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The Rise and the warfare methods of Marathas

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Abstract

The rise of Marathas, like that of the Rajputs, was a Mughal (8th century onwards) phenomenon. Both had mixed origins which have been discussed at length. Marathas have been innovative in not only in their war method but also very unique in defending themselves. They always fought with lot of courage determination. They not only attacked on their enemies with lot of grit but they never offered any chance to their rivals to defend skillfully. In short Marathas defense was remarkable and it is found in history one of the rare defensive talent. Shiva ji one of the greatest leaders of Marathas never believed in finding new warfare techniques to defeat the opposition. It is also noteworthy that Mughals never used guerrilla warfare against Maratha forces because they knew that Marathas were very good at guerrilla warfare tactics. Shiva ji maharaja a great warrior who always used guerrilla tactics especially against Aurangzeb and the Mughal army. Guerrilla warfare is a form of irregular warfare in which a small group of fighters, armed civilians use military tactics to fight a larger enemy. battle of Partapur, battle of Kohlapur, battle of Konkan, battle of Surat, battle of Purandar, battle of Kalian, battle of Salehar are famous for warfare methods of Marathas.

Keywords: warfare, conquest, plunders masses, defence, etc

1. Introduction

It is clear that there was a definite process of both Brahmanization and Kshatriasation in mughal India. Thus, those enrolled in service, particularly military service, and in receipt of grants of land tended to become a separate group, marrying within itself, following a certain code of conduct (such as giving up widow remarriage, certain foods, etc.) and claiming a higher status. However, unlike the Rajputs, the Marathas have not been able to set up well-established independent states of their own. They were, hence, seen as powerful local chiefs and potential allies with a following of loose auxiliaries termed *bargirs*, rather than autonomous rulers. Marathas warfare methods haven't been ordinary compared to other rulers.

The rise of the Marathas during the 17th century, and the establishment of an independent Marathastate are closely associated with the family of Shivaji. Shivaji's ancestor, Babaji, was the patel (headman) of villages Hingani Beradi and Devalgaon in the Poona district. His sons, Maloji and Vithoji, settled in the Daultabad district and served as petty horsemen under the jadhavs of Sindkhed. However, another branch of the family, the Ghorpades, was well established in the kingdom of Bijapur. Subsequently, Maloji rose in the service of Malik Ambar. An important step in the rise of the family was the grant by Malik Ambar of the parganas of Sholapur and Poona to Shah ji, son of Maloji, in 1622. These parganas were held at that time by Murari Pandit on behalf of Bijapur, and Shahji earned his spurs by ousting Murari Pandit from the area. In 1630, when Lukhaji Jadhav, father-in-law of Shahji, was treacherously murdered at the Ahmadnagar court, Shahji defected to the side of the Mughals, and was given the mansab of 5000 zat, 5000 sawar, and Poona as jagir by Shah Jahan. His brother Minaji and elder son, Sambhaji, were also given mansabs. However, Shahji's alliance with the Mughals was short lived and he defected to Bijapur in 1632 when Fath Khan, the son of Malik Ambar, agreed to surrender Daultabad, joined the Mughal service, and was awarded Poona in jagir. Shivaji began his real career of conquest in 1656 when he conquered Javli from the Maratha chief, Chandra Rao More. Shivaji's legacy was to vary by observer and time but began to take on increased importance with the emergence of the Indian independence movement, as many elevated him as a proto-nationalist and hero of the

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Hindus ^[1]. Particularly in Maharashtra, debates over his history and role have engendered great passion and sometimes even violence as disparate groups have sought to characterize him.

The Javli kingdom and the accumulated treasure of the Mores were important, and Shivaji acquired them by means of treachery. The conquest of Javli made him the undisputed master of the Mavala area on the highlands and freed his path to the Satara area and to the coastal strip, the Konkan. Mavali foot soldiers became a strong part of his army. With their help, he strengthened his position by acquiring a further series of hill forts near Poona.

