CHAPTER 9
MARATHA SOCIETY AND CULTURE

MARATHA COUNTRY.

Maharashtra, the western part of the Deccan, is the homeland of the Marathas. It lies between the 16th and 22nd degree of north latitude extending from Daman to Goa on the west; the Satpuda range forms its northern boundary; an irregular line joining Canda to Goa and passing through Nanded, Bidar, Solapiir and Belganv, marks off the south-east limits of the region.

The establishment of the independent Maratha State and its expansion in the 18th century were responsible in fixing these boundary lines. Grant Duff writing in 1826 remarks, 'Maharastra is that space which is bounded on the north by the Sautpoora (Satpuda) mountains; and extends from Naundode on the west, along those mountains, to the Wyne Ganga (Wainganga), east of Nagpoor (Nagpur). The western bank of that river forms a part of the eastern boundary until it falls into the Wurda (Wardha). From the junction of these rivers, it may be traced up the east bank of Wurda to Manikdroog (Manik-durg), and thence westward to Mahoor (Mahur). From this last place a waving line may be extended to Goa, whilst on the west it is bounded by the ocean.' Elphinstone practically bears out what Duff has said.

The region is divided into three distinct parts; the Konkan borders on the sea with its fast running rivulets opening into creeks and small ports, its humid climate, its torrential rains, and its rice crop, is divided from the mainland by the massive watershed of the Sahyadri or the Western Ghats which run parallel to the sea-coast right from Surat down to Goa and beyond a few miles inland. This mountain-range about twenty to twenty-five miles in breadth is the distinctive feature of Mahararastra. It determines the rainfall, the vegetation, the character of the people and has had a decisive influence on their history. The heavily-laden rain-clouds that the south-west monsoons drive before them, burst against this massive wall of granite and inundate the coastal strip, the hilly region and

* This Chapter is contributed by Dr. V. G. Dighe.

the valleys. A belt of deep forest formerly covered the hills and spread for some distance to the plains. Pressure of advancing agriculture has denuded the plains of forest, but the hills yet remain wooded. All along the hills the summits are frequently crowned at the top by large flat basaltic rocks. These huge blocks of granite, have been transformed into fortresses which look impregnable. In many of them there are springs of good-water; a supply can be secured in tanks from the rains from June to October. During the rainy season with cascades tumbling down the hills, with the rivers in spate and valleys inundated, the hill-sides become inaccessible and are completely isolated from the outside world. In fair season the tangle of brushwood and thick forests, and the winding paths in rugged hills make the movements of large troops in the tract difficult, if not impossible. The terrain offers every advantage to the defenders.

The Des country or the open plateau is the main Maratha country. The valleys of the Godavari, the Bhima, the Nira, the Krsna are fertile, but the rest of the country is barren. The main crop is not wheat, but the hardy millet—Jovar or Bajra—which is the staple food of the people.

South of the Satpuda, there are four great ranges of hills running west to east extending beyond the ordinary spurs of the Sahyadri mountains. The Candore hills passing through Nasik district extend from Rahuri to Berar, the Ahmadnagar hills from Junnar to Bhir, the Poona range from Bhor to Indapur and the Mahadev hills cover the Satara district. The general aspect of Maharashtra is thus hilly. Though the climate is salubrious, the country on the whole is rugged and rough, the soil is poor and rainfall precarious. The toil of the peasant brings but a moderate reward. There is little scope for the accumulation of wealth.

Under these circumstances no big cities and no thriving marts grew in the region and the forbidding aspect of nature had little attraction for invaders. Though the Muslim conquerors occupied the central plains, the hill-sides and valleys were left to the local hiefs in nominal allegiance to the Sultans. The niggardly nature and his wild surroundings bred in the Maratha, the virtues of simplicity, manliness, self-reliance, perseverance, courage, a sense of social equality and pride in the dignity of man. It also made him narrow, parochial and selfish.

THE PEOPLE.

What kind of people occupied this tract in the 18th century and made it famous in history? To outsiders the people of Maha-rastra are known by the generic term Maharrattas or Maratha:, though in the State itself the term is restricted to the community which follows the agricultural profession and forms the backbone of its society. Though there are divisions of castes and sub-castes, the
differences are not so sharply marked as in other States and the striking feature of the homogeneity has been remarked upon by anthropologists from the days of Risley (1908). The reasons for this homogeneity lie in the racial composition of the people, the rise of the Maratha language and its use by all classes of people, the religious reform movement of the middle ages which attacked Brahmin orthodoxy, breathed a liberal spirit and made men feel equal, and the prominent part played in the political history of the country by the great peasant community of the Marathas, from which sprang not only Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha State but several other notable families and which in a way moulded the way of life of the people of the region.

The people of Maharashtra are of mixed origin: the migrating Aryans from the north came in contact with the earlier residents of the region and in the course of centuries came to form the Maratha people. The Aryans came in three waves as is evinced by the Puranic legends of Parasuram and Agasti; they came much earlier than the Sakas or Scythians who came on the scene much later and who were supposed to be the progenitors of the Marathas. The latest position has been so lucidly stated by Dr. Mrs. Iravati Karve that one cannot do better than summarise her argument.

