

Contribution of Baji Rao in the Expansion of Maratha Empire

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Balaji's eldest son, BajiRao, was born in 1698, while the second son, chimnaji, was eight years younger. Balaji also had two daughters, one of whom married a rich money lender who made life miserable for BajiRao as his most tiresome creditor when the latter incurred huge expense in raising new armies. One of the last acts of BalajiVishwanath, before he died, was to arrange for the marriage of his son BajiRao to a most suitable and charming young lady called KashiBai.

Balaji brought up his two sons under strict discipline. He constantly admonished them saying, 'You must be fearless as lions and strong as tigers. You must be soldiers and leaders of men. Nothing, but nothing should deter you.'¹ BajiRao and chimnaji followed his advised and gloried in the triumphs of their father and both brothers had visions of similar and more glorious victories.²

It can be said about BajiRao Tall and commanding in appearance he was like all his family, famous for his good looks. He was equally great as a soldier and as a statesman. He understood to perfection the peculiar tactics of the Maratha horse, and his campaigns against the Nizam were masterpieces of strategy. He was as chivalrous in the hour of victory as he was brave in the field. As politician he had the lofty and far-reaching ambition of his father, and he lived to see the tiny Maratha race once 'a cloud no bigger than a man's hand', spread all over India, from Delhi to Tanjore. He was an eloquent and inspiring orator, and if in private life he had something of the haughty and imperious reserve of the chitpavan; he was a generous master to those who served him faithfully." (Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV, p.407.)

BajiRao was fortunate to secure the friendship of Jay Singh of Ambar and ChhatrasalBundela. In 1737 he marched right upto the vicinity of Delhi but did not enter the city I order that the might not wound the sentiment of the emperor. The emperor, however, summoned the Nizam to get rid of the Maratha menace. The Nizam forgetting his agreement with the Peshwas in 1731 (1732?) by which he agreed to give a free hand to Peshwa in Hindusthan, i.e. north India did not feel any scruple to march against the Peshwa. The two met near Bhopal and the Nizam was defeated and compelled to bet for terms (Jan. 7, 1738). By the agreement that followed the Nizam was to grant the subahdari of the province of Malwa to the Peshwa and the full sovereignty of the territory between Narmada and Chambal, to obtain from the Emperor confirmation of the cession of this territory and to promise payment of Rs. 50 lakhs to meet Peshwa's expenses. The Emperor having ratified the agreement the Peshwa who had established a de facto control of a part of Hindusthan became de jure authority over the area.³

While the Peshwa was operating in northern India another Maratha army under ChimanjiAppa succeeded in wresting Salsette and Bassein from the Portuguese. These places were seized by the Portuguese nearly two hundred years ago from the Marathas and made Bassein capital of their province and raised strong fortifications there. The conquest of these two districts meant liberating a part of the Maratha Homeland (1739.)

The news of Nadir Shah's invasion of India in 1739 perturbed BajiRao and like a true patriot he made an attempt to offer a united resistance to the invader sinking all his differences with his Muslim neighbors. Nadir's sack of Delhi bewildered the Peshwa. He was all the more stupefied at the infamous act of the Nizam in suggesting to the Persian adventurer to seize the person of the emperor. The Peshwa felt that a person of Nizam's character should not be allowed to rule in the Deccan. The Peshwa also received the earlier report that Nadir Shah intended to punish the Maratha aggressors. He at once sent for his brother who was in his campaign in Bassein. But the confrontation with the Persian adventure did not take place since he left Delhi. But his plan to punish the Nizam did not materialize because of his premature death in 1740 at an early age of forty- two.

Opinions are at great variance with regard to the achievements and statesmanship of BajiRao. Some historians regard BajiRao as a man of extra- ordinary qualities a born leader and not merely a capable soldier but also a wise statesman. In his statesmanship he perceived that the Mughal Empire was on the throes of

dissolution and the Marathas should take advantage of situation. It was also to his credit that he understood the need of rousing the Hindu sentiment and to that end he preached the ideal of HinupadPadshahi.' Bold and imaginative he definitely formulated the policy of Maratha imperialism initiated by his father, the first Peshwa. He knew how to deal with his enemies and his masterly handling of the situation had frustrated the plan of his rivals TrimbakRaoDhabadeShambhuji II and the Nizam. It was his quality of leadership that helped him to pick up war-loads like the Holkars, Scindias, Phadkes, Pawars etc. He also realized in his deep insight that the Hindu like the Rajputs, Bundelas, Jats etc. were his natural allies against the Mughals. His friendly relations with Sawai Jay Singh and Chhatrasal stood him in good stead in times of need.

He was an expansionist, an empire builder and his policy of northward drive brought the province from Punjab to Bengal Under the Marathas by 1760. As Sardesai points out, as the result of the work of BajjiRao "Shahu was no longer the petty raja of a small self-contained one race, one language kingdom as his father and grandfather had been, he was now monarch over a far-flung and diversified dominion" Rajwada, Savarkar and many other writers credit him with founding a Hindu empire supplanting the empire of the Timurids. K.M Panikkar also remarks in the same strain. He says that "if Shivaji was the founder of the Maratha state BajjiRao claim that he transformed what was a national state into an empire. He was the first man to see the possibilities of succeeding to the Grand Mughal estate and building up a Maratha empire"⁴

Some historians, however, make mention of his domestic life and personal character and say that BajjiRao had exceeded all bounds of decent life and religious prohibitions by getting infatuated with a dancing girl and partaking of meat. His policy of northward expansion before completely crushing the Nizam in the Deccan has been criticized by some historians. The only success he had over the Nizam was to force him to recognize the Maratha right to collect chauth and Sardeshmuki and not beyond that. It has also been questioned that if security of the homeland was his main objective why should he have gone over to conquer Hindustan leaving a jealous enemy in Nizam behind.

But the balance of judgement is in favour of BajjiRao. Sir Jadunath sees in BajjiRao great constructive foresight and remarks that BajjiRao was besides his many other achievements which entitle him to be regarded as a great statesman and hold military leader, was like Sir Walpole of England the founder of the institution of the prime minister of the Maratha Raj. By far the overwhelming majority of the writers are full of praise for the activities and achievement of BajjiRao I.⁵

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