

7th Social Science Lesson 11 Notes in English

11] Rise Of Marathas And Peshwas

Introduction:

The rising power of the Marathas in the south-west posed the real danger to the Mughal Empire. Shahji honsle, Shivaji's father, an officer of the Ahmednagar State and later Bijapur, proved to be a thorn in the flesh of the Mughals, even in Shah Jahan's period. But it was his son, Shivaji, who attained glory among the Marathas as he could stop the Mughal Empire's expansion in the Deccan. Shivaji was a gallant fighter, army general and a guerilla leader. He built up a band of brave mountaineers, who were loyal to him. With their help, he captured many forts and gave Aurangzeb's commanders a tough time. As Marathas grew stronger, the Mughal Empire weakened. The Mughal Emperor had to recognise the right of the Marathas to collect their Chauth tax all over the Deccan. Warfare opened opportunities for talented commanders who contributed to the vigorous expansion of Maratha power early in the eighteenth century. The prime minister of Maratha rulers, called the Peshwas from the time of Shahu, held real power. Under the aegis of Maratha power, the Peshwas continued their supremacy until 1761.

Factors Responsible for the Rise of Marathas:

Geographical Features:

The physical features of the Maratha country developed certain peculiar qualities among the Marathas, which distinguished them from the rest of the people of India. During the sixteenth century, the sultans of Bijapur and Ahmednagar had recruited them to serve in cavalry. Their presence was helpful to the sultans in balancing the political ambitions of the Muslim soldiers in their service. The rocky and mountainous terrain gave protection to the Marathas from invaders. It proved to be advantageous in guerrilla warfare for Marathas.

Bhakti Movement and the Marathas:

The spread of the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra helped the Maratha people develop consciousness of their identity and oneness. It promoted a feeling of unity, especially in terms of social equality, among the Marathas. In the Maratha region, the religious leaders were drawn from different social groups. Eknath, Tukaram and Ramdas were the noted Bhakti saints. Tukaram and Ramdas had considerable influence on the life of Shivaji.



Tukaram

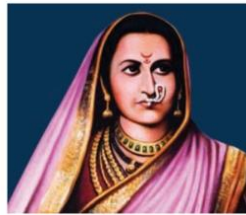
Ramdas

Literature and Language of the Marathas:

Marathi language and literature also served to develop unity among the people. Hymns composed in the Marathi language by Bhakti saints were sung by people of all castes and classes.

Shivaji:**Shivaji**

Shivaji, born in 1627, grew up under the care of his mother, Jijabai, who influenced him Shivaji with stories from the Hindu epics, Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. Shivaji's teacher and guardian, Dadaji Kondadev, trained him in the art of horse riding, warfare and state administration. At the age of eighteen in 1645, when he had just entered the military career, he successfully captured Kondana, a fort near Poona. The following year, he took the fort of Torna. Then he succeeded in conquering Raigarh, which was rebuilt by him.

**Shahji****Bhonsle Jijabai****Shivaji's Confrontation with Sultan of Bijapur:**

Shivaji became totally independent after the death of his guardian Kondadev (1649). He also got his father's jagir transferred to him, which was earlier looked after by Kondadev. The strength of his army was Mavali foot soldiers. With their help, Shivaji conquered many of the hill forts near Poona. He captured Puranthar from the Mughals. Shivaji's military raids angered the Sultan of Bijapur. He held Shivaji's father captive and released him only after Shivaji promised to suspend his military raids. Shivaji kept his word and remained at peace with Bijapur from then on till his father Shahji's death. During this period he toned up his administration.



Consolidation of Maratha Power:

Shivaji resumed his raids after his father's death and conquered Javali (1656) from the Maratha chief Chandrarao More. He also reduced all the lesser Maratha chiefs around Pune to subordination. The soldiers of Bijapur from the hill fortresses acquired by Sultan of Bijapur were driven out and replaced with his own commanders. These moves and the defeat of Bijapur army sent to punish Shivaji alarmed the Mughal officials. When the Mughals made a punitive expedition, Shivaji boldly confronted them. In 1659 he killed Afzal Khan, a notable general of Bijapur. In 1663 he wounded and chased away the Mughal general and Aurangzeb's uncle Shaista Khan. To cap these bold acts, he audaciously directed his soldiers to plunder Surat (1664), the major Mughal port on the Arabian Sea.

