

BRITISH CONQUEST OF MARATHA

CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHARAJ ERA (1630-1680)

Shivaji Maharaj established Hindavi Swaraj with a focus on territory stretching from Punjab to Odisha.

- Agrarian-Based Army - To avoid imposing direct tax burdens on his own peasants - who also served in his military - Shivaji Maharaj maintained a minimal tax system within his own territories.
- Sardeshmukhi - This was a 10% levy collected specifically from village headmen, known as Deshmukhi. It acted as a primary revenue source derived from the taxes the headmen themselves collected, rather than taxing the farmers directly.
- Chauth - This tax was collected from territories outside of the Maratha kingdom. It served as a form of protection money; by paying one-fourth of their

revenue for the Marathas, these outside areas were spared from military raids & plunder. He engaged in strategic diplomacy, including the Treaty of Surandar (1665) & maintained his political influence in South India until his death in 1680.

AURANGZEB'S DECCAN CAMPAIGN AND MARATHA STRUGGLE

- Mughal expansion in the Deccan - In 1686 Emperor Aurangzeb successfully captured the kingdoms of Bijapur & Golconda to consolidate Mughal control in South India.
- Conflict with the Marathas - Following these conquests, Aurangzeb turned his focus towards the Marathas. He committed a major political blunder in 1689 by executing Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, son of Shivaji Maharaj, hoping to crush the Maratha spirit.
- The 27 year war - The ensuing conflict led to a brutal, 27 year long war in the Deccan. This period severely strained the Mughal economy & military, causing deep seated jagirdari & agrarian crises.
- Policy of reconciliation - Recognizing the futility of the long war, the Mughals eventually

adopted a policy of reconciliation. This culminated in the release of Shahu Maharaj in 1707 following Aurangzeb's death. Upon his release, Shahu Maharaj was granted the right to collect Sardeshmukhi from his Swaraj territory, which strengthened his position as the legitimate heir.

RISE OF SHAHU MAHARAJ & CIVIL WAR

- Family lineage & imprisonment - Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had two sons: Sambhaji & Rajaram. Shahu Maharaj was the son of Sambhaji, while Shivaji II was the son of Rajaram born to Taxabai. After Sambhaji Maharaj's death in 1689, Shahu was held as a virtual prisoner by Aurangzeb until 1707.
- Power struggle - During Shahu's absence, Taxabai effectively ruled the Maratha empire following the death of Rajaram in 1700, positioning her son Shivaji II as the heir.
- Civil war - Upon the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, Shahu was released. This led to a civil war between the factions of Shahu & Taxabai. The conflict was complicated by the fact that Shahu's release & claim were supported by the Mughal authorities as part of their political strategy in the Deccan, which made Taxabai view his claim as illegitimate & a threat to Maratha independence.

- The rise of Balaji Vishwanath - A pivotal moment in the conflict was the involvement of Balaji Vishwanath. He used his influence & diplomatic skill to persuade several key Maratha military commanders who were initially loyal to Tarabai to switch their allegiance to Shahu Maharaj.
- Resolution - By 1712, the internal resistance had largely collapsed & Tarabai was forced to acknowledge Shahu as the rightful Chhatrapati. This victory allowed Shahu to consolidate his authority & formally begin his reign with Balaji Vishwanath emerging as a central figure in his administration.

ROLE OF BALAJI VISHWANATH AS PESHWA

Appointed as Peshwa in 1713, Balaji Vishwanath held the crucial position of Sax-Subedar over important regions like Pune & Aurangabad. He organized the administrative structure based on the Mughal model, establishing a hierarchy of village, Pargana, Sarkar & Suba levels.

- Interaction with the Mughal empire - During his tenure, the Mughal empire was undergoing significant internal instability. Balaji Vishwanath formed an alliance with the Sayyid brothers, which culminated in a historic mission to Delhi to support them & challenge the authority of the

Mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar.

- Transition of Power - After serving as Peshwa for roughly 6 to 7 years, Balaji Vishwanath passed away in 1720. He was succeeded by his son, Peshwa Bajirao I, who would go on to become one of the greatest military commanders in Maratha history.

MILITARY CONQUESTS UNDER PESHWA BAJIRAO

- Succession (1720) - Following the death of his father Balaji Vishwanath, his son Bajirao I ascended to the position of Peshwa at the young age of 19. Despite his youth, Bajirao demonstrated a keen understanding of governance. He recognized that to stabilize & expand the Maratha empire, he needed to secure the unwavering loyalty of his military & administrative subordinates.
- Strategic Alliances - To build this core of loyalists, Bajirao actively promoted skilled military leaders into positions of influence. Malhar Rao Holkar became the founder of the Holkar dynasty of Indore, signaling the beginning of Bajirao's efforts to solidify power through trusted commanders.
- Territorial expansion - Under Bajirao I's leadership, the Maratha influence grew significantly. He shifted the empire from a smaller entity, as it stood at the time of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's death in 1680,

into a dominant force that controlled vast stretches of Central India & the Deccan by the time of his death in 1740.

- Conflict with the Nizam - Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah left the Mughal court, & after a skirmish at the Battle of Sakarkhedo, Bajirao helped the Nizam defeat the Mughal forces sent against him. Despite this initial cooperation, tensions grew as both sides vied for influence in the region.

- Battle of Palkhed - The power struggle culminated in the Battle of Palkhed, where Bajirao decisively defeated the Nizam. Following this, the Treaty of Mungi-Paithan was signed, forcing the Nizam to recognise the Maratha right to collect Chauth & Sardeshmukhi throughout the Deccan. This victory was a major milestone that solidified Bajirao's standing within the Maratha empire & effectively neutralized the Nizam as a threat to Maratha expansion.