"Anthropometric data reveals the following facts. The tribals inhabiting the north-west corner of Maharashtra and the northern mountainous region are in a class by themselves and fall apart from the rest of the population of Maharashtra. They are short, dolichocephalic with broad flat noses. Among these the Varli, the Bhils, etc., have very small heads and very broad noses. The Gonds, Govars belong to a slightly different category. The Bhils, Varlis, Gonds, it is surmised, are the original inhabitants of the country. When a pastoral people cleared the valleys and plains these aborigines retired to the mountainous regions. There are references to Nisads and Kirats in Sanskrit and Pali literatures. They seem to be the first colonisers in this country, and belong to the Australoid or the Vedda races. Though these forest tribes are on the border of Maharashtra, there has been some admixture from them among the rest of the Maratha population. The immigrant people employed the tribals as labour on land and some of them took tribal wives and their mixed progeny formed new castes. The process of mixing continues even now. Almost all castes Brahmins, peasants, artisans, in Maharashtra show a small element of admixture with the tribals."

The second category is comprised of the Maratha peasantry. A few of them broad-headed are found in the eastern and western region, but the numerous and powerful Maratha peasantry are medium-headed with prominent noses. The Madhyandin Brahmins in no way differ from the Marathas."
“Closely related to this category, but with heads slightly bigger and wider is the third category in the western region. The members of this category now follow professions other than agriculture, but the main stock is Maratha. Mixing with later migrants from the north may be responsible for the slight variations in the physiognomy of the category.’

“The Agris, Khaire Kunbis, Manes are very near the tribals. The Mahars and Mangs come midway between the tribals and the Marathas. Madhyandin Brahmins cannot be distinguished from the Marathas. Rgvedi Desastha Brahmins stand midway between the Marathas and the western located group. This leads to the conclusion that the Marathas, most of the Brahmin castes, the Prabhus bear such close resemblances to each other as to be included in one common category. This class came in lesser or greater contact with the early dolichocephalic tribes and other tribes and gave rise to other castes. Some castes appear to have come from the north in modern times. Caste groups are formed not on the basis of social status but on the principle of geographical distribution. The natural divisions of Maharashtra are the central plateau, the valley of the Purna and the Wainganga, the Konkan, Bombay island and the mountainous region. The shape of the head changes as one travels from Bombay to the east. The anthropometric data is clear on the point that the Marathas are racially different from the Rajputs. Wherefrom the Maratha and the kindred Maratha castes came is not clear. The Rajputs are heard of from the seventh century. But much before this the Satavahana kings are reported to be opposing Saka or Scythian invasions. The Sakas entered Maharashtra from the north through Gujarat. Their invasions occurred over a long period. The Satavahanas might belong to one of the early waves of invaders. Though they ruled from Paithan on the Godavari, their important’ inscriptions are found in western Maharashtra. The words Maharathi and Maharathini occurring in their writings, it has been conjectured, refer to the Maratha people. The Marathas had settled in Maharashtra low before the Rajputs appeared on the stage of history and established their kingdom.”

COLONIZATION OF THE DECCAN BY ARYANS.

Taking her cue from Puranic legends Dr. Mrs.Karve suggests a much earlier date for the infiltration of northern or Aryan elements in Maharashtra. According to her the colonization of Maharashtra by Aryans speaking Sanskrit or a near related language, occurred in three waves. The legend of the flight of Parasuram after killing, the Haihaya king Kartavirya of Mahismati into Aparanta is well-known; this story is interpreted as indicating that Aryan colonization of Aparanta or Kohkan started about 1700 to 1600 B.C., as Parasuram was contemporary of Raja Hariscandra whose reign has been

\(^1\) Marathi Lokanci Samskriti, by Dr. Mrs. Iravati Karve (1951), pp. 153-54.
approximately dated about 1700 B.C., by Pargiter. This wave of colonizers entered Aparanta from the north-eastern corner and developed the Konkani language. This part of the country on account of the broken nature of the ground, its hills reaching the sea, its swift flowing rivers, its forests and its consequent lack of communication, remained undeveloped. Konkani remained a spoken dialect without its literature receiving permanent form in writing.

The second wave broke into Vidarbha or modern Berar. The legend of Agasti in the Puranas says that the sage crossed the Vindhyas and arrived South. This route has been used by later kings for their southern conquests and brought the conquering hordes right into the valley of the Wainganga river. In this region the northern Aryans came into conflict with the aborigines. The colonizers by keeping constant contact with the north, refused to merge with the forest-dwelling people. If we are to accept the stories of Lopamudra, Damayanti, Rukmini, Indumati—all princesses of Vidarbha, wedding princes and heroes of the north, Vidarbha appears to be the spear-head of Aryan civilization expanding to the south. Pargiter fixes the time of these Vidarbha princesses between 1500 B.C. and 1000 B.C., the period of the great war of Mahabharata. The Aryan rule of Vidarbha attained great eminence and the Vakatakas later on continued the tradition.

The main story of Mahabharata centres round the rivalry between cousins. It also contains a sequel about the meeting or conflict of two cultures—the Aryan and the Naga. The Mahabharata contains several names of Naga families. Arjuna burnt down the Khandava forest of Taksaka. Taksaka retaliated by destroying Pariksit. His son Janme-jaya to avenge the death of the father, put to death innumerable Naga families. The story is interpreted as a ruthless struggle between the advancing Aryans, a pastoral people who cleared the forests for their agriculture and for their cattle and the forest-dwelling tribes who were forced to retire into inaccessible mountains and valleys. The Baigas, the Gonds, the Kolis of Madhya Prades claim a kinship with the Nagas which lends support to the thesis of Aryan-Naga conflict in the region. Anyhow as ancient literature in Sanskrit or Pali contains no reference to Dravids Dramils or Tamils contesting the ground with the expanding Aryans, it is safe to assume that the people who opposed the Aryan advance in Maharastra were Nagas the ancestors of the hill tribes of the present day.