The Mughal invasion of Bijapur in 1657 saved Shivaji from Bijapuri reprisals, Shivaji first entered into negotiations with Aurangzeb, then changed sides and made deep inroads into Mughal areas, seizing rich booty. When Aurangzeb came to terms with the new Bijapur ruler in preparation for the civil war, he pardoned Shivaji also. But he distrusted Shivaji and advised the Bijapur ruler to expel him from the Bijapur area he had seized, and if he wanted to employ him, employ him in the Karnataka, far away from the Mughal frontiers.

In 1657, at the time of the Mughal invasion of Bijapur, Shivaji had demanded, and Aurangzeb had agreed, that all the forts and mahals pertaining to Bijapur which were in Shivaji's possession be granted to him, as also the port of Dabhol and its dependencies. But Aurangzeb had balked at his demand for the cession of the forts and territories in the Adil Shahi Konkan, even though this was to be done "after the imperialists had seized the old Nizam Shahi territory now in the hands of Adil Shah." Taking advantage of the Mughal civil war, Shivaji had conquered Purandar and seized north Konkan, including Kalyan and Bhiwandi. Accounts vary on whether Shivaji or Afzal Khan struck the first blow ^[2]. The Maratha chronicles accuse Afzal Khan of treachery, while the Persian – Language chronicles attribute the treachery to Shivaji ^[3].

Jai Singh did not have the heavy guns to defend and engage in a siege, nor means to support or to gather provisions for the besieging army. His difficulties were added to by Golconda sending an army of 12,000.

Sawars and 40,000 foot to aid Bijapur. As soon as Jai Singh received a setback, Diler Khan and the faction hostile to Shivaji ascribed the failure to the lukewarmness and treachery of Shivaji, and demanded that he be imprisoned. To keep him out of harm's way, Jai Singh sent Shivaji to besiege Panhala. But Shivaji failed. Seeing his grandiose scheme collapsing before his eyes, Jai Singh persuaded Shivaji to visit the emperor at Agra. If Shivaji and Aurangzeb could be reconciled, Jai Singh thought, Aurangzeb might be persuaded to give greater resources for a renewed invasion of Bijapur. But the visit proved to be a disaster. Shivaji felt insulted when he was put in the category of *mansabdars* of 5000- a rank which had been granted earlier to his minor son. Nor did the emperor, whose birthday was being celebrated, break protocol to speak to Shivaji.

The Karnataka expedition was the last major expedition of Shivaji. The base at Jinji built up by Shivaji proved to be a haven of refuge for his son, Raja Ram, during Aurangzeb's all-out war on the Marathas. The forts which were major sources of strength for Shivaji were carefully supervised, Mavali foot soldiers and gunners being appointed there. We are told that three men of equal rank were placed in charge of each fort to guard against treachery.

Shivaji was one of the few Indian rulers who tried to develop a navy. His conquest of the ports of Kalyan, Bhivandi and Panvel in North Konkan brought him adjacent to the Portuguese possessions at Goa. He realized quickly that without a navy he would not be able to control the creeks on which places of trade and commerce were located. Nor would he be able to defend the coast and areas from the depredations of the Sidis of Janjira, an African group of people who dominated the island of Janjira and its adjacent areas. On coming to the throne, Aurangzeb had two problems in the Deccan: the problem posed by the rising power of Shivaji, and the problem of persuading Bijapur to part with the territories ceded to it by the treaty of 1636. Kalyani and Bidar were secured in 1657. Parenda was secured by bribe in 1660. Sholapur still remained. After his accession, Aurangzeb asked Jai Singh to punish both Shivaji and Adil Shah. This shows Aurangzeb's confidence in the superiority of the Mughal arms and the underestimation of his opponents.

Jai Singh decided to adopt a policy of divide and rule, arguing that "it is not very difficult for the victorious armies to conquer both of these wretched rulers. But if policy can accomplish a thing, why would we court delay (by resorting to force)?" As he saw it, the question for the Mughals was how to keep the Deccanis divided without conceding anything to them in return for their support against the Marathas. Jai Singh did put forward a plausible policy for attaining this objective. Jai Singh was of the opinion that the Maratha problem could not "be solved without a forward policy in the Deccan - a conclusion to which Aurangzeb finally came 20 years later. While planning his invasion of Bijapur, Jai Singh had written to Aurangzeb, "The conquest of Bijapur is the preface to the conquest of all Deccan and Karnataka". But Aurangzeb shrank. From this bold policy we can only guess at the reasons: the ruler of Iran had adopted a threatening attitude in the north-west; the campaign for the conquest of the Deccan would be long and arduous and would need the presence of the emperor himself for large armies could not be left in charge of a noble or an ambitious prince, as Shah Jahan had discovered to his misfortune. Also, as long as Shah Jahan was alive, how could Aurangzeb afford to go away on a distant campaign?

