



12. Progression of the Empire

Till now we have learnt about the rise of the Maratha power and its expansion. We studied the developments from the foundation of the *Swaraj* till its expansion into an empire. In this chapter, we take a brief review of the *Sardar* families, who gave their valuable contribution for expanding the Maratha kingdom in the northern parts of India.

The Holkars of Indore : Malharrao was the founder of the Holkar rule at Indore. He served the Maratha state for a



Malharrao Holkar

long time. He was well-versed in guerrilla warfare. He proved his valour in the northern campaigns of the Marathas at the time of Bajirao I and Nanasahab Peshwa. He was instrumental in establishing the Maratha supremacy in Malwa and Rajputana. He proved to be of great help to Peshwa Madhavrao in reviving the Maratha prestige in the North after the defeat at Panipat. *Punyashloka* Ahilyabai Holkar was the wife of Khanderao, who was Malharrao's son. Khanderao died in the battle of Kumbheri. After a few days, Malharrao also passed away. After him, Ahilyabai assumed the reins



Ahilyabai Holkar

of the Indore administration. She was a capable, astute and excellent administrator. She made new laws for agricultural cess, revenue collection etc. and put the affairs of the State in order. She strove to bring more land under cultivation, digging wells for farmers, promoting trade and industry, building lakes and tanks.

She built temples, *Ghats*, *Maths*, *Dharamshalas*, drinking water facilities at all important places of pilgrimage in the four quarters of India. This effort of hers was important for the cultural integration of the country. She looked into judicial matters personally and dispensed justice. She was very generous. She had great love of books. She ruled ably for twenty-eight years and enhanced the Maratha prestige in the North. She brought peace and order to her Kingdom and made her people happy. Yashwantrao Holkar tried to save the Maratha Kingdom when it was on the decline.

The Bhosales of Nagpur : Parasoji was given the *jagir* of Varhad and Gondawan during the reign of Shahu Maharaj. Among the Bhosales of Nagpur, Raghuji was the bravest and the most capable. He brought the area surrounding Tirucherapalli and



Raghuji Bhosale

Arcot in the South under Maratha dominance. Shahu Maharaj had assigned to him the *chauthai* rights of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. He brought these territories under the Maratha dominance. In 1751 CE the Bhosales of Nagpur won



the Odisha territory from Ali Vardi Khan. Till 1803 CE Marathas dominated Odisha.



Do you know ?

The Maratha ditch – The British at Kolkata used to fear the Bhosales from Nagpur. So, to protect the city of Kolkata from a possible Maratha attack, they dug a ditch around the city. That ditch came to be known as the Maratha ditch.

The Shindes of Gwalior :

Bajirao I had rightly judged the capabilities of Ranoji Shinde and made him a *Sardar* in the North. After Ranoji's death, his sons Jayappa, Dattaji and Mahadji, too, proved their valour and strengthened



Mahadaji Shinde

the Maratha rule in North India.

Peshwa Madhavrao conferred the family title on Mahadji. Mahadji was a brave General and an astute statesman. Mahadji was instrumental in re-establishing the Maratha supremacy and prestige in North India after the Maratha defeat at Panipat. He realised that the guerilla tactics of the Marathas would not be suitable for the warfare in the plains of the North. He trained his army and modernised his artillery under the guidance of a French military expert de Boigne. With the help of this trained army, he subdued the Rohillas, the Jats, the Rajputs and the Bundellas.

The British began to take interest in the

politics at Delhi, when they felt that the Marathas might have become weak after the battle of Panipat. They managed to get Diwani rights of Bengal province and wanted to capture the Emperor of Delhi. In these adverse circumstances, Mahadji Shinde defeated the British and reinstated the Emperor on the throne. The emperor was pleased with his bravery and conferred the title of 'Vakil – i – Mutlak (Chief agent of the emperor) upon him, which meant that he had the authority of civil and military rights. He accepted that position on behalf of the minor Peshwa Savai Madhavrao. Due to this, the Marathas gained full control of the Empire. It was very difficult to save the tottering empire. Mahadji managed the difficult affairs with strong determination and looked after the Delhi affairs during 1784 CE to 1794 CE.

The heirs of Najib Khan, responsible for the Panipat battle, were still plotting against the Marathas in Rohilkhand. Najib's grandson Ghulam Kadir captured the Red Fort and tortured the Emperor and his *begums* for their wealth. He gouged out the Emperor's eyes and took hold of the royal treasure. In these circumstances, Mahadji defeated Kadir. He confiscated the wealth from him and returned it to the emperor. He reinstated the Emperor on the throne of Delhi. Thus, Mahadji recovered the Maratha prestige which was lost after the battle of Panipat. He controlled the politics of India by putting the Emperor under Maratha control.