Khandes’ third region to be colonized by the northern people, known as Asmaka or Mulaka, appears to be an offshoot of Vidarbha. Asmaka had its chief town at Pratishthan; both names appear to be imported from the north. Under the Satavahanas of Pratishthan Asmaka rose in importance, Maharastri was patronized and helped the rise of Marathi. Before the Satavahanas the country, according to Katha Sarit Sagar of Somadeva, was ruled over by Narasinha. The
popularity of the name of Narasinha or Narasayya in the Deccan, the presence of numerous temples of Narasinha in this region and the frequent reference to Narasinha in folk-tales of the Deccan tribals, bear out Somadeva to a certain extent. Was he the last king, of the Nagas? The words Nag-Narsoba so frequently appearing together in Marathi folk literature, the presence of many townships in Maharashtra such as Nagpur, Nagothana and the popularity of Naga worship in Maharashtra are rather significant.

The Naga people were probably overcome by people coming from the North on horseback. Satavahana or Salivahana means thouse who used sata or sala as their transport. Sali in Mundari or Naga language may mean a horse. The retreating Nagas felt that the conquering hordes derived their superior strength from the horse and called them Salivahana. For want of more convincing evidence one can only conjecture, that in the course of over a millennium elements from the north arrived in Maharashtra in trickles, mingled with the aborigines and came to form the Maratha people.

Pargiter’s chronology cannot be accepted in the light of the latest research on the subject and dates will have to be advanced by almost half a millennium. Basham remarks that the Aryans entered India in the Second Millennium B.C. (about 1,500 B.C.). It must have taken quite a few centuries for the Aryan tribes to spread to the east and then probe southward. Sir Mortimer Wheeler states the position as under in the latest edition of Oxford History of India. “Although there is no reason to believe that any large Indo-Aryan tribal body ever marched into the peninsula .... the peaceful penetration of the Deccan by Indo-Aryan emissaries began many centuries before the Christian era. Tradition credits the Vedic Rsi Agastya or a name sake of his with the introduction of Aryan ideas and institutions into the Dravidian South.” Prof. Nilakanta Shastri makes a guess that the Aryanization of the South took place about 1,000 B.C.

The above discussion may give us an idea of the early colonization of Maharashtra and of the elements that have gone in the making of the Maratha people. The Deccan plateau has been the meeting ground of the Aryans and their successors Yavanas, Sakas, etc., from the north, with the original inhabitants of the land.

How the people came to be called Marathas is a matter of conjecture and the word continues to baffle historians and philologists. The etymology suggested by Molesworth, the first lexicographer of the Marathi language in the 19th Century, that it meant either the great country (Maha Rastra) or the country of the Mahars (Mahar Rastra) has not found acceptance, as the first explanation is obviously the Sanskritized interpretation of later writers and the second has been rejected on, the ground that there arn no instances of a country being called after a low caste. The present accepted theory is that it is a compound of Maha : great and Rastrika : either a Sanskr form of Ratta, the name of the northern tribe or a term applied generally to petty Chiefs ruling in the Deccan.
From ancient literary sources it has been surmised that the Ratta, commenced a southward movement from the country of the Kurus north of Indraprastha in Vedic times and entered northern Kohkan by way of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Another body of these Rattas found their way into Vidarbha through Bundelkhand. These bodies were perhaps led by Parasuram and Agasti. In the period of the Brahmans, the Haihaya tribe colonized western and northern parts of Daksinapatha. The Yadavas likewise moved into Saurashtra and Vidarbha. The Rattas of Aparanta crossed the Sahyadri range and established themselves in the valley of the Bhima, while those in Vidarbha, spread to Asmak (Khandes), south of the Satpuda. In the absence of a strong organized government, the Rattas became all powerful and began to exercise royal authority in their petty principalities. In the time of the Satavahanas (200 B.C. to 200 A.D.), they had become powerful enough to call themselves Maharattas and marry their daughters in the royal family. They were, as is obvious from the Naneghat and Bedsa inscriptions, at that time well-established in central Maharashtra and the Ghatmatha of the Sahyadri range.

After the fall of the Satavahana dynasty, Maharashtra was invaded by Indo-Bactrians, Scythians, Abhirs and Malvas. Some of these invaders remained behind and established themselves in separate colonies. Most of them however merged with the people of the country and became Marathas.

The interregnum between the dissolution of the Satavahana power (220 A.D.) and the rise of the Calukyas (500 A.D.) was a period of comparative anarchy when the Marathas entrenched themselves in their villages and districts. Their later career under Calukya, Rastrakuta and other dynasties is too well-known to need reference.

