



11. Marathas – The Protectors of the Nation

After Bajirao I, Shahu Maharaj appointed his son Balaji Bajirao alias Nanaasaheb the *Peshwa*. Following the invasion of Nadirshah, there was instability in Delhi. In these circumstances, Nanaasaheb tried to stabilize the Maratha rule in the North. Ahmadshah Abdali posed a challenge to the Marathas at Panipat. We shall learn about these developments in this chapter.

Situation in the North : The region to the north-west of Ayodhya province at the foothills of the Himalayas was called Rohilkhand in the 18th century. The Pathans who had migrated from Afghanistan had settled in this region. They were known as Rohillas. The Rohillas had wrought havoc in the Doab region of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. The Nawab of Ayodhya invited the Marathas to subdue the Rohillas. The Marathas chastised the Rohillas.

Conflict with the Afghans : Ahmadshah Abdali, the ruler of Afghanistan, was attracted by the riches of India. He marched on the Punjab in 1751 CE. There was anarchy in the Mughal territory. The Mughals were facing the threat of Abdali's invasion. In these circumstances, the Mughals found it necessary for their own protection, to seek the help of the Marathas. The Emperor was sure of the Maratha strength and integrity. There was no other power strong enough to protect Delhi. Therefore, the Emperor entered into a treaty with the Marathas in April 1752. According to this treaty, the Marathas agreed to protect the Mughal power from enemies like the Rohillas, the Jats, the Rajputs and the

Afghans. In return, the Marathas were to get cash money, the right to collect *chauthai* in the territories of the Punjab, Multan, Rajputana, Sindh and Rohilkhand and the *Subhedari* of Ajmer and Agra provinces.

As per the treaty, the Peshwa sent the Shinde-Holkar armies for the protection of Delhi on behalf of the Chhatrapati. When Abdali learnt that the Marathas were marching to Delhi, he went back to his country. Because the threat of Abdali was thus thwarted due to the Marathas, the Emperor gave them *Chauthai* rights to the Mughal *subhas*. These *subhas* included Kabul, Kandahar and Peshawar. Though the *subhas* were previously a part of the Mughal empire, now they were part of Abdali's Afghanistan. As per the treaty, it was a duty of the Marathas to win the *subhas* back from Abdali and annexe them to the Mughal Empire. Abdali however, wanted to bring under Afghan control, the region up to the Punjab. So a conflict between the Marathas and Abdali was imminent and inevitable.

Raghunathrao, brother of the Peshwa Nanaasaheb, accompanied by Jayappa Shinde and Malharrao Holkar, undertook the campaign of North India to combat Abdali.



Peshwa Nanaasaheb

The local rulers in the north saw the Marathas from the South as their competitors. They did not take into account the broad vision of the Marathas and

remained neutral, offering no help to the Marathas. They did not like the Maratha supremacy and interventions in the Delhi court. Surajmal Jat and Rani Kishori were the only ones who helped the Marathas wounded in the battle of Panipat.

Also, some of the orthodox sects in the North saw Marathas as people belonging to other religions. They, too, left aside the broad vision of the Marathas. They persuaded Abdali to invade India with a view to reducing the Maratha might. They expected that Abdali would defeat the Marathas and drive them away back to the South, beyond the river Narmada.

The Maratha standard on Attock :

Najibkhan was a Rohilla chief. He found it hard to tolerate the Maratha supremacy in the North. At the behest of Najibkhan, Abdali invaded India again. This was the fifth time he had invaded India. He captured Delhi. He returned to Afghanistan with a huge booty. Raghunathrao and Malharrao Holkar marched to the North again. They captured Delhi. Then, driving out Abdali's officers, they captured the Punjab. The Marathas pursued Abdali's soldiers right up to Attock in 1758 CE. The Maratha standard was raised at Attock. Attock is in present day Pakistan. From Attock, the Marathas pushed the campaign up to Peshawar. However, they did not make proper arrangements to look after this newly conquered territory.

Dattaji's valour : To get a firm hold over the Punjab and to crush Najibkhan, the *Peshwa* sent Dattaji Shinde and Janakoji Shinde to the North. Dattaji went to the North. Keeping Dattaji engaged in negotiations, Najibkhan established contacts with Abdali. He requested Abdali

to come to his help. On receiving the message from Najibkhan, Abdali invaded India again. Dattaji and Abdali confronted each other at Buradi Ghat on the banks of the Yamuna. A fierce fight ensued. Dattaji showed tremendous valour. He met with a heroic death in this battle.



Do you know ?