Due to the family feuds amongst the *Peshwas*, Raghunathrao opted to go to the British camp. He wanted to become a *Peshwa* with the help of the British. It was not acceptable to the Maratha Statesmen. This led to an inevitable conflict between the Marathas and the British. The conflict between the two great powers. The

Marathas and the British would finally decide who the ruler of India would be.

From Mumbai, the British marched on the Marathas via Borghat. The Maratha army gathered under the leadership of Mahadaji Shinde. The Marathas blocked the supply of foodgrains to the British, using guerrilla tactics. Both the armies met at Wadgaon (on today's Pune-Mumbai Road). The British were defeated in this battle and were forced to surrender the custody of Raghunathrao to the Marathas.

Delhi was under Maratha control till 1803 CE. When we note that the British conquered India after battling with the Marathas, we understand the importance of Mahadaji's achievements. After setting in order, the affairs of Delhi, Mahadaji came to Pune. He died at Wanawadi near Pune where a memorial is built to him.

Like the Shindes, the Holkars and the Bhosales, some other prominent Maratha *Sardars* also rendered noteworthy service to the Maratha *Raj*.



Shinde Chhatra, Wanawadi, Pune

The navy raised by Shivaji Maharaj was strengthened by Kanhoji Angre and his son Tulaji. With this strong navy, they contained the naval powers of the Portuguese, the British and the Siddhis. They defended the coastline of the Maratha State.

Khanderao Dabhade and his son Trimbakrao laid the foundation of Maratha power in Gujarat. After the death of Khanderao, his wife Umabai routed the Mughal *Sardar* of Ahmadabad. She conquered the fort there.

Later, the Gaikwads made Vadodara in Gujarat a seat of their power. The Pawars of Dhar and Dewas in Madhya Pradesh rendered valuable assistance to the Shindes and the Holkars in expanding the Maratha power in the North.

The Maratha State was in disarray after the death of Peshwa Madhavrao. Nana Phadnavis, the famous administrator of the *Peshwas* and a Maratha statesman,



Nana Phadnavis

set right the affairs of the State with the help of Mahadaji. While Mahadaji was busy restoring the Maratha supremacy in the North, Nana managed the affairs of the South. In this, he was helped by the Patwardhans, Haripant Phadke, the Rastes and other *Sardars*. As a result of this, Maratha supremacy was established in the South.

The Holkars of Indore, Bhosales of Nagpur, Shindes of Gwalior, Gaikwads of Vadodara brought glory to the Maratha power on the basis of their valour, leadership qualities and capability. They were the pillars of the Maratha power in its last phase.

The Maratha *Sardars* were successful in establishing the influence of the Maratha power both in North and South India. After the death of Mahadaji Shinde

and Nana Phadnavis, the Maratha power began to wane.

At that time, Bajirao II, the son of Raghunathrao was the Peshwa. He did not have leadership qualities and had many vices. He was unable to unite the Maratha *Sardars*. The internal strife between the *Sardars* weakened their power.

During the reign of Bajirao II, the Maratha influence in the North and South waned further. The British replaced the Marathas.

The British captured Pune in 1817 CE and hoisted their flag 'Union Jack' there.

In 1818 CE the British defeated Marathas in the battle of Ashti in Solapur district and finally the Maratha power came to an end. This event marks a major change in the History of India. After this, the British managed to gain control over a major part of India. India came into contact with the Western world. That led to many changes in India's social system. Many old things became redundant or were pushed aside. This was a major transformation. A major change took place. The medieval period of Indian history came to an end. The Modern period began.



Exercise

1. Answer in one word.

- (1) She took the charge of the Indore administration.
- (2) The most capable and brave man in Bhosale family of Nagpur.
- (3) He reinstated the Emperor on the throne of Delhi.
- (4) He managed the politics in South.

2. Arrange chronologically.

- (1) The battle of Ashti.
- (2) Maratha dominance over Odisha.
- (3) The British flew the Union Jack in Pune.

3. Write briefly.

- (1) The work done by Ahilyabai Holkar.
- (2) The valour shown by Mahadji Shinde.
- (3) The Maratha rule in Gujarat.

4. Discuss the reasons behind the end of Maratha rule.

Activity

Create a pictorial chart to show the families that contributed to the expansion of the Maratha power. Exhibit it in your school.



Shaniwarwada, Pune