The earliest known mention of Marathas is found in an inscription of about 100 B.C. of the Naneghat leading from the Konkan into the north of the Poona district. The term used here is Maharatha granikoviro which probably means the hero-leader of Maharathas. In the Bedsa caves in the same locality there is a reference to a queen described as Maharathini, dated in the first century A.D. Other similar references are found in the Bhaja and Karla caves. It is not easy to decide whether the terms Maharatha and Maharathini indicate simply great charioteers or residents of Maharashtra or designate the individuals by their tribal name, the early form of Maratha. Support is lent to the latter interpretation by Rock Edict V of the Mauryan Emperor Asoka of 245 (B.C.) wherein it is recorded that the emperor despatched Buddhist missionaries to Raistikas, Petenikas and Aparantas. It is known that Petenikas refers to Paithan on the Godavari while Aparanta is the old name of northern Konkan.
Rastikas therefore indicates some people resident in the Deccan, possibly the Rattas. It is suggested that the Rattas called themselves Maha Rattas i.e. Maharathas.¹

The Eran inscription of the 4th Century is perhaps the earliest reference to Maharashtra.² A century later was read in Sinhalese chronicle the Mahavansa (A. D. 480) of the country of Maharatha and in A. D. 634, the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang styled the kingdom of the Calukya dynasty of the Deccan Mo-ho-lo-cha which is the Chinese transliteration of Ma-ha-ra-tha. In the middle of the seventh century, an inscription at Aihole near Badami in Bijapur district relates how a king of the Calukya dynasty Pulakesin II gained the sovereignty of the three Maharasras with their 99,000 villages. About 1020 A.D. the Arab geographer Al Biruni mentions Marhat des as a country to the south of the Narmada. Foreign travellers who visited this country from 1,000 A. D. onward always refer to it as the country of the Marathas.

**SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS.**

Two distinguishing features marked the organization of Maratha society and gave it security and stability—religion of the mass of the population of Maharashtra and the caste system and the village. Hinduism advanced in the south with the march of the Indo-Aryan civilization, but the movement was slow and many of its concepts though accepted superficially, did not obtain the same hold in this region. The Hindu theory that mankind is divided into four Varnas or group of castes Brahmin, Ksatriya, Vaisya and Sudra — was foreign to the people of the Deccan. Though some castes affected to be of Ksatriya origin, the only distinction in society was between Brahmins, the general mass of the people known as the Marthas and the untouchable Mahars. The forest dwelling tribes like Bhils, Ramosis, Kolis, Varils and Katkaris were outside the pale of civilized society. They were literally hewers of wood and were not disturbed so long as they confined themselves to the jungle and remained quiescent. Whenever for some reason or other the forest-dwellers raided villages on the border, punitive expeditions were sent against them and they were hunted like wild beasts.

**Brahmins.**

The Brahmins were a priestly class and enjoyed social privileges. Only a small part, however, engaged in religious duties. They studied the Sastras, acted as temple worshippers, and preached the traditional religion to the masses by reading Puranas and by holding religious concourses, popularly known as Kirtans and Bhajans. At these Kirtans would be expounded the philosophy of Hinduism that the world was a mirage and only the Brahman was real and the

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² Discovered by Prof. V. V. Mirashi and published in *Aitihasik Samkirma Nibandha* of B. I. S. Mandal of Poona, Vol. 5. It says that “Satyanaga Maharasti raises this pillar to commemorate the memory of the soldiers who died in the field”.
realization of the *Brahman* in the self should be the aspiration and endeavour of life. This could be done by study, contemplation, piety, charity and by everybody doing his appointed duty in this life; the exposition was followed by the recitation of a popular story from the *Puranas* — like that of Pralhad or of Bhakta Dhruva — to the accompaniment of music. The object was to drive the moral to the listeners — the triumph of good over evil, of the godly over the ungodly. Many of the temple-worshippers would attach themselves to families in the locality, officiate on occasions like birth, marriage and death, read horoscopes, and perform worship for their patrons on specially holy or auspicious days such as *Ekadasi*, *Sivaratri* etc.

The class which strictly followed the tenets of the Faith and devoted their lives to the study of divine ordinances was held in esteem, but otherwise there was no special veneration for the Brahmin character. Many of them had taken to mundane activities and were working as merchants, bankers and soldiers. But the profession in which they excelled was the clerical one. Because of the illiteracy of the general population the secretarial part of the administration at all levels — village, district and the centre — fell into the hands of the Brahmins who acted as village accountants and district accountants; they kept records: they were in charge of land measurement and assessment; and they acted as divans to *jagirdars* and ministers and managed their estates. With the establishment of Svaraj, the Brahmin clerks and accountants nearest to the king, became ministers of the realm. Sivaji’s *Pesva* or chief minister, Moropant Pingle, was a Brahmin; his finance minister Arnnaji Datto, was a Brahmin. Ramcandra Amatya and Naro Sahkar Saciv who directed the war of independence against Aurangzeb were Brahmins. Balaji Visvanath who founded the family of the *Pesva* which later usurped royal authority was a Brahmin.

There were several sects of Brahmins in Maharashtra; the more important were the *Desastha* from Central Maharashtra and *Konka-nastha* or *Citpavan* from Konkan. In the early days of the Maratha state, *Desastha* Brahmins were in greater prominence in administration, but with the rise of Balaji Visvanath *Pesva* they lost their pre-eminent position to the *Citpavanas*.

The Brahmin was thus an important factor in the population. Though the percentage of Brahmins to the general population was barely five, the small minority wielded much greater political power than could be warranted by its strength. The *Pesva’s* court in Poona in its later days came to be known as “*Brahmani Daulat*” Brahmin-dominated state and roused feelings of jealousy among the masses owing to the favoured position of the Brahmin class.