Shivaji and Aurangzeb:

After Shivaji plundered Surat, Aurangzeb swung into action. An army under the command of a Rajput general, Raja Jai Singh, was ordered to destroy Shivaji and annex Bijapur. Shivaji finally sought peace, yielded the fortresses he had seized and accepted service as a mansabdar in the Mughal service for the conquest of Bijapur. He also agreed to visit the imperial court at Agra, on the advice of Jai Singh only to suffer humiliation, which led him to escape, by hiding in a basket.

Aurangzeb was determined to stop the Maratha interference in his expeditions against the Deccan kingdoms. He attempted to patch up with Shivaji, but those efforts failed. In 1670, the Mughal army was helpless when Shivaji again plundered Surat. In 1674, Shivaji crowned himself by assuming the title of Chhatrapati and the coronation of Shivaji was celebrated with great splendour at Raigarh, as the occasion was the founding of a new kingdom and a new dynasty.

Shivaji's aged mother Jijabai, who had lived to see her son crowned the king, passed away a few days after the coronation, with her life wish fulfilled. Shivaji spent his last years trying to bring his son Shambhuji into his ways as he had defected to the Mughals. He fell ill with fever and dysentery and died in 1680.

Maratha Administration under Shivaji:

Shivaji's political system consisted of three circles. At the centre was the swaraj. Shivaji was caring and would not allow the people to be harassed in any way. In the second circle, Shivaji claimed suzerainty, but he did not administer them himself. He protected the people from loot and plunder for which they were required to pay Chauth (one-fourth of the revenue as protection money) and Sardeshmukhi (an extra one-tenth, as the chieftain's due). In the third circle, Shivaji's only objective was plunder.

Deshmukhs held sway over rural regions and their control was over between twenty and hundred villages. Each village had a powerful headman (Patil), who was assisted by a village accountant of a keeper of records (Kulkarni). In the absence of a strong central government, these local community level officials functioned as the true government.

Army:

Shivaji gave utmost attention to his army and training of its personnel. In the beginning, the backbone of his army was the infantry. But as his campaigns extended into the plains, his cavalry grew in size and importance. Every soldier was selected personally by Shivaji and was taken into service on the assurance of a soldier already in service. Shivaji took great care in the maintenance and security of his forts. Retired captains holding a high reputation were put in charge of guarding the forts.

Ashtapradhan:

Shivaji designated eight ministers as the Ashtapradhan, each holding an important portfolio. Peshwa was the equivalent of a modern prime minister in the Maratha Empire. Originally, they were subordinates to the Chhatrapati. But, in course of time, especially from the time of Sahu Maharaja, Peshwa became the de facto Maratha ruler while the Chhatrapati was reduced to the position of a nominal ruler.

Shivaji was influenced by the Mughal revenue system. The assessments were made on the actual yield, with three-fifths left to the cultivator and two-fifths taken by the government. In judicial administration, civil cases continued to be decided by the panchayat, the village council, while criminal law was based on the Shastras, the Hindu law books.

Responsibilities of the Ashtapradhan:

Pantpradhan / Peshwa	Prime Minister
Amatya / Mazumdar	Finance Minister
Shurunavis/Sacheev	Secretary
Waqia-Navis	Interior Minister
Sar-i-Naubat /Senapati	Commander-in-Chief
Sumant / Dubeer	Foreign Minister
Nyayadhish	Chief Justice
Panditrao	High Priest

Shambhuji:

Shambhuji succeeded Shivaji after a succession tussle with Anaji Datto. There were family feuds splintering the Maratha kingdom. Durgadas of Rathore Marwar and Aurangzeb's rebel son Akbar arrived in Maharashtra and took shelter in Shambhuji's court. Aurangzeb viewed these developments very seriously and took all out efforts to finish off Shambhuji. Marathas under Shambhuji were in no position to resist the Mughals. Aurangzeb himself arrived in the Deccan in 1681. Aurangzeb's main goal was the annexation of Bijapur and Golconda. These two sultanates fell to Aurangzeb by 1687. In little over a year, Shambhuji was captured by the Mughals and, after torture, put to death.

