
UNIT 17 MARATHA ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE¹

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Rise of the Maratha Power: Theoretical Framework
- 17.3 Consolidation of the Maratha Power
 - 17.3.1 Shahji
 - 17.3.2 Shivaji
- 17.4 Mughal-Maratha Relations
- 17.5 Administrative Structure of the Marathas
 - 17.5.1 Central Administration
 - 17.5.2 Provincial Administration
 - 17.5.3 Military Organization
- 17.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.7 Key Words
- 17.8 References

17.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss the history of the rise of Maratha power. After going through this Unit, you would be able to know:

- about the rise of Maratha power;
- that Mughals had very troubled relationship with the Marathas, especially with Shivaji; and
- administrative and military organization of Marathas, especially during the reign of Shivaji.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Deccan constitutes a very unique landscape where upland of plateau is the defining feature. Satpura mountain ranges in the north define the northern boundary of the Deccan and Western Ghats are the marker of the western boundary for the Deccan. Gradual slope leading to the Bay of Bengal is the eastern boundary for the Deccan. Southern boundary is difficult to define, as the term has been derived from the Sanskrit term *Dakshin* i.e. South. There are several important rivers with fertile plains which have sustained large and small political entities since ancient times. Its different geography, especially steep height in the north often restricted direct political control from the

¹Dr. Mayank Kumar, Associate Professor, Faculty of History, School of Social Sciences, IGNOU, New Delhi

political powers of the northern India. Aspirations of the rulers of northern Indian plains were regularly resisted by the powers of the region. The history of the Deccan from mid-16th to mid-18th century cannot be discussed without examining the significant role of the Marathas who were initially in conflict with the Deccan kingdoms to carve out an independent principality. Subsequently, Marathas were in conflict with Mughals because by second half of 17th century large part of Deccan was annexed by the Mughals. Therefore, this Unit will also apprise you about the rule of Shivaji and Maratha administration which had borrowed a lot from the earlier ruling dispensations.

17.2 RISE OF THE MARATHA POWER: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are several ways to explain the rise of Marathas in the 17th century as a major political force and scholars have proposed few possible explanations. Grant Duff in his book *A History of the Mahrattas* (1826) considered Marathas as a ‘conflagration’ in the forests of Sahyadri. However, M. G. Ranade (*Rise of Maratha Power*, 1900) suggested that it was a struggle for nation against the Mughals who were foreigners. Such a proposition is difficult to sustain on historical grounds, especially because if we Mughals were considered outsiders then how to explain Marathas accepting service at the courts of Bijapur and Ahmednagar.

Similar argument was extended by Jadunath Sarkar and G. S. Sardesai who saw emergence of Maratha power as ‘Hindu’ retaliation to the communal policies of Aurangzeb. However, such an assertion is difficult to sustain especially because Marathas regularly served Muslim rulers of Bijapur and Ahmednagar. Moreover, policies of Shivaji do not substantiate such an impression. His assumption of the title such as *haindava dharmoddharak* was a regular appropriation by the rulers. Andre Wink locates reasons for the emergence of Marathas in the mounting pressure of the Mughals. Mughals appears to be one of the several factors which have been elaborated by the Satish Chandra.

Satish Chandra locates rise of Marathas in the larger socio-economic context. He also acknowledges the significant role of the geography which facilitated a different kind of polity. He suggests that Shivaji was able to capitalize on the discontent against the intermediaries and was successful in garnering the support from the peasantry. Shivaji curtailed the powers of Deshmukhs to check the abuse of power by them. The number of retainers to be maintained by the Deshmukhs was also restricted which also played important role in constraining the powers of the Deshmukhs. This benefitted petty landlords who constituted a large number of armed retainers of the Maratha army under Shivaji. Shivaji emphasized on extension of area under cultivation and improvement of cultivation which benefitted the peasantry. Irfan Habib has suggested that oppressed peasantry was eager to rebel and Shivaji was successful in channelizing the energy.

Like any other emerging power, Shivaji made excellent use of matrimonial relations. While curtailing the powers of Deshmukhs, he managed matrimonial alliances with the leading Deshmukh families of the region – Nimbalkars, Morayas, Shirkes – to claim equal status. Moreover, his coronation as *Suryavamshi Kshatriya* with the help of Gagabhat and other Brahmins of Benaras further enhanced his prestige. He buttressed

his claim to *kshatriya* status with the help of genealogy connecting him with the Indra and titles like *kshatriya kulavatamsa*. This helped him in claiming higher status among the Maratha families and, thereby, exclusive claim to collect *sardeshmukhi*.