**Marathas.**

The next class in importance was the Marathas. The term had a much wider connotation than at present. It included not only
the peasantry, but the shepherds and cowherds. With the exception of a few prominent families they were looked on as Sudras, the fourth class in the society. Col. Tone an officer in the Pesva army writing in 1798, remarks.\(^1\) “the Maratha holds a very inferior situation in the scale of rank and eminence of Hindu institutions. He is happily free from observances in respect of washing, praying and eating. He can eat all kinds of food with the exception of beef, can dress his meals at all times and at all seasons, can partake of victuals dressed by any caste superior to his own; washing and praying are not indispensable in his order. These advantages point out the Maratha as eminently qualified for a military life. His paste by which he belongs to the labouring population of the country endures him to fatigue and the vicissitudes of weather.........The Marathas are the most numerous of the Hindu people which circumstance promises hopes of success in every military undertaking.”

Col. Tone further adds that the Maratha people were closely knit by a certain primeval plainness operating upon the whole people. There was no distinction of sentiment to be seen : the prince and his domestic thought alike and expressed themselves in the same terms. It was not unusual for a great chief warming himself round a fire or conducting his affairs sitting on a plain saddle cloth surrounded by his subordinates. The simplicity of manners of the Marathas, their democratic feeling of equality surprised strangers who had seen servility of conduct of Muslim Courts. The ruler was from a Maratha family; the big confederates Sinde, Bhosle, Gaikvad, the Pavars, were all Marathas. The Maratha peasantry was the dominant element in the Army. Marathas everywhere were Patils of villages and Desmukhs in districts, or chief landholders. Their total strength was about one-third in the entire population, and besides the Brahmins, they were a powerful element in the population.

Vaisyas.

The next group was made up of artisans and traders, each organised in separate castes. The artisan plied his trade in the village in the traditional way and served its simple needs. The trader was often a bania from Gujarat. The carpenter, the smith the copper-smith, the oil-man, the barber, the fisherman were all functional groups and differed little from the—general Maratha community in their religious and social outlook. Each caste had a sort of religious and moral government among itself, conducted by a council of elders. Any breach in the performance of the religious and social rites of the caste brought upon the individual the wrath of the elders. The government in most cases upheld the decision of the elders. In cases of disputes between castes, the matter was referred to the Brahma Sabha of a holy place like Nasik, Paithan or Wai. The general tone of society was conservative and the ruler saw that the traditional way of life was upheld.

\(^1\) W. Tone in Indian Annual Register. Vol. I, *Illustrations of some Institutions of the Maratha People.*
Mahars.

The last in the social scale, was the Mahar. In the village community, he was assigned such low jobs as scavenging, clearing away dead animals, keeping watch at night and acting as a messenger and guide to government officials and strangers passing through a village.

Thus, though Maratha society under influence of Brahmanic culture, had adopted many of its concepts, caste distinctions were not sharp and strict as in the north. The great peasant community, despite its low standing in the social scale, held a dominant position and set the general tone of society.

Writing in 1818, Elphinstone reported to Government "The whole population of the Marhatta (Maratha) country are Marahattas (Marathas), and all have some attachment to their nation and feel some interest in its greatness but the common people are devoted to husbandry."

Village Communities.

Village communities present the next striking feature of Maratha society of the 18th century. Towns were few and the majority of the people lived in villages. The village was the base on which rested the administrative structure.

A village in the Deccan is called gav; when not a market town, it is known as mauja; when so, it is known as kasba. Every village was a self-contained unit. It was made up of a cluster of huts of the peasants, of the houses of the village officials and of the village temples. All the surrounding land with the exception of inaccessible mountains was attached to it and was divided into fields and the village commons where the cattle grazed. The boundaries of its lands were defined and encroachments were resisted. The arable land was divided into fields, each field had a name which together with the name of the owner, was entered in the register. The inhabitants were principally cultivators and were either Mirasdars or Upirs. "The Mirasar belonged to the village," held his land in heredity and could not be dispossessed of it so long as he continued to pay the rent. He could sell and transfer his fields and had the right to sit in the village council. The Upri was an outsider, a mere tenant-at-will and cultivated the land so long as his lease continued.

1 Poona Residency Correspondence, Vol. XIII, p. 395.

2 Authorities for the following discussion are Selection of Papers from the Records at the India House, Vol. IV, especially Elphinstone’s report and the reports of Chaplin, Robertson and “other officers; also Poona Gazetteer, (old edition), Vol. II, Chapter 8.

3 The word is derived from Arabic miras, mirasi, mirasdar and these from waris to inherit, mirasdar being a holder of hereditary property: Upri means a stranger, a mere renter in opposition to hereditary occupant.
Besides the cultivators, there also resided in the village the village officials, Patil, Kulkarni, Caugula and the artisans known as Bara Baluta. The most useful and legitimate employment of the artisans was that of labouring for the villagers in the several lines of their drafts, but they also held another position as the village staff and attendants on the Patil and assistants in the various social and festive ceremonies of the village.

The Sutar or carpenter was at the head of the artisans, his services being most in requisition. He made the villagers’ ploughs and repaired their carts, the owners finding the material; for any other work as building a house or making a cart for other than agricultural purposes, he was paid. The Lohar or smith made the hoes of the ploughs and other implements. The Cambhar made all leather buckets, halters, whips, ropes and bands for agricultural purposes, the owner finding the leather himself. He also mended the farmer’s shoes, though they had to pay him for new ones. He also had to furnish gratuitously the Desmukh and the Despande of the district and the Patil and Kulkarni of his village with a new pair of shoes each, annually.