Dattaji fought very bravely. At last, he was severely wounded and collapsed on the battleground. Najib Khan Rohilla's adviser Qutub Shah stepped down from his elephant and came towards Dattaji. He asked Dattaji, 'क्यों पटेलजी, हमारे साथ तुम और भी लढेंगे?' Dattaji was in a wounded state. But after hearing these words of Qutub Shah, he replied with pride, 'हाँ, बचेंगे तो और भी लढेंगे।'

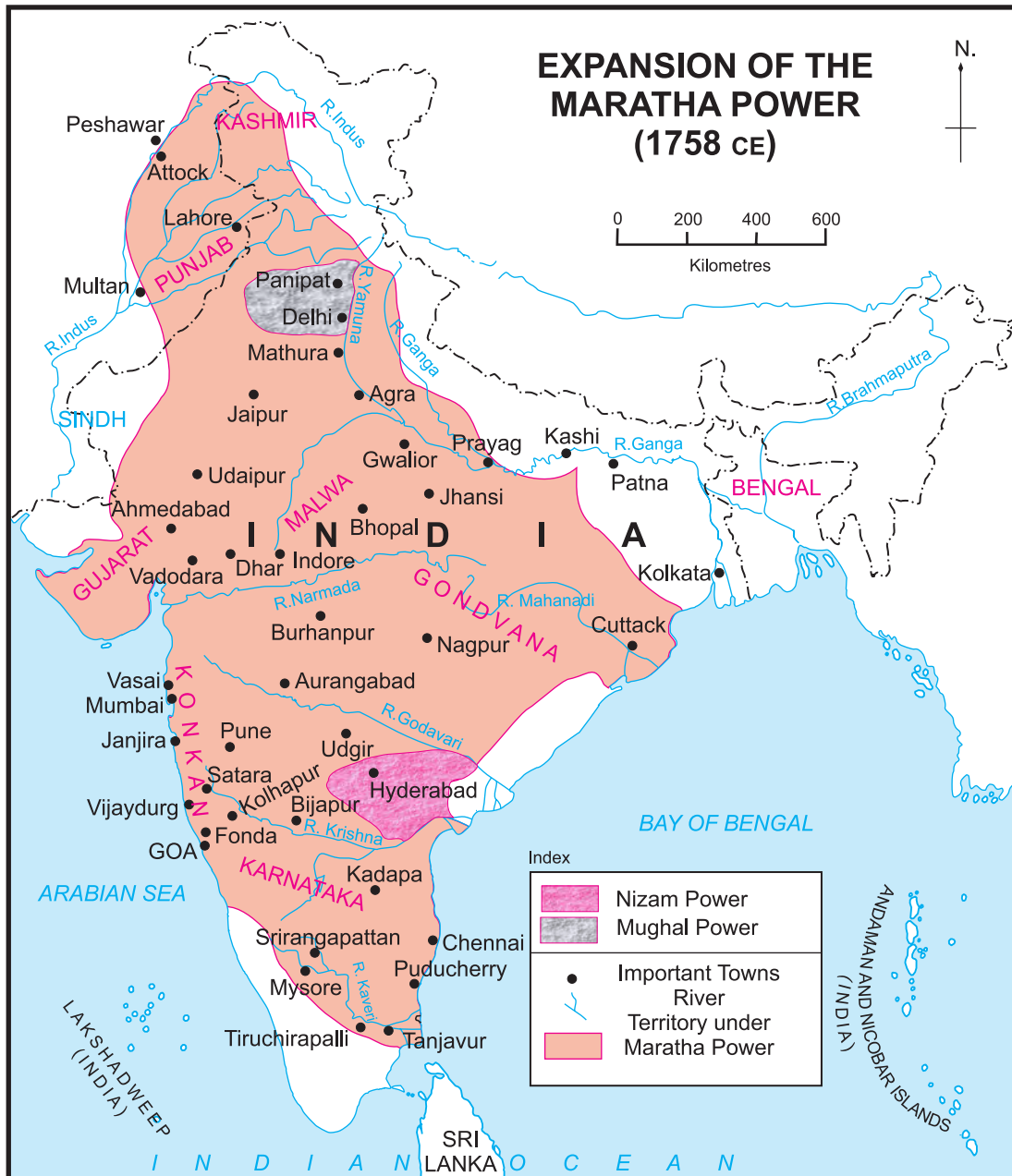
Sadashivraobhau : Nanasaheb sent his cousin Sadashivraobhau and eldest son Vishwasrao to the North to crush Abdali.

Sadashivraobhau was Chimajiappa's son. He had with him, a huge army and a powerful artillery.



Sadashivraobhau

Ibrahimkhan Gardi was the chief of the artillery. He had defeated the Nizam in the battle of Udgir in 1760 CE, on the strength of this artillery.