Such a possibility to access *kshatriya* status played important role in mobilization of Marathas who were not only agriculturalists but also the fighting class. Marathas, thus, rallied behind Shivaji and played exemplary role in the military success of Shivaji. Similarly, agricultural community – Kunbis – also rallied behind Shivaji along with tribal groups like Kolis and others. Therefore, upsurge of Shivaji was based on greater mobilization of different sections of Maratha society who were also seeking better social status along with resentment against economic exploitation by the traditional elite of the region. Therefore, reducing Maratha upsurge solely to a desire to overthrow the foreign rule is very superfluous explanation.

The role and significance of *bhakti* movement in social and political mobilization was most visible in the emergence of Maratha power. Insistence on egalitarianism by *Maharashtra Dharma* played very important role in the consolidation of Marathas as a cultural identity and paved way for social upward movement. *Maharashtra Dharma* means an ethical policy of great enlightened state. However, Guru Ramdas gave it political connotation. Guru Ramdas was critical of Turko-Afghan-Mughal rule. Such a stance by the saint-poet was capitalized by Shivaji and he mobilized peasantry against Deccani rulers as well as against the Mughals. However, it was a regional assertion against the dominant powers. Therefore, it cannot be termed as Hindus fighting against the Muslims. The sheer fact that Shivaji, his nobles/*sardars* and his successors collected *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* (a legalized plunder) across their dominion is clear testimony that it was not a Hindu *rashtra* fighting against the Muslims. Similarly, the question of Hindu *swarajay* was a tool for political mobilization by regional power against the centralizing approach of Mughals. Marathas wanted to establish a large principality especially after the disintegration of Ahmednagar.

17.3 CONSOLIDATION OF THE MARATHA POWER

As discussed earlier, the emergence of Marathas as a powerful political group started since the 17th century under Deccan kingdoms and it was the Bhonsle family which led the path of Maratha state formation.

17.3.1 Shahji

Shahji's grandfather Maloji Bhonsle was related to Jagpal Rao Naik Nimbalkar, the Deshmukh of Phultun. Maloji joined the service of Ahmednagar ruler Murtaza Nizam as *bargir* in 1577. Despite few initial misunderstandings over marriage with Jijabai he was made in charge of forts of Shivneri and Chakun along with the title of Maloji Raja Bhonsle. He also got the *jagirs* of Poona and Sopa in the beginning of 17th century. His prestige enhanced further when a very powerful deshmukh Jadav Rao Sindekar married his daughter Jijabai to Shahji, the son of Maloji. Subsequently, Mughals captured Ahmednagar during the reign of Akbar resulting in a lot of chaos and confusion. During the period of turmoil Shahji succeeded his father Maloji and joined Mughal services as *mansabdar* with the rank of 6000 *zat* and 5000 *sawar* in 1630. However, soon after in 1632 Shahji shifted side and joined Bijapur and rose rapidly controlling almost one-fourth of Nizam Shahi territory. Soon, Mughals once again became active in the area

and forced Shahji to surrender most of the territory and he was forced to retreat to Konkan region as Bijapur noble. Here he came into contact with Morar Punt and joined services of Randaulah Khan and demonstrated his capabilities during Karnataka campaign.

17.3.2 Shivaji

Shivaji, the prime architect of Maratha power, was born at Shivneri in 1627 and stayed with his mother Jija Bai till 1636 when Shahji was forced to surrender seven forts under his possession to the Mughals. He remained at Poona under the guardianship of Dadaji Konddev. After the death of Dadaji Konddev in 1647 Shivaji took control of Poona as Shahji's representative. It was at this juncture that he developed friendship with Maval chiefs Jedhe Nayak and Bandal Nayak based on the west of Poona. This friendship was very significant for Shivaji as Mavals constituted the backbone of Shivaji's army. Shivaji always believed that he has natural claim over the territory his father was forced to submit in 1636 and he wanted to recover it. However, arrest of his father by Mustafa Khan, the Bijapuri commander, prompted Shivaji to take help of Mughals to pressurize Bijapur to release his father. Meanwhile, Shivaji was successful in capturing the fort of Prander in 1648 and by 1656 he was able to capture fort of Javli which was the stronghold of Mavle chieftain Chandra Rao More. Capture of Javali was not only a chance to expand further in south and west Konkan region but also enhanced his military strength due to joining of Mavle chieftains of More territory.