The above three were the principal artisans. They possessed several perquisites above the others, among which was the privilege of sowing in every farmer’s field a strip of land with ralla, each strip consisting of four furrows. The farmer tilled the land, and the artisans merely brought each his basket of grain which was sown by the farmer and reaped by the recipient when ready.

The Kumbhar or potter supplied the village with earthenware—frying pans, ovens, pitchers, water-pots and jars—according to the casualties and needs of each household, receiving a cake of bread on the supply of fresh article. When the crop was ripening he took a jug and water vessels to each field for those engaged in watching the crops, receiving in turn his nimboor (or ears of corn). The other artisans, Mahars and the village staff generally claimed their nimboor free, but the Kumbhar stipulated for some service in return. He had also to supply any government servant on his arrival at the village with what vessels he might require. He found the several images at festivals receiving in return a little grain.

The Nhavi shaved all the farmers; to the Mahar he merely lent a razor. He attended at the Patil’s wedding. On the occasion of weddings or festivals in the village it was his duty to convey presents from one party to another.

1 Baluta derived from Bali a share in the grain of the peasant. Baluta means yearly allowance of grain for service rendered to the community. The detailed description of the artisans is based on ‘Village Community in the Deccan’, by N. R. Goodine, ‘Bombay Govt. Selection.’ (1852).
The Parit or washerman washed the clothing of the men-folk of the village. He spread white clothes as carpets for passage-over of a wedding party or of some great personage at a festival.

The Mahar was the village watchman, scout and messenger. He was verily the ‘village eye.’ His situation made him acquainted with everybody’s affairs, and his evidence was required in every dispute. Should two cultivators quarrel respecting the boundaries of their fields, the Mahar’s evidence often decided it. The Mahar’s duties were numerous. In large villages they were divided into two or three heads; these were veskars or porters at the village gates; the Khale-veskars or guards of the stack-yards, the gaon-veskars or Mahars appointed to attend at the cavdi and the gaon-mahars or those for general duty of the village. Different Mahar families performed these duties in rotation. In small villages one family guarded the gates, kept an account of persons who came and went, attended to travellers, conveyed government letters and cash. During harvest time he guarded the stack-yard and kept a fire burning at night and made himself generally useful. His remuneration was a government inam, a tithe upon everything grown; presents of bread and other victuals; small imposts of oil, sugar and condiments begged from shopkeepers.

The Mang-provided the villagers with ropes and prepared the hides for the Cambhar to work, the Gurav looked after the local temples, a Mulana took care of the mosque and tombs; a bard and astrologer were the other concomitants of larger villages.

The fees in kind to the artisans depended very much on the state, of the crops and also upon the extent of services performed. Col. Jervis who made inquiries about the percentage of the share the Balutedars claimed from the peasants, was informed that it was as high as twenty-five, which he did not believe. Other sources reveal it as about ten per cent. But there is no doubt that the arrangement added to the burden of the peasantry.

The Patil was the first among the cultivators and the chief village officer, the Caugula was his immediate assistant and both were Maratha by caste. The office descended from father to son; when there was no capable person to perform the duties, a near relation was chosen. A succession always required confirmation from government and vacancies caused by disappearance or desertion, were filled by government nomination. The Patil held rent-free lands and had several perquisites. His position as a government dignitary and the social predominance and various financial advantages he enjoyed gave him a prestige in the community and the dignity of the post was much valued.
The person next to the Patil was the Kulkarni, the clerk or registrar who kept the records in respect of the fields, kept the rental accounts and acted as a general writer for the inhabitants. Being perhaps the only literate person, he wielded far greater influence than was warranted by his position. He had rent-free lands and other perquisites only inferior to that of the Patil. He was mostly a Brahmin, some times a Kayastha Prabhu.

The Caugula and the Mahar made up the village establishment. The Mahar was useful as a village watchman and attended to strangers. His duties have been already enumerated.

The Patil’s principal duty was to supervise cultivation and collect government assessment. As the latter depended on the state of the crops, the Patil had to use all the skill and persuasion he was capable of, to make the ryots work harder and better. He induced them to bring as much land under the plough as they could, attracted tenants to take up fallow land, fixed the rent they had to pay, arranged advances for agricultural operations and helped government agents to make correct assessment and realize the rent from the ryots.

He was also in charge of peace and order. Trifling offences he punished himself, redressed wrongs, and intervened to settle the, villagers’ disputes. The village Cavdi was the place where people with grievances came and related them to him. The Patil knew everybody well, and could immediately sense what was wrong and tried to set things right with admonitions to the offender. When disputes took a serious turn and could not be settled by this informal method, he induced the parties to compromise the matter, but if necessary, he called some of the inhabitants best acquainted with the dispute and submitted the case for arbitration. This was called a Pancayat. Crime of a trifling nature was attended to by the Patil but serious offences were reported to the district officer.

In addition to his revenue and magisterial duties, the Patil was responsible for the defence of the village. He sent for the villagers to sleep at the village cavdi and keep watch at the gate when disturbances were reported in the surrounding country. Funds needed to strengthen the village-wall or repair the temples and wells were collected with the help of the village elders and spent under his direction. He was responsible for entertaining government dignitaries, Sibandi, holy men and Sanyasis passing through the village. He also sometimes provided the villagers with amusement and recreation by inviting jugglers and tumblers to perform.