**Shambhuji****Shahu Maharaja:**

Shivaji's grandson Shahu means honest, originally a name given by Aurangzeb to contrast his character with that of Shivaji) ruled from 1708 to 1749. During the first half of the eighteenth century, consolidation of royal power was achieved through conferment of royal entitlements upon those who served Shahu.

**Shahu Maharaja**

During Shahu's 40-year reign there was increase in the territory under the Maratha control, from which tribute was regularly extracted. More centralised and strong state structure also began to take shape. Every household, including that of landed household, profited from state employment.

Peshwas:

Balaji Vishwanath (1713–1720) began his career as a small revenue official and became Peshwa in 1713. Much against the advice from his close circles, Shahu appointed 20-year-old Viswanath's eldest son Bajirao to occupy the office of Peshwa.



Balaji Vishwanath

Bajirao (1720–1740):

Bajirao decided to launch a major Maratha onslaught against the Mughals and the Nizam of Hyderabad. He assumed the powers of the commander-in-chief. He was wise in his choice of commanders for these campaigns. Instead of relying on the traditional elite group, namely Deshmukhs, he gave commands to the Gaikwad, Holkar and Shinde or Scindhia families who had been loyal to the emperor Shahu, his father Balaji Viswanath and to him.



Bajirao

The Prominent Maratha families:

- Gaikwad at Baroda
- Bhonsle at Nagpur
- Holkar at Indore
- Shinde or Scindhia at Gwalior
- Peshwa at Pune

Bajirao proclaimed wars against Malwa and Gujarat and freed them from Mughal domination. The Mughal army and the troops of the Nizam that intervened on behalf of the Mughals were defeated. Bajirao succeeded in getting the recognition of Shahu as the king of Maharashtra and overlord of the rest of the Deccan, from which the tribute of Chauth and Sardeshmukhi could be legally collected by the Maratha officials. Bajirao centralised the fiscal functions in Pune. This helped to receive the prompt transmission of tribute from the Deccan.

The Maratha army, which consisted of no more than 5000 horsemen and no artillery, had by 1720 had doubled in its size. Yet they were no match for the Mughals and the Nizam. The success of Marathas against the Mughals was mainly due to the weakness of the latter. The Maratha dominance in the Deccan is also attributed to the qualities of Maratha officials and generals who grew up under Shahu and the Peshwas.

Balaji Bajirao (1740–1761):



Balaji Bajirao

When Balaji Bajirao was the Peshwa, Emperor Shahu died (1749). A possible succession struggle among factions of the royal family was averted, thanks to the timely intervention of Balaji Bajirao. He summoned all the contending factions and forced them to accept the conditions he laid down. He decided that the capital of the kingdom would henceforward be Pune, not Satara. All power and authority was now concentrated in the Peshwas's office. Balaji Bajirao now commanded an army of paid soldiers. The Maratha peasant warrior band was reconfigured and its run came to an end. Maratha soldiers were not permitted now to retire from battle fields each year for the purpose of cultivating their land. Soldiers were required to live in forts and towns far away from their home. They were trained as infantrymen as well as horsemen. The large guns were nominally under the command of Maratha officers. But those who fired and maintained them were mostly Portuguese, French and British.

During the period of the Peshwa Balaji Bajirao, the northern frontiers of the Maratha state were rapidly touching Rajasthan, Delhi and the Punjab. At some point, the Maratha tributary regime extended itself to within fifty miles of Delhi. The Marathas launched raids from Nagpur against Bihar, Bengal and Odisha. Notwithstanding the conflict between the Marathas and the Nizam over Karnataka, Tamil, Kannada and Telugu regions were effectively brought under the control of the Marathas. Between 1745 and 1751 plundering expeditions were launched yearly by the Maratha chieftain Rahuji Bhonsle.