Aurangzeb had triumphed but he soon found that the extinction of Bijapur and Golconda was only the beginning of his difficulties. The last and the most difficult phase of Aurangzeb's life began now. After the downfall of Bijapur and Golconda, Aurangzeb was able to concentrate all his forces against the Marathas. Earlier, by a series of carefully calculated moves, and well-chosen troops, Aurangzeb was able to put the Marathas on the defensive, and virtually seal off the routes across which the Marathas would have to traverse in order to aid Bijapur and Golconda. Sambhaji's preoccupation with internal enemies and with those in his immediate neighbourhood, that is, the Sidis and the Portuguese, also aided Aurangzeb in his scheme of isolating the Deccani states, and dealing with each one of them according to his convenience.

In 1689, Sambhaji was surprised at his secret hide-out at Sangameshwar by a Mughal force. He was paraded before Aurangzeb and executed as a rebel and an infidel. This was undoubtedly another major political mistake on the part of Aurangzeb. He could have set a seal on his conquest of Bijapur and Golconda by coming to terms with the

Marathas. In fact some of the nobles advocated Sambhaji being kept a prisoner and asked to surrender all forts. By executing Sambhaji, Aurangzeb not only threw away the chance of a compromise but provided the Marathas a cause.

In the absence of a single rallying point, the Maratha sardars were left free to plunder the Mughal territories, disappearing at the approach of the Mughal forces. Instead of destroying the Marathas, Aurangzeb made the Maratha opposition all-pervasive in the Deccan. Rajaram, the younger brother of Sambhaji, was crowned as king, but decided to escape when the Mughals attacked his capital. Leaving Ramachandra Amatya as his vice-regent (*hukumat panah*), Rajaram sought shelter at Jinji on the east coast and continued the fight against the Mughals from there with the help of his half cousin, Shahji of Tanjore. Thus, Maratha' resistance spread from the west to the east coast.

However at the moment, Aurangzeb was at the height of his power, having triumphed over all his enemies. Some of the nobles were of the opinion that Aurangzeb should return to north India, leaving to others the task of carrying on mopping up operations against the Marathas. Aurangzeb rejected all such suggestions. Convinced that the Maratha power had been crushed, after 1690 Aurangzeb concentrated on annexing to the empire the rich and extensive Karnataka tract, and to settle the administration of the two conquered kingdoms.

Recent studies show that Aurangzeb's reorganization of administration in the old settled tracts of Golconda and Bijapur was broadly on sound lines. Aurangzeb transferred a cadre of experienced Mughal officers into these two provinces. The old Golconda was divided into nine sarkars, with a faujdar at the headquarters. Hyderabad-Karnataka was made a separate charge, as also Bijapuri-Karnataka. The old revenue system was reorganized. A full scale survey and assessment of lands was not undertaken. It has been pointed out that three great Asian empires--the Safavid, the Mughal and the Ottoman declined during almost simultaneously during the 17th and 18th centuries. While each of them had specific features in their decline; some common factors have been attributed to it. Thus, there were a top-heavy administration, a deeply hierarchical society, and a ruling class with a narrow social base which was totally out of touch with the new developing science and technology in the West.

The sharp contrast between the life style of the ruling elites in these countries, and the miserable living condition of large sections of the peoples have been commented upon by all European travelers. In the case of India, it has been noted that in 1595, the pay of 122 mansabdars of the rank of 500 zat and above, accounted for over a half of the entire revenue resources of the empire. Social disparities further widened the gulf between the ruling class and the masses. There was a deep-seated belief both among Hindu and Muslim thinkers that those born in a particular group or lower castes should remain there for the sake of social stability. This attitude did not altogether close the doors of social mobility, but restricted it. The Mughals did induct into its service Hindus belonging to the khatri and Kayastha castes, and a few brahmins, and raised some of them to high offices, but few from the lower castes. The Mughal ruling class looked down not only on traders (*baniyas*), but on artisan and agricultural groups and castes Rajputs and, to some extent, Shaikhzadas and Afghans being exceptions. This attitude was made manifest when Shivaji was called a

"petty *bhumia*". Even later, when many Maratha sardars were given high mansabs, they were not considered socially equal, and were not appointed to offices of trust and authority.

