



## International journal of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research

ISSN 2456-4567 (O)

### The Rise and Expansion of the Maratha Empire

Saloni Singh

Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Amity Institute of Social Science (AISS), Department of History,  
Undergraduate Student, India

---

**Abstract:** This essay uses straightforward language to explain the beginnings, development, governance, and fall of the Maratha Empire. The Bhakti movement's influence, the Marathas' strong geographic heritage, and their resistance to Aurangzeb's political and religious policies all contributed to their rise. Shivaji's leadership was crucial in establishing the framework for a powerful and autonomous Maratha kingdom. He established efficient revenue systems, developed a disciplined army, and established a well-run government. Shivaji's successors, particularly the Peshwas, extended Maratha authority throughout much of India after his passing. The Marathas were once among the nation's most potent political forces. But the empire was weakened by internal strife among the Maratha chiefs, poor leadership following powerful rulers, and the loss at the Third Battle of Panipat. The British East India Company took advantage of this circumstance and fought three Anglo-Maratha Wars before defeating the Marathas in 1818. With this, the Maratha Empire came to an end and British political domination over India began.

---

#### Introduction:

##### • Origin:

There are 3 reasons for the origin of Marathas-

- 1) **Their Geography:** The geography of Marathas were not suitable for agriculture as it had narrow topography making it difficult for survival. They had Basaltic rock so the fort constructed were not strong. Due to their geography, they naturally became strong, hardworking and shared their resources (Kulkarni,1996).
- 2) **Bhakti movement:** Emerged during medieval times, it was the revival of Hinduism. Many Bhakti saints united people with vernacular languages. Saints like Tukaram, Ramdas and Ek Nath were popular in Maharashtra, they united them all and created a bond for them to stay stronger together during tough times. Shivaji claimed Ramdas as his political guru. Bhakti movement united people through Marathi language which played an important role and kept them together (Chitnis,1980)



- 3) **Aurangzeb and his policies:** Marathas were never against Islam but they were against policies of Aurangzeb as he was oppressing the Hindus. Shivaji had a huge respect for prophet and holy book Quran. **The Marathas aim to create a Hindu kingdom called as 'Hindu padpadshahi'** (Gordon, 1993).

### **Shivaji and Rise of Marathas:**

One of the most significant forces in Indian history was the Maratha Empire. It flourished in the seventeenth century, when India was dealing with ongoing conflicts and political instability. The Mughal Empire was waning at this time, particularly in the Deccan. People were dissatisfied because of high taxes and unfair treatment, and the Mughal government was unable to effectively govern far-off regions. In this scenario, the Marathas became a powerful regional force that eventually expanded into a vast empire and altered India's political landscape (Gordon, 1993).

The foundation of the Maratha Empire was laid by Shivaji Maharaj. He was born in 1627 to Shaji Bhonsle (Diwan of Ahmednagar) and Jija Bai at Poona. After 5 years in 1632, Shah Jahan annexed Ahmednagar so Shaji Bhonsle left Shivaji and Jija Bai under the custody of Dadaji Kondadeva and moved to Bijapur. Shivaji was trained by his grandfather about handling arms, breaking forts, entering forts without damage, loot, plunder and attack. Shivaji aim was to attack Bijapur and capture as many as forts possible. (Chitnis, 1980)

In 1647, Dadaji Kondadeva died, so Shivaji became independent from than only he began to attack Bijapur. From 1647- 1658 he captured many forts such as Purandhar, Chakan, Javli, Kalyan and Sopra. In 1658 Aurangzeb became the ruler who had pan India. Bijapur was not able to pay tax on time as Shivaji looted them. So Bijapur decided to mediate. Afzal khan (general of Bijapur army) tried to weakened Shivaji. He destroyed temples and insulted Shivaji. However, Shivaji agreed for a peaceful meeting with Afzal khan at the foothills of Pratap gad Fort in 1659. It was decided that both would come with only one bodyguard each and without weapons. But between the meeting Afzal khan tried to stab Shivaji. But Shivaji killed Afzal khan with his tiger claw (Bagh – Nakh). (Gordon, 1993).