For all practical purposes the village managed its affairs, and followed the even tenor of its life almost forgotten by the world out-side and undisturbed by upheavals beyond the narrow range of its
interests. Elphinstone though that “these village communities were an excellent remedy for the defects of a bad government as they saved the people from negligence and served as a sort of barrier against its tyranny and rapacity.”

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE.

The Maratha administration as it developed in the 18th century was a compound of elements borrowed from ancient works on Hindu polity, elements taken over from the Muslim States of the Deccan and modified by the genius of the founder of the Maratha State to suit its special needs and changes that took place when the guiding hand of that great architect was removed. The administrative structure in mediaeval times was a simple one, government activities centering around defence from foreign enemies and security from turbulent elements at home. Defence calls for an efficient army which for its proper functioning needs unity of command. The leader of the hosts who can successfully beat back the enemies, naturally comes to occupy the first place in the State. He becomes the King. For internal security the monarch looked to the support of the aristocracy. This privileged order at the centre formed the Kings court and advised him on the conduct of administration. Outside the capital members from the class managed districts on his behalf.

Central Executive.

Thus in Maratha polity we find political power resting in the highest executive, the crowned prince. Sivaji directed all the activities of his state and ruled as well as reigned. As his field of activity grew wider, he appointed advisers to assist him—a minister who would look after collection of revenues and audit accounts, another to take charge of relations with neighbouring powers, a third to look after defence, a fourth to look to the records, a fifth to administer justice, a sixth to take charge of ecclesiastical matters and so on. Though the Raja received advice from the ministers and often accepted their suggestions, the responsibility for formulating policy, unlike that of the British Cabinet, was his; his ministers were his secretaries—his subordinates who carried out his orders. It is wrong to compare the Asta Pradhan Mandal or the Cabinet of eight Ministers of Sivaji with that of the English Cabinet. The English Cabinet is free in the choice of its decision, while the ministers have a free-hand in the routine administration, the general directive comes from the Prime Minister. The sovereign reigns but does not rule. In Sivaji’s Council, no minister possessed over-riding authority. This was left in the Land of the sovereign himself.

Sivaji’s successors did not possess his tireless energy and came to rely more and more on their councillors. Sambhai (1680-1689) resigned his authority to his minister Kalasa, while in the fugitive


1 Selection of East India Papers, Vol. IV, p. 158.
Rajaram’s time (1689-1700), the exigency of the situation required that the King should give a free hand to his advisers. In his absence in the south, Ramcandra Amatya and Sankaraji Saciv, directed Maratha activities on their own initiative. Even at Jinji, Rajaram resigned himself to the advice of another minister, the Pratindhi. These ministers lacking the prestige of the King’s position, were obliged to purchase the loyalty of their adherents by making appeals to their self-interest, by holding out promises of large rewards, in the shape of fiefs or Jagirs, with which the Maratha was already familiar and which the Moghal emperor was bestowing on renegades. Sivaji always insisted on regular payment from his treasury to his officers. But during the protracted war with Aurangzeb, little treasure could be found with which to pay the chiefs and their men. It was found necessary to assign them territories and ask them to fend for themselves.

Feudalization.

In the interregnum from Sambhaji’s capture to the home-coming of Sahu in May 1707, conditions in Maharastra were abnormal. The machinery of government as devised by Sivaji broke down. A number of Maratha captains raised Torces on their own, led expeditions in Moghal provinces and made collection of revenues from which they reimbursed themselves. Sahu when he returned home with a handful of body-guards, was called upon to establish his superior claims against local Moghal officers and the protege of his aunt Tara Bai and set up his authority over the warlords. At first the patriotic tradition of his grand-father, the bitter memory of the sufferings of his father and the support of Zulfiqar Khan, enabled him to hold his own against his rivals. But this initial advantage needed to be buttressed by the personal valour and leadership in a country bristling with arms. Sahu lacked the commanding talents and energy of his grand-father and the patriotic tradition could not help him long ; he was scarcely able to hold his own against the party of his aunt, when the support of Zulfiqar Khan was gone. Balaji Visvanath who became Pesva in 1713, in face of mounting difficulties came to realize that it was no longer possible to adhere to Sivaji’s old constitution under which the King, aided by his eight ministers, was the sole ruler of his dominions. The King’s position as against the warlords who had made themselves practically independent in several parts of the Deccan, had deteriorated. The only way to save the kingship being submerged and the country being involved in civil war and turmoil, was to accept the chiefs as vassals, with practically free reins in their territory, to acknowledge them as hereditary Jagirdars who would bring their armies to the common standard when called upon, but otherwise, would have a free hand in the management of their fiefs. Sahu accepted the advice of his minister, concluded an agreement with Angre on these lines, and gave similar freedom of action to other chiefs. A revolution in feudalizing the Maratha State began.
Sahu’s stay-at-home policy accelerated the process of feudalization, and the want of capacity in his successors completed it. The chiefs who raised men and money for distant expeditions on their own, could not be expected to be subservient to royal commands and render minute accounts to court officers, when the sovereign himself gave no directive and showed little interest in distant operations. The Pesva or Chief-Minister who could have saved royal authority from falling into disuse, himself became the leading feudal chief and kept his conquests on the west-coast and in Hindustan to himself. The example set by the Pesva was copied by other ministers and chiefs. The Pratinidhi, Saciv Senapati and other cabinet members though they retained their nominal rank, became transformed into hereditary, feudatories and the new warlords that had sprung during the war with Aurangzeb, swelled their ranks.

