnavis?

(B) Short Questions (answer each within 150 words):

Q.1. Write short notes on-

a) Mughal- Maratha conflicts.

b) Land Revenue of the Marathas.

c) Balaji Bishwanath.

d) Baji Rao II.

Q.2. Who was Tara Bai?

Q.3. What were the terms of the Treaty of Purandar?

(B) Broad Questions (answer each within 300-500 words):

Q.1. Discuss the chief causes for the rise of the Marathas?

Q.2. Analyze the administration under Shivaji.

Q.3. Discuss the contributions of Peshwas for the expansion of the Maratha kingdom.

Q.4. Analyze the leading factors for the downfall of the Marathas?

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