Maratha Administration under Peshwas:

The revenue administration of Peshwas was headed by a key official called the Kamavisdar. He was appointed by the Peshwa. He was empowered to maintain a small body of soldiers to police the administrative area, from where tribute or tax had to be collected. A small staff of clerks and servants were employed to maintain the revenue records. These records were randomly checked by the office of the Peshwa. The contracts for revenue collection was auctioned annually after the revenue for a particular place was estimated by the Peshwa's civil servants, based on previous years' yields. A prospective tax or revenue collector who won the contract was expected to have a reputation for wealth and probity. He was required to pay a portion of the whole of the anticipated revenue – one-third to one half – either out of his own wealth or from the money borrowed from bankers. Judging from the ledgers of correspondence and account books, it is evident that the Peshwas were keen on accurate recordkeeping. The Peshwa regimes looked distinctly modern in comparison with the Mughals to whose fall they contributed militarily.

The Fall of Marathas:

The imperial moment of the Marathas sadly ended at Panipat near Delhi in 1761. The Marathas' attempt to extend their domain beyond Punjab was checked by the king of the Afghans, Ahmad Shah Abdali.



Ahmad Shah Abdali

Abdali invaded eight times before finally marching onto Delhi. The Marathas were now divided among several commanders, who approached the battle with different tactics. Artillery decided the battle in January 1761. The mobile artillery of the Afghans proved lethal against both Maratha cavalry and infantry. The Maratha army was shattered and the surviving men took six months to return to Maharashtra from Panipat to report the tragedy. By then Maratha supremacy over the sub-continent was effectively over.

Summary:

- ❖ The factors responsible for the rise and expansion of Maratha rule are explored.
- ❖ Early life of Shivaji and the influences that worked on him are traced.
- ❖ Shivaji's military raids and victory over Bijapur Sultan's army inviting Aurangzeb's intervention are discussed.
- ❖ Confrontation of Shivaji with Aurangzeb and their fallout in the Deccan are dealt with.
- ❖ Maratha administration under Shivaji is highlighted.
- ❖ Maratha affairs after the death of Shivaji under Shambhuji and Sahu are analysed.

- ❖ Peshwas emerging de facto rulers and their contribution to the continuance of Maratha power are explained.
- ❖ Modernisation of administration under the Peshwas and the end of Maratha supremacy after the Third Battle of Panipat are detailed.

Glossary:

1.	Hymns	Poems in praise of God	துதிபாடல்கள் /பாசுரங்கள்
2.	Audaciously	Boldly	துணிச்சலான
3.	Fortresses	A Strongly fortified town	கோட்டை /அரண்
4.	Suzerainty	The Right of a country to rule over another country	மேலாதிக்கம்
5.	Conferment	Granting of (A title)	வழங்கப்பட்ட
6.	Summoned	Ordering the presence of	வரவழைக்கப்பட்ட
7.	Shattered	(heart) Broken, Broken (glass, Upset	மனமுடைந்த

Do You Know?

Chhatra (parasol) pati (master or lord), is the Sanskrit equivalent of king or emperor, and was used by the Marathas, especially Shivaji.

Shambhuji was under the wicked influence of his family priest Kavi Kalash. Kavi Kalash was the caretaker of Shambhuji in Varanasi during Shivaji's flight from Agra. He later brought Shambhuji safely to Raigarh. His dominance in the Court became absolute in course of time, as Shambhuji looked to his advice for everything. Kavi Kalash was a distinguished scholar and poet. But he was a practitioner of witchcraft. So the orthodox Hindus in the court had developed a deep hatred for him. When Shambhuji was captured by the Mughal army, he was found to be in the company of Kavi Kalash. So both of them were subjected to all forms of torture and then executed by the orders of Aurangzeb.