The narrow social base of the Mughal ruling class also led to neglect of the rapidly growing science and technology in the West. This was partly an account of the Mughal ruling classes not feeling any kind of threat from the European domination of the seas. They thought that they could use the mutual European rivalries, and their own domination of the land to satisfy their needs, and defend the interests of their traders, without incurring the cost of building a navy. The Ottomans did build a strong navy, which dominated the Mediterranean till the 18th century. But they lost because of their neglect of science which resulted in building of superior guns and swifter ships in the West.

Another impact on the Mughal ruling class was the intellectual atmosphere created by the religious leaders of the time who denounced "rationalism". Thus, Abul Fazl laments their emphasis on tradition (*taqlid*), and how they had closed the door of how and why. It was due to this attitude that Akbar's attempt to lay emphasis on secular subjects, such as mathematics, geography, social sciences, etc., failed, and there was very little technological development.

In such a situation there was little prospect of new science and technology growing. As Bernier pointed out, unlike France, there were no academies which could protect and promote new thought. In the field of trade and artisanal production, the economy continued to grow while agriculture grew slowly. The outer brilliance of the empire dazzled many European traders, and visitors, but the Mughal Empire was not capable of leading India to a higher stage of development. Sooner or later, the rigid framework of the empire had to break in order to create the possibility of faster growth.

This should not lead us to the conclusion that there was a total breakdown of the system under Aurangzeb. The Mughal Empire was still powerful and vigorous military and administrative machinery. The Mughal army might fail against the elusive and highly mobile bands of Marathas in the mountainous region of the Deccan, especially in the western part. Maratha forts might be difficult to capture and still more difficult to retain. But in the plains of northern India and the vast plateau extending up to the Karnataka, the Mughal artillery and cavalry was still master of the field. Thirty or forty years after Aurangzeb's death, when the Mughal artillery had declined considerably in strength and efficiency, the Marathas could still not face it in the field of battle. Continuous anarchy, wars and the depredations of the Marathas may have depleted the population of the Deccan and brought industry and agriculture in large areas to a virtual standstill. But in northern India which was the heart of the empire and was of decisive economic and political importance in the country, the Mughal administration still retained much of its vigor, and continued to collect a large magnitude as land-revenue. Trade and industry not only continued to flourish but expanded. The administration at the district level proved amazingly tenacious and a good deal of it survived and found its way indirectly into the British administration. Despite the military reverses and the mistakes of Aurangzeb, the Mughal dynasty still retained a powerful hold on the mind and imagination of the people.

As far as the Rajputs are concerned, we have seen that the breach with Marwar was not due to an attempt on Aurangzeb's part to undermine the Hindus by depriving them of a recognised head, but to a miscalculation on his part: he wanted to divide the Marwar state between the two principal claimants, and in the process alienated both, as also the ruler of Mewar who considered Mughal interference in such matters to be a dangerous precedent. The breach with Marwar and the long drawn-out war which followed damaged the moral standing of the Mughal state. However, the fighting was not of much consequence militarily after 1681. It may be doubted whether the presence of Rathor Rajputs in larger numbers in the Deccan between 1681 and 1706 would have made much difference in the outcome of the conflict with the Marathas. In any case, the demands of the Rajputs related to grant of high *mansabs* as before and restoration of their home lands. These demands having been accepted within half a dozen years of Aurangzeb's death, the Raj puts ceased to be a problem for the Mughals. They played no active role in the subsequent disintegration of the empire, nor were they of much help in arresting the process of its decline. Though we are living in 21st century, still our way of warfare isn't so like Marathas. pm Mr.Modi has though enhanced our military power immensely, but what matters is warfare methods like of Marathas?

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