Meanwhile, Aurangzeb, who was governor of Deccan, moved to north and got involved in the war of succession. Mughals' engagement with the war of succession allowed Shivaji to exert his might and by siding with rulers of Bijapur, he raided area of Mughal Deccan. Expanding further he captured Kalyan, Bhiwandi and Mahuli from the Siddis of Janjira by 1658. Soon, relations between Shivaji and Bijapur turned sour and Adil Shahi rulers deputed Abdullah Bhatari Afzal Khan to punish Shivaji. Relying more on diplomacy, Afzal Khan arranged a meeting with Shivaji where Shivaji murdered him (10th November, 1659). This further emboldened Shivaji and he took control over Panhala and South Konkan, though Marathas could not retain Panhala for long. Increasing power of Shivaji prompted Aurangzeb to depute Shaista Khan in the Deccan. Initially, Shaista Khan achieved success and Mughals were able to secure North Konkan but could not take control of Ratnagiri. However, Shivaji gave a severe blow of Mughals by attacking the camp of Shaista Khan and seriously wounding him. Soon, it was followed by attack on an important Mughal city Surat (1664 CE).

Realizing the gravity of situation Aurangzeb deputed Mirza Raja Jai Singh as viceroy of Deccan. Moving strategically, Jai Singh tried to pressurize Shivaji to side with Mughals against Bijapur. This would create a rift between the two and at the same time tried to shift *jagirs* of Shivaji further away from Mughal territory towards less fertile areas of Bijapur. To corner Shivaji, Jai Singh exerted pressure and defeated him at Purandar in 1665. As per the terms of the treaty Shivaji was forced to surrender 23 out of 35 forts under his control which yielded approximately between 4 to 5 lakh *huns* annually. As compensation he was to be allotted Bijapuri Talkonkan and Balaghat. At the same time, Shivaji's son was enrolled as *mansabdar* in Mughal services with the rank of 5000 *Zat*. However, Aurangzeb's reluctance to support Shivaji against Bijapur and growing resentment against Shivaji in the Mughal party in the Deccan caused little success for Jai Singh's strategic move. Moreover, it resulted in alliance between Golconda and Bijapur.

As an alternative Jai Singh persuaded Shivaji to visit Aurangzeb in person at Agra. At the Mughal court Shivaji felt humiliated as he was placed along with *mansabdars* of 5000 *Zat* and did not receive honour as expected. Shivaji's protest led to his imprisonment at Agra. Soon after, Shivaji's escape and transfer of Jai Singh to Kabul further complicated the political scenario of Deccan for the Mughals.

Expecting retaliation from the Mughals, Shivaji strategically extended friendship towards Prince Muazzam, the viceroy of Deccan. Prince Muazzam conferred a *mansab* of 5000 *Zat* on Sambhaji, the son of Shivaji, and allotted a *jagir* in the Berar region. Fearing rebellion by the Prince Muazzam, Aurangzeb initiated action against the *jagir* of Shivaji in Berar region on the pretext of recovering one lakh *huns* which were given as advance for his visit to Mughal court at Agra. Moreover, internal factions within the Mughal camp in Deccan along with transfer of Jaswant Singh, who was close to the prince, to Burhanpur further weakened the position of Mughals in Deccan. Shivaji took advantage of the situation and started recovering forts ceded to Mughal as per treaty of Purandar in 1666. Shivaji sacked Surat once again in 1670.

Maratha success led to deputation first of Mahabat Khan in 1670 and soon in 1673 he was replaced by Bahadur Shah. However, none of them could put effective check on the expansion of Maratha territory and consolidation of Maratha power in the region. In the interim Shivaji extended his dominion in the Bijapur territory after death of Ali Adil Shah in 1672 who was succeeded by his young son. As Aurangzeb was preoccupied with Afghan disturbance, Shivaji got himself coroneted in 1674 and went from strength to strength till his death in 1680. It is the same year when Aurangzeb decided to go in person to Deccan with the aim of total conquest.

17.4 MUGHAL-MARATHA RELATIONS

Mughal-Maratha relations have been examined in four phases:

- 1) The first phase (1615-64) deals with the rise of Shaji and Shivaji and adherence to the terms of treaty of 1636.
- 2) The second phase 1664-1667 was the period when Mughals, in their attempt to check the growing threat being posed by Shivaji, followed aggressive policy of alliances with Deccan rulers to counter each other including Marathas.
- 3) The third phase (1667-1680) saw the further consolidation of Maratha power with coronation of Shivaji.
- 4) The fourth phase 1680 onwards witnessed Mughal emperor Aurangzeb shifting his base in the Deccan to control the Marathas by annexing almost all of the Deccan kingdoms.

The first three phases, which coincide with the activities of Shivaji, have been already examined in the section above. Let us briefly spell out the character of Maratha polity after the death of Shivaji before examining the character of Maratha administration.