Death of Afzal khan made Shivaji popular and Aurangzeb noticed him. In 1660, Aurangzeb appointed Shaista khan as the Mughal governor of Deccan, where Shaista khan occupied Poona. After 3 years, in 1663, Shivaji re- captured Poona where Shaista khan lost his thumb. Aurangzeb appointed Raja Jai Singh to capture the forts and Shivaji. Raja Jai Singh reached Purandhar and held Shivaji captive in the fort. Shivaji had no choice but to surrender and Treaty of Purandhar was signed between Shivaji and Raja Jai Singh.

### **Treaty of Purandhar (1665):**

- 1) Shivaji had to surrender 23 forts to Mughals and left with 13 only.
- 2) He has to accept overlordship of the Mughals.
- 3) He has to pay annual tribute of 4 lakhs.
- 4) He has to give a personal attendance along with his son to the Mughal court.
- 5) He has to give 5000 cavalries to Mughals.



Thus, the treaty was signed and he left to Agra. He left humiliated and neglected in the Mughal court but he was imprisoned at Jaipur bhawan, Agra.

### **Coronation of Shivaji**

He managed to escape and reached Mathura along with his son. He visited all the holy places of north India like Kashi, Allahabad etc. He reached Poona in 1666. The first thing he had done is to accept Mughals. He desired to carve a kingdom for the Marathas. In 1674, he coronated himself as the 'Chhatrapati' of Maratha kingdom. He was coronated by priest of Kashi 'Gangadharbhat' according to Vedic rituals. He made Raigad his capital. After 12 days his mother passed away, so he had his 2<sup>nd</sup> coronation according to tantric rights.

### **Shivaji's Administration**

Shivaji was a great administrator. He had simplified and well organized administration. He created a group of ministers called '**Ashtapradhan**'. The **Peshwa** were the prime minister they maintain law and order as well as manage administration and wage war. **Amatya** manages all accounts of the state. **Waqia navis** were in charge of personnel safety of the king. **Sachiv** was in charge of royal correspondence. **Sumanth** were the foreign ministers of the state. **Senapathi** were the head of the army. **Pandit Rao** were the chief priest of the state who managed all the religious activities and lastly **Nyayadish** were the chief judicial officer. Shivaji also introduced '**Ryotwar settlement**'. It was the land revenue. Peasants had to pay 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the produce as tax to Shivaji. He also introduced 2 other taxes 'Chauth' and '**Sardeshmukhi**' (Gordon,1993).

### **Rule of Shivaji's Successor**

Shivaji was a cultural Hindu. He had high respect for all the religions. His state was secular. Due to ill health, he died in 1680 and his son Shambaji became the next ruler.

#### **1) Shambaji (1680-1689)**

He was son of Shivaji. He was a scholar and linguist. He was arrogant towards his nobles. He dislikes Aurangzeb and his policies. He even shelter Aurangzeb's son and plotted him against his father. In 1689, he declared independence so Aurangzeb imprisoned him. He was asked to convert but he refused so he was killed. After his death, his son Shahu was imprisoned. There was a vacuum in the Maratha's throne, so the nobles and family members choose Rajaram as the next ruler.

#### **2) Rajaram (1689-1700)**

He was son of Shivaji and step brother of Shambaji. He was a great ruler, he united Marathas and help them together. He expanded the kingdom by fighting battles against small kingdoms. He minted coins in the name of Shahu. He died in 1700, after him his son became the ruler.

#### **3) Shivaji II and Tarabai (1700-1708)**

Shivaji II was a minor so Tarabai became his guardian. Tarabai wanted his son to continue the rule, so she wrote letters and asked Aurangzeb not to release Shahu. On the other hand, she minted coins of Shahu to justify her rule. She managed the administration efficiently. Aurangzeb



died in 1708, so Bahadur shah I became the ruler. Tarabai wrote letter to him not to release shahu but on the advice of his PM ( Zulfikar khan) he released shahu. Shahu proceeds towards Raigad and Tarabai proceed towards Khed. The battle of Khed took place. Tarabai was defeated and she was pensioned off to Kolhapur along with her son.

