

History of India (1605-1750)

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Although there were many influential Maratha families like Mores, Ghatagas, Nimbalkars who were exercising control in small regions but none of them created a big and well establish empire like Rajputs. The credit for creating such an empire is given to shahji Bhonsale and his son Shivaji. In Deccan kingdom, many officials were creating semi-independent principality of their own like Mir Jumlo (noble in Golconda) tried on coromandal coast, Shahji at Bangalore, the Abyssinians on western coast and Siddis behaved in the same manner. It was in this kind of background that Shivaji attempted to create a large principality near Poona.

The traditional sources (Bhakers) claim that Shivaji was divine figure who built a powerful state with the help of Mata Bhawani's blessings. Various historians have put forward their views regarding nature of Maratha state. Imperialist historians see Medieval Indian states as exploitative and oppressive. They describe Ancient Indian history as Hindu period, Medieval Period as Islamic Period and Period under Britishers as that of equality and civilisation.

G. Duff argues that Maratha States was based on loot and plunder. It had no taxation system, no law and order and had no long term aims. It was a one man show Shivaji talks about "Haindava Dharmoddharak" (Protection of Hindu Faith) and "Kshatriya Kulavamsa". He publicly announced the protection of cow and brahmins. So, Maratha state was based on religion. Similarly Mughals also based their empire on religion. So both, Maratha and Mughals gave communal colour to Indian.

Nationalist historians like M.G. Ranade, V.V. Giri, C.D. Deshmukh criticized G. Duff and argue that Maratha state was a result of 'Socio religious renaissance'. They were fed up of foreign imperial domination of Mughals. Shivaji performed Maharashtra Dharma and formed nation-state of Maharashtra. According to these historians, Marathas represent the first freedom reactionary class to imperial Mughals.

Jadunath Sarkar argues that Marathas not only gave national struggle but Hindu struggle to Islamic Mughals. Marathas blamed Rajputs for traiting against Hindu faith as they

supported Islamic Mughals. Precisely because Mughals were foreigners and oppressive, Marathas created Hindu Rastra nation.

Here it is very important to remember that all these historians say that Marathas had a borrowed identity i.e. they emerged as a reaction to Mughal empire. Satish Chandra and S. Gordon challenged these views. Gordon argues that if Maratha state was a one man show then the Mughal empire would have been more successful as it had individuals like Akbar and Aurangzeb. He further argues that Maratha state had social base in the way that when Britishers came to India, they had to fight with Marathas to establish their empire rather than with Mughals. Marathas had their taxation system, army, social coronation and characters of imperial state.

Satish Chandra argues that there was no caste rigidity in Deccan. But Irawati Karve and Ethoran say that there was vertical social mobility (Kulis - Kunbis - Marathas - Kshatriya) in the society. Anybody could achieve higher status by looting land and collecting persons.

Shivaji could feel the pulse of the masses. The people collected under Shivaji were the oppressed people under Aurangzeb and Deccani Sultans. Maratha state was not a result of loot and plunder or a 'war state' but it was result of mass movement which had low class bearing. Shivaji adopted two pronged policy on the one hand he got the support of low class people while on the other hand he kept good relations with Zamidars, Deshmukhs, Jagirdars. But in long run he cut down powers of Zemidars and maintain support of low class people.

Satish Chandra argues that Maratha state emerged similarly as Rajputs through the processes brahmanisation and kshatriyisation which started in 8th century A.D. People belonged to low class status began to adopt Kshatrim and brahmanism to claim high status in the society. When Alauddin Khalji went to Deccan, many lower Maratha Sardars help him.

The major process of formation of Maratha state started in 1656-57. In 1656 Shivaji invaded Chandra Rao More is Javli area in Karnataka. In 1657, he even looked parts of Bijapuri Kingdom and planned to attack Surat. Aurangzeb knew this but he lest Shivaji to do so because he needed his help in the war of succession. So, Maratha state was not a borrowed identity state but an indigenous state.

There was tussle between centralisation of Aurangzeb and decentralisation of Deccani Kingdom. In this tussle, Deccani Sultans were crushed and Shivaji took advantage of this opportunity.

Maratha state was not stable like Rajputs. Marathas believed in loot and plunder as they were marunders. They had no long term aims. It emerged as "Bangish" state. Shivaji won all battles through guerrilla warfare, so he captured state power through treachery.

S. Chandra and S. Gordon agree to Wink that Shivaji took advantage of the situation but they argue that Marathas had vibrant economy in Deccan. Gordon argues that if Marathas were based on Fitna, then state would have been collapsed on the day Shivaji died, Wink and S. Chandra both agree that Shivaji used circumstances but Wink says that he took advantage of negative situations while S. Chandra argue that he was a strategist and genius and can be compared to Akbar. Wink further argues that it was under Peshwas that Marathas came into being as state while under Shivaji there was chaos.

Betelle argues that Marathas were collecting revenue under Mughals like other Mansabdars. They were saviours of Sovereignty with Mughals. S. Gordon argues that Shivaji was hungry for imperialism and for this he committed three plunders as argued by M.N. Pearson. In 1663, he looted Shiaste Khan's camp at Poona, in 1664 he attacked Surat, in 1665 the treaty of Purandar. In 1674 he crowned himself.

So, by summing up all it can be said that Shivaji was not a Hindu National Leader. He did not raise an empire which was religiously reactionary to Mughals but he used the circumstances strategically and formed a state which was regional in character but had popular base.