Shivaji had to tackle a very tricky situation during his last years over the issue of succession in the Maratha court. A rift emerged between his elder son Sambhaji and Rajaram who was minor at that time over the issue of division of territory. Diler Khan, Mughal noble in the Deccan, exploited this rift and offered Sambhaji a *mansab* of

7000 *Zat* by the Mughal emperor in 1678. The rift between Rajaram and Sambhaji further widened and adversely impacted Maratha power. Meanwhile, Aurangzeb also made all the efforts to suppress the Marathas who had given shelter to rebel prince Akbar. However, Mughals could not achieve the desired result against Marathas so Aurangzeb decided to annex Bijapur and Golkonda so that he could concentrate on the Marathas. Thus, Bijapur was annexed in 1686 and Golkonda in 1687 into the Mughal empire. Meanwhile, Marathas, making use of diverted attention of Aurangzeb, consolidated their control over Karnataka which subsequently served as their second line of defense. Though Marathas harassed Mughals by devastating the region between Aurangabad and Burhanpur, they soon faced the might of Mughal empire. A large-scale defection of Marathas towards Mughals took place after Mughal conquest of Bijapur and Golkonda, ultimately leading to imprisonment of Sambhaji and finally his execution in March 1689. Rather than helping the cause of Mughals, annexation of Bijapur and Golkonda further complicated the situation. Mughals now were forced to manage the affairs of these territories which resulted in appointment of *Jagirdars* resulting in local agrarian tensions, especially among the intermediaries – Nayaks, Valesas, Deshmukhs etc.

Satish Chandra has pointed out that the number of Maratha *mansabdars* increased from 13 during the reign of Shahjahan to 96 at the time of Aurangzeb. Similarly, the number of Deccan *mansabdars* in Mughal service reached 575 under Aurangzeb. This resulted in the conflict not only between the Deccani and Khanzads *mansabdars* but also put excessive pressure on the Mughal exchequer. Marathas under the leadership of Rajaram were able to exploit the situation better despite several reverses and loss of territory to Mughals. Mughals were able to get hold over Raigarh (1689), Panhala (1689) and even Satara in 1700 but could not capture Rajaram. Mughal army was war-fatigued and was finding it difficult to manage local resentment. Inability to crush Marathas demoralized Mughal army tremendously. At this stage Aurangzeb realized his folly and was contemplating withdrawal towards Ahmedabad but died at Aurangabad in 1707.

17.5 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE MARATHAS

Maratha administrative structure borrowed a lot from the earlier traditions prevalent in the courts of Deccan kingdoms. Offices like Peshwa, Mazumdar, Wakins, Dabir, Surnis etc. existed even earlier. Even the idea of *ashtapradhana* cannot be attributed to Shivaji but it became the broad structure of Maratha administration.

17.5.1 Central Administration

The composition of *ashtapradhana* was as following:

- 1) **Peshwa** or the Prime Minister: He was the head of both civil and military affairs.
- 2) **Mazumdar** or the auditor: He maintained records of state income and expenditure.
- 3) **Wakins** or chamberlain: The officer who managed king's private affairs.
- 4) **Dabir** or foreign secretary: An officer who was in charge of foreign affairs.

- 5) **Surnis** or superintendent: Office who was expected to take care of all the official correspondence.
- 6) **Pandit Rao** or ecclesiastical head: the officer who managed religious affairs of the state.
- 7) **Senapati** or commander in chief: He was head of the army.
- 8) **Nyayadhisha** or Chief Justice: The office who was to look after the judicial system of the state.

Each office of the *ashtpradhana* was assisted by a team of eight assistants, namely:

- 1) diwan,
- 2) mazumdar,
- 3) fadnis,
- 4) sabnis,
- 5) karkhanis,
- 6) chitnis,
- 7) jamadar, and
- 8) potnis.

The *ashtpradhana* were directly paid from the state exchequer and were never assigned *jagir*. Initially, these officers were appointed by the king and continued in the office till the king decided. Most of the offices, especially during the reign of Shivaji, were neither permanent nor hereditary. Later on, these offices became hereditary and permanent. Quite similar to *mansabdars* of Mughal empire, all the officers, except Pandit Rao and Nyayadhisha, were expected to participate in military excursions. Another important office was *chitni* who was the in-charge of royal correspondence with the provincial and local level officers.

17.5.2 Provincial Administration

There was an elaborate system of administration linking king and officials at the court with the local village level officers. The territory was divided into:

- 1) *prants*,
- 2) *tarfs*, and
- 3) *mauzas*.