#### **4) Shahu (1708-1748)**

He was son of shambaji and yasubai. He was imprisoned along with his father in 1689 and almost serve 19'years of imprisonment. He was keen observer and well read. In 1708, he was released by Bahadur shah I and promised to be loyal to the Mughals for life. He with the help of his peshwa fought the battle of Khed and defeated Tarabai and became next Chhatrapati. From 1708-1713, shahu tried to manage administration but he found there were some flaws, so he decided to make peshwa responsible towards the administration. In 1713, he made Balaji Viswanath as his peshwa by with Chhatrapati became nominal head with his capital at Satara and peshwa became real head with the capital at Poona. Shahu had 3 peshwas that are Balaji Viswanath, Baji Rao I and Balaji Baji Rao. Due to ill health Shahu died in 1758 and Rajaram II became the next ruler (chitnis,1980).

#### **Peshwas (1713-1818)**

The PM was under ashtapradhan but during shahu's rule he granted them more power and made them as the real head of Marathas kingdom. He had 3 Peshwas and all of them were great warriors. It was because of them Marathas were able to create an empire from 'Attock (pak) to Cuttack (Orissa)'.

#### **1)Balaji Viswanath (1713-1720)**

He was the 6<sup>th</sup> peshwa of the Maratha kingdom. A young and dynamic warrior who waged many wars and consolidated Maratha kingdom. He united all the Maratha chief and brought peace to the kingdom. In 1719, he signed Mughal- Maratha treaty of friendship with the Mughals. The sayyid brother PM and Mir- Bakshi of the Mughals made this treaty with the Marathas. According to this treaty;

- The Marathas had to maintain 15,000 soldiers at Delhi.
- Mughals granted the collection of Chauth and sardeshmukhi at 6 provinces of Deccan.

Thus, the treaty made Marathas strong and strong ally of Mughals.

Due to ill health, he died in 1720. Shahu appointed his son Baji Rao I as his next peshwa.

#### **2) Baji Rao I (1720-1740)**

He was the 7<sup>th</sup> peshwa. He was the eldest son of Balaji Viswanath. One of the greatest peshwa who made Marathas as unbreakable power in south India. He continued his father policy in expansion and expanded the kingdom as well. He waged many battles with the native rulers and annexed the kingdom. In 1729, chattrasal the ruler of Bundelkhand sort help from the peshwa to support him against Mughals but shahu denied permission. But a huge Maratha army reached the Maratha field to witness the war and Mughals were badly defeated by chhatrasal. It exposed the weakness of Mughals. In 1737, Baji Rao I conducted his famous raid at Delhi by which he gained huge loot from north India. He saw Mughals to be weak ruler and requested shahu to give him permission to attack Mughals. But shahu denied. The Mughal ruler Md. Shah



Rangeela asked Shahu to withdraw Maratha forces. The Peshwa felt broken and returned to Poona. He felt sick and died in 1740. Shahu made his son Balaji Baji Rao as next Peshwa.

### 3) Balaji Baji Rao (1740-1761)

He was the 8<sup>th</sup> peshwa. He was the eldest son of Baji Rao I. It was during his period, real expansion took place, he began to annex northern territories and Marathas to rule from Attack to Cuttack. Shahu died away and Rajaram II became the next ruler, he was a weak ruler. So Peshwa decided and grab all the power and became the Minal as well as the real head. The Afghan ruler Ahmed shah Abdali attacked India 7 times and threaten the Mughals. The Peshwa send his son visveshwar Rao and his uncle Sadashiv Rao bahu to Panipat. In 1761, the 3<sup>rd</sup> battle of panipat took place between Abdali and Marathas. The Marathas were defeated. The Peshwa's uncle and son were killed. The defeat of Panipat was a big blow to the Peshwa within few months he died.

Apart from the three majors Peshwas, the following individuals also held the position of Peshwa: Madhav Rao, Narayana Rao, Raghunath Rao, Madhav Rao II and Baji Rao II (Gordon, 1993).