The Battle of Panipat : In his campaign of the North, Sadashivraobhau captured Delhi. The armies of the Marathas and Abdali confronted each other at Panipat. On 14 January 1761, the Marathas opened the battle by attacking Abdali's army. This was the Third Battle of Panipat. Vishwasrao fell a victim to an enemy bullet in the battle. When Sadashivraobhau learnt this, he fiercely attacked the enemy in a frenzy. He disappeared in the battle fray. Seeing that

their leader had disappeared, the Maratha soldiers lost courage. At that very moment, the reserve contingents of Abdali launched an attack on the Marathas with a fresh vigour. The Marathas were defeated. A whole generation of young men in Maharashtra was killed. Many brave *Sardars* fell on the battlefield. The Marathas believed that an outsider like Abdali had no moral right to rule here. The Marathas fought at Panipat with the broad perspective that India is for Indians.



Do you know ?

Approximately 1,50,000 people were killed in the battle of Panipat. One letter describes this in a poetic way.

“दोन मोत्ये गळाली. सत्तावीस मोहोरा
हरवल्या! आणि रूपये, खुर्दा किती गेल्या याची
गणतीच नाही.”

Sadashivraobhau had explained the broad, all-inclusive viewpoint of the Marathas in his correspondence with the rulers in the North, saying that they were all native to the land and Abdali was an enemy from a foreign country. But the rulers in the North did not respond favourably to him and took a neutral attitude. Naturally, the Marathas had to shoulder the responsibility of protecting India. We can say that the Marathas were the first in our history to realise that India was one country and it was necessary for all to lend support to the king irrespective of his religion.

Peshwa Madhavrao : After the death of Peshwa Nanasaheb, his son Madhavrao succeeded him to the office of the Peshwa. Madhavrao kept the Nizam and Hyder Ali at bay. He established the supremacy of the Marathas in the North again.

After the defeat of the Marathas at Panipat, the Nizam once again resumed his anti-Maratha activities. He invaded the Maratha territory. Madhavrao defeated the Nizam



Peshwa Madhavrao

at Rakshashbuvan near Paithan.

Hyder Ali was the Sultan of Mysore. Taking advantage of the Maratha defeat at Panipat, Hyder Ali attacked their territory in Karnataka. The Marathas defeated Hyder in a battle at Moti Talav near Srirangapattan. He then agreed to cede the region north of the river Tungabhadra to the Marathas.

Peshwa Madhavrao died in 1772 CE. In the history of the Marathas, he is described as an honest, hard-working, determined administrator who was keen on public welfare. The death of this capable *Peshwa* was an irreparable loss to the Maratha State.



Do you know ?

Peshwa Madhavrao provided special attention towards the welfare of farmers. He dug many wells in Pune and increased the water supply to the city. Administrators like Nana Phadnavis and judges like Ramshastri Prabhune emerged under his rule. He reformed the judiciary for better justice to the common people. He started artillery and ammunition factories. He also established a mint to make coins.