As stated above, even these administrative divisions were already in existence. Shivaji reorganized and gave these units different names. Provinces were known as *prants* and the affairs were managed by *subedar*, *karkun*. A number of *prants* were administered by a *subedar*. Next in order were *tarfs* and the affairs at *tafar* level were managed by *havaladar*, *karkun* or *paripatyagar*. The lowest unit of administration was the *mauza*. In the beginning none of the offices were hereditary, however with the passage of time most of the offices became hereditary.

17.5.3 Military Organization

The credit for the success of Shivaji to a large extent can be attributed to his military organization. Carving out political space amidst the numerous claimants of hereditary rights was not an easy task. Perhaps, that was the reason for Shivaji to construct forts in almost all the *taluqas*. He is credited with the construction of around 250 forts and through these forts he was not able to manage his military affairs but could control hinterland. Therefore, none of the fort was ever under the control of a single official. Every fort had a *havaladar*, a *sabnis* and a *sarnobat*, whereas bigger forts had up to ten *tat-sarnobats*. These officials were equal in rank with division of work. The *havaladar* was responsible for the safety and security of the fort and was the custodian of the keys of the fort. The *sabnis* maintained the muster roll and were in charge of correspondence along with maintaining records of revenue of the land under the jurisdiction of the fort. Garrison of the fort were under the control of *sarnobat*. To keep a check on the officers of the forts it was mandatory to have seals of *havildar* and *karkhani* on every order issued by the *sabnis*. Furthermore, to check the domination of any particular caste it was clearly stipulated that the *havaladar* and *sarnobat* should be a Maratha whereas the *sabnis* should be a Brahmin and the *karkhani*, a *prabhu (kayastha)*.

The swiftness of the Maratha army under Shivaji was its forte, especially against Mughals. Therefore, Shivaji made special efforts to train its infantry in guerilla and hilly warfare. The smallest unit in Shivaji's infantry consisted of nine men headed by a *naik*. Five such units were under one *havaladar*. Over two or three *havaldars* was a *jumledar*. Ten *jumledars* were put under a *hazari* and seven such *hazaris* were under a *sarnobat*.

The cavalry under Shivaji consisted of *bargir* and the *siledar*. *Siledar* were expected to bring their own horses whereas state provided hoses to the *bargir*. The cavalry was organized on similar pattern as infantry. A Maratha *havaladar* was placed above 25 *bargirs* and a *jumla* had five such *havaldars*. Ten *jumlas* were placed under a *hazari* and five such *hazaris* were under the command of *panch hazari*. *Sarnobat* was placed above *panch hazaris*. There was provision for water carrier and farrier over every 25 horses. Salaries were paid in cash and revenue assignment was generally avoided. Feudal army of *watandars* was also available for service but Shivaji discouraged reliance on them.

Shivaji realized the necessity of a strong navy and with the help of Koli sea-faring tribe he made efforts to establish one. His fleet was equipped with *ghurabs* (gunboats) and *gallivants* (row boats with two masts and 40-50 oars). In all, Shivaji's navy had around 200 vassals divided in two squadrons. He could not devote sufficient time and energy on navy as he was preoccupied with the affairs on the mainland. Although his navy could harass European and other naval powers but could not check Siddi menace.

Check Your Progress Exercise

- 1) Critically examine the factors which contributed to the emergence and consolidation of Maratha polity in the 17th century.
- 2) Discuss the character of administrative structure of Marathas during the reign of Shivaji.

17.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have carried out a cursory survey of the rise of Maratha power. History of how Marathas carved out political space for themselves has been examined. Efforts of Mughals to expand their area of domination in the beginning and later on, annexation of these territories has also been discussed. Mughal difficulty in establishing control and management of affairs of the region has been elaborated. The character of administration is also discussed to highlight the continuity of previous structures of administration. The administrative structure was designed in such a manner by Shivaji so as to check the powers of the local and regional hereditary landed stakeholders.

17.7 KEY WORDS

Ashtapradhana	: Council of minister
Peshwa	: Prime Minister
Mazumdar	: auditor of account
Wakins	: chamberlain
Dabir	: foreign secretary
Surnis	: superintendent
Pandit Rao	: ecclesiastical head
Senapati	: commander in chief
Nyayadhisha	: chief justice
Bhakar	: a Marathi term for biographical accounts
Bhumia	: a land-holding caste
Deshmukh	: they were equivalent to Chaudharis of north India
Konkan	: western coast line of Indian subcontinent

17.8 REFERENCES

Chandra, Satish, *Medieval India: Society, the Jagirdari Crisis and the Village*, MacMillan India, Delhi, 1982

Asher, Catherine B. and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2006

Chandra, Satish, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals*, Har-Anand, Delhi, 1999