### Decline of Marathas: The Anglo- Maratha Wars

During the eighteenth century, the Maratha Empire rose to prominence as one of India's most powerful nations. The Marathas ruled over sizable portions of western, central, and northern India following the fall of the Mughal Empire. However, the Maratha Empire gradually started to wane following the defeat at the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 and the deaths of powerful leaders. The Maratha chiefs' unity was diminished by internal strife, poor leadership, and rivalry. The British East India Company was growing its influence in India at the same time. Three significant conflicts known as the Anglo-Maratha Wars resulted from the conflict between the Marathas and the British, ultimately leading to the collapse of the Maratha Empire

#### 1) The 1<sup>st</sup> Anglo Maratha war (1775-1782)

There were tensions prevailing at Maratha kingdom after the 3<sup>rd</sup> battle of Panipat. Madhav Rao became the Peshwa who reformed Maratha kingdom. After him Narayana Rao became the next. He was found dead so Barabai council headed by Nana Fadnavis, appointed Raghunath Rao as the Peshwa. The Barabai council found Raghunath Rao killed Narayana Rao. So they dethroned him. Meantime, Narayana Rao wife Ganga bai was expecting a child and she was under the custody of nana Fadnavis. In this background, Raghunath Rao wished to occupy the throne. Raghunath Rao met the Bombay officials and signed the treaty of Surat. According to which;

- he would give salsette and Bassein to the Britishers if they make him the Peshwa.

Months passed by and on both sides, there was no improvement. So, Raghunath Rao attacked Bombay and held all their goods. Warren Hastings sent col. Upton to mediate the Marathas and settle the issue he met nana Fadnavis. Meantime Gangubai delivered a son and named Sawai Madhav Rao. The treaty of Purandhar was signed between nana Fadnavis and col. Upton. According to which;

- Sawai Madhav Rao to be peshwa, this triggered Raghunath Rao, so he attacked Bombay and destroyed their goods.



Warran hustings declared war against Marathas. Multiple battle took place and finally Marathas were defeated. And treaty of Salabai was signed. According to which;

- The Sawai to be the Peshwa
- Salsette to be given to the Britishers.
- Raghunath Rao was pensioned and never claim any political rights in future .
- Marathas to be supportive to the Britishers.

Thus, the war to be a victory for Britishers. Sawai committed suicided as he could not tolerate the high handedness of Nana Fadnavis. So Barabai appointed Baji Rao II as the next peshwa (Kulkarni,1996).

## **2) The 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo Maratha war (1803-1805)**

Internal disputes among the Maratha chiefs led to the Second Anglo-Maratha War between the Marathas and the British East India Company. The primary reason was the Treaty of Bassein (1802), which Peshwa Baji Rao II signed with the British to shield himself from his enemies. In opposition to this treaty, other Maratha leaders like Scindia and Bhonsle declared war. The British, led by Lord Wellesley, won a number of battles against the Marathas. The Marathas consequently lost a lot of territory, and British influence in India grew considerably (Gordon,1993)

## **3) The 3<sup>rd</sup> Anglo Maratha war ( 1827-1818)**

The last battle between the Marathas and the British East India Company was the Third Anglo Maratha War. Peshwa Baji Rao II opposed British meddling in the Maratha administration, which led to the start of the war. The Peshwa gave up in 1818 after the British routed the Maratha army. As a result, the British established their dominance over the majority of India, the Maratha Empire ended, and the position of Peshwa was eliminated. (Sardesai,1946).

## **Conclusion**

Strong geographic circumstances, the Bhakti movement's unifying influence, and opposition to Aurangzeb's policies all contributed to the Marathas' rise. The Marathas, led by Shivaji, founded a strong and orderly kingdom that, under the Peshwas, grew into a huge empire. However, the empire was weakened by internal strife, uncoordinated actions following the Third Battle of Panipat, and weak successors. By taking advantage of this circumstance, the British East India Company won the Anglo-Maratha Wars against the Marathas, which ultimately resulted in the Maratha Empire's collapse in 1818 and the establishment of British dominance in India.

## **References**

1. Chitnis, K. N. (1980). The Marathas. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
2. Gordon, S. (1993). The Marathas 1600–1818. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Kulkarni, A. R. (1996). Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji. Pune: Deshmukh Prakashan.



4. Sardesai, G. S. (1946). *New History of the Marathas (Vols. I–III)*. Bombay: Phoenix Publications.
5. Sen, S. N. (1979). *Administrative System of the Marathas*. New Delhi: K.P. Bagchi & Company.
6. Majumdar, R. C. (1977). *An Advanced History of India*. New Delhi: Macmillan.
7. Chandra, S. (2007). *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54121/2021111472>