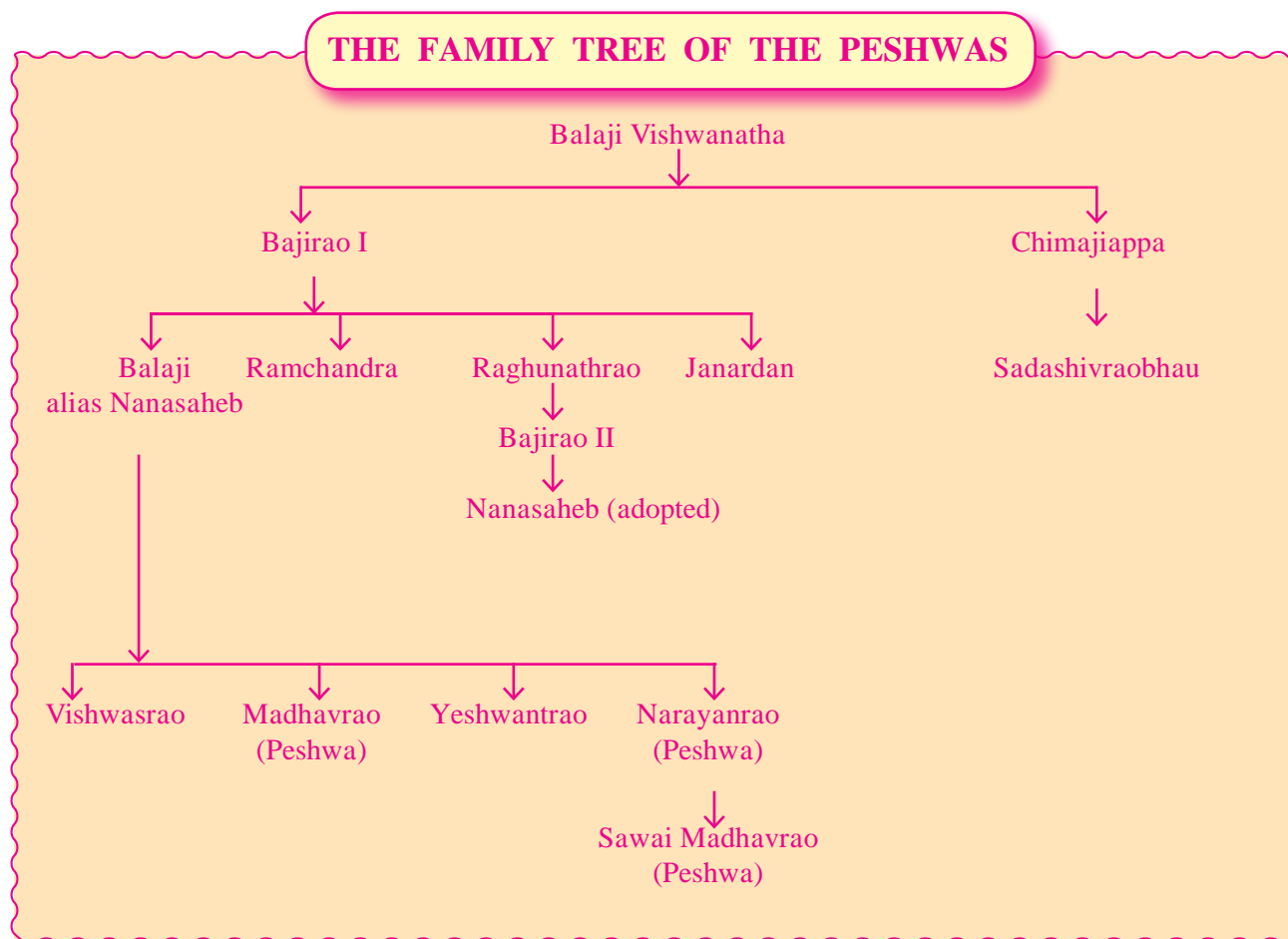
The two Peshwas who succeeded Peshwa Madhavrao, namely Narayanrao and Sawai Madhavrao, did not live long. During their term, Peshwa was in the grip of family feuds. Raghunathrao, who had once raised the Maratha standard at Attock, sought shelter with the British to satisfy his greed for power. This led to a war between the Marathas and the British.

Hyder Ali died in 1782 CE. After him his son Tipu became the Sultan of Mysore. He was a skilled warrior, a scholar and a poet. He used his competence to increase the might of his Kingdom. He established contact with French and shook the foundation of British supremacy. He died in 1799 CE in a battle against the British.

The Maratha Supremacy Rises Once Again : The Maratha prestige in the North had suffered a severe setback because of the debacle at Panipat. Madhavrao dispatched Mahadji Shinde, Tukoji Holkar, Ramchandra Kanade and Visajipant Biniwale to re-establish the Maratha rule in the North. The Maratha army defeated the Jats, the Rohillas and the Rajputs. The Marathas restored the Emperor Shah Alam to the throne of

Delhi under their own protection. The Maratha power was revived in the North.

The Marathas suffered a heavy loss in the battle of Panipat. Abdali's army also suffered losses. He did not benefit financially in the battle. In fact, Abdali or his descendants did not muster enough courage to invade India again. They realised that only the Marathas had the strength and capacity to control the anarchy in the North. They expressed their wish that the Marathas should protect the Empire. They sent a messenger to Pune to establish cordial relations. It is important to note that the Marathas overcame the great defeat at Panipat and successfully revived their supremacy in the politics of the North. Malharrao Holkar, Ahilyabai Holkar and Mahadji Shinde had a lion's share in all this.





Exercise

1. Name them.

- (1) They came from Afghanistan ...
- (2) They settled at the foothills of the Himalayas...
- (3) The brother of Nanasahab Peshwa...
- (4) The chief of Jats at Mathura...
- (5) Defeated Nizam at Rakshashbuvan near Paithan...

2. Write in brief about.

- (1) Raising the Maratha standard at Attock.
- (2) Conflict with the Afghans
- (3) The after effects of the battle of Panipat.

3. Arrange chronologically.

- (1) The battle of Rakshashbuvan.
- (2) The death of Tipu Sultan.
- (3) The death of Madhavrao Peshwa
- (4) The battle of Panipat
- (5) The battle of Buradi Ghat

4. Find the names of people in the chapter :

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Activity

Find more information about the battle of Panipat on the internet and make a presentation in your class.



The Court of Sawai Madhavrao Peshwa