MILITARY EXPANSION

- Campaign in Malwa - Bajirao sent his brother Chimaji Appa, to Malwa to enforce the collection of Chauth from the region.
- Annexation of Bundelkhand - After receiving

a plea for help from Chhatrasal Bundela, who was struggling against Mughal & other invaders, Bajirao intervened. Following Chhatrasal's death in 1731, the Marathas gained control of one-third of his territory, including the strategic city of Gwalior.

- Gujarat Campaign - Bajirao successfully defeated Mughal commanders, including Sarbuland Khan & Jai Singh, to bring Gujarat under Maratha influence, eventually paving the way for the Crackwad dynasty to establish control there.

- Empire building strategy - Bajirao built a system of regional power centers: Indore - managed by Holkar family, Gwalior - managed by Scindia family, Gujarat - Managed by Crackwad family.

INTERNAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS

- Hindu Rulers' resentment - Many local Hindu rulers in North India preferred working under the Mughal or Sultanate administration because these systems did not involve constant looting. In contrast, Maratha incursions to collect Chauth were viewed as predatory, leading these rulers to hope for a Maratha defeat.

- Caste dynamics - Bajirao's Brahmin background caused friction within the Maratha community, which limited total grassroots support.

- Lack of infrastructure - The empire failed to implement long term administrative or economic reforms. Instead, it functioned primarily as a military machine focused on short term revenue generation through raids.
- Seeds of decline - By the time of Bajirao's death while the empire was territorially vast, the lack of a stable governance model meant that regional power centers would eventually exhaust their resources & military strength over time, leading to the empire's eventual fragmentation.

EXPANSION TO RAJPUTANA & DELHI

- Invasion of Rajputana - After securing Gujarat, Bajirao turned his attention to Rajputana. By 1736, he successfully forced Mewar to surrender & agree to pay chauth. He then moved to Amber (modern day Jaipur) ruled by Sawai Raja Jai Singh. Jai Singh also surrendered & in a significant development, began providing the Marathas with intelligence regarding the internal instability & weakening state of the Mughal court.
- March to Delhi - Armed with intelligence about the Mughal Empire's vulnerabilities, Bajirao launched a bold march towards Delhi in early 1737. He led an army of approximately 50,000 soldiers, initially

halting at Gwalior

- Strategic Maneuvers - Upon reaching Gwalior, Bajirao split his army. One division was sent to attack the Awadh region to distract Saadat Khan, the Mughal military commander. This strategy aimed to keep the Mughal forces occupied while Bajirao moved closer to the capital.

- Battle of Delhi - In March 1737, Bajirao reached the outskirts of Delhi & engaged the Mughal forces near Talkatora Stadium. Bajirao emerged victorious in this battle, decisively defeating the Mughal army. Despite this victory, Bajirao chose not to overthrow the Mughal emperor at this time, focusing instead on extracting financial concessions & consolidating influence.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS & DIPLOMACY

- Numerical & tactical constraints - Bajirao had only 22,000 to 25,000 troops at Delhi, making it impossible to hold the capital against Saadat Khan's reinforcements of approximately 1.5 lakh soldiers. Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah was marching towards Delhi with 40,000 troops to support the Mughal emperor, creating a multifront threat.
- Lack of legitimacy - There was no political impetus to replace the Mughal throne. The Marathas continued to recognize the Mughal authority while

leveraging their own military dominance for concessions.

- ★ Campaign against the Nizam - By June 1731, Peshwa Bajirao I moved his forces south to Bhopal to engage the Nizam. The Nizam, who had been marching towards Delhi, was intercepted by the Marathas. Prior to open warfare, there was a period of failed diplomatic negotiations where the Nizam demanded that Bajirao surrender & apologize to the Mughal emperor in Delhi. Bajirao refused these terms, leading to the escalation of the conflict.

- ★ The Battle of Bhopal - The resulting Battle of Bhopal saw a decisive victory for the Marathas over Nizam. Following his defeat, the Nizam was forced to sign the Treaty of Dauraha. This agreement resulted in two major concessions from the Mughal empire:-

- ★ The Entire Malwa region was ceded to Marathas
- ★ The Mughal government agreed to pay an indemnity of 50 lakh rupees.

★ AFTERMATH OF TREATY OF DORAHA

- ★ Shift in strategy - After the treaty, Bajirao significantly reduced his northern military campaigns. Even during Nadir Shah's invasion of Delhi in 1739, Bajirao ordered his brother Chimaji Appa to lead a force of 15,000 men to defend the Mughal throne.

However upon receiving news that the invasion was already concluding, the march was called off.

- The nature of Maratha campaigns - Bajirao's attacks were often driven by local political pragmatism - gaining financial resources, ensuring steady revenue through Chauth & managing power dynamics with the Mughal court, rather than a desire to fully replace the Mughal emperor.
- End of a reign - Following the Hyderabad campaign in late 1739, Bajirao I faced a decline in health. After nearly 20 years of continuous warfare, the physical toll became apparent; he fell ill with a fever that was left untreated for several days leading to his passing in April 1740.
- Transition of power - After death of Bajirao I in 1740, his son Balaji Bajirao took office as the new Peshwa. Following Shahu Maharaj's death in 1749, as there was no legal heir, the Treaty of Sangola was signed. This agreement effectively transferred the center of power to the Peshwa. From 1749 onwards, the Peshwa became the de facto head & sole sovereign of the entire Maratha empire.