The old members of the cabinet looked on the Pesva as an usurper and withheld co-operation in his schemes of conquest. The Pesva had to look to able assistants to uphold his authority in distant quarters. These assistants, Sinde, Holkar, Pavar, Jadhav and others in course of time, became transformed into feudal chiefs. The spirit of feudalization came to stay and invaded Maratha administration in all its branches. Even small civil and military posts came to be endowed with Jagirs and alienated revenues.¹

The feudal organization lacks coherence, suffers from want of unity of command and can never pull its full weight in a crisis. As the sovereign does not deal direct with his subjects, his hold on their allegiance is nominal. The subjects readily follow the immediate chiefs with whom their lives and welfare are tied than the legendary monarch on whom they rarely set their eyes. The freedom the subordinate chiefs enjoy in the management of their Jagirs, breeds a spirit of defiance, they affect independence and resent interference from central authority. Should this authority pass into weak hands, the centrifugal tendencies become accelerated and the structure collapses. The Maratha State could not escape this fate of feudal Governments. Its atomisation sapped the foundations and it could not stand the attack of the, organized power of the British at the end of the century.

Malcolm’s comments are worth repetition. He says, The constitution of the government and army of the Marhattas (Marathas) was more calculated to destroy than to create an empire. The fabric had no foundation. The chiefs were from the first, almost equal; and as the armies they led, depended principally on success

¹ According to Elphinstone’s calculation out of the total revenue of the Pesva of Rs. 2,15,00,000, more than half was in the possession of Jagirdars. This does not take account of the Jagirs of the bigger chiefs like Sinde, Holkar, Bhosle and Gaikvad. See Poona Residency Correspondence Service, Vol. XIII, p. 396.
for pay, the leaders were necessarily invested with powers for the collection of tribute, or revenues, from the provinces into which they were sent. But though a share was claimed by Government, the application of the greater part in the payment of his troops and other expenses, raised the successful general into a ruler of the countries he had conquered. This everywhere produced the same effects, and the public interest was lost sight of in the desire of individuals to promote their own ambition. The early example of the Paishwah’s (Pesva) usurpation was followed almost by all to whom opportunity offered; and this was aided by the form of their village governments having been carried into the state; every office, from that of Paishwah (Pesva), or prime minister, to the lowest employ became hereditary. This practice, by giving rights, limited patronage and weakened the heads of the empire, among whom divisions early arose. Notwithstanding the military reputation which some of the Paishwahs (Pesva) added to their other pretensions to supreme authority, all that superior intelligence which their habits and education gave them, was unequal to keep in check the ambition of enterprising chiefs who, intoxicated with success, soon forgot their obligations to the Brahmin princes by whom they were elevated to command. One part of the policy of the Paishwahs (Pesva) tended greatly to accelerate the independence of those leaders—the fear of their disturbing the peace of their native country, or consuming, its resources, led to their constant employment in foreign expeditions, where they were subject to little or no control; and to attain the object of keeping a successful general and his adherents at a distance, the superior was satisfied with nominal allegiance.¹

Rise of the Pesvas.

For quite some time the revolution was not apparent. The King’s authority was bolstered up by his very able Pesvas Balaji Visvanath, Baji Rav I and his son Balaji. The Pesvas, with other ministers, attended the Raja’s court and when absent on campaigns were represented by their deputies. The king was kept informed of happenings outside and was formally consulted on all matters of importance. But as the Maratha state expanded the Pesvas showed themselves great leaders of men and far out-stripped other ministers. It was Pesva Balaji Visvanath who obtained for his sovereign the sanad of Svaraj. Cauth and Sardesmukhi and thus legitimatized Raja Sahu’s position. Then again it was Balaji’s son Baji Rav who defeated the great Nizam when the latter challenged the Raja’s authority in 1727. The Senapati who had started intrigues both against the Raja and the Pesva was destroyed in 1731. The neighbouring powers on the west coast were reduced by the Pesva’s exertions, who also tore away Malva and Bundelkhand from the imperial grip. No wonder that the grateful Sovereign came to rely more and more on the Pesva than on other ministers who chose the ease of the capital and kept at home, contenting themselves with giving advice. The result was that the Pesva who originally was one of the eight ministers, came to occupy the first position in the king’s council.

This was confirmed by Raja Sahu himself. On his death-bed he wrote two wills or rescripts. The first says “We order that you should command the forces. The Government of the empire must be carried on. You are to take measures to preserve the kingdom. Our successors will not interfere with your post.”\(^1\) The other paper was a solemn injunction to the Rajas successors to maintain the Pesva in power.

Armed with these documents, the Pesva called a meeting of the council and declared that he would also administer the kingdom on behalf of the dead Rajas successor. The successor being an inexperienced youth brought up in humble circumstances, was in no position to oppose the Pesva, and gave his written sanction that the Pesva’s authority should be obeyed. The Pratinidhi, Raghuji Bhosle, and others who showed themselves recalcitrant, were overawed. Thus, from 1750 the supreme authority in the Maratha Government came to be exercised by the Brahmin Pesva in the name of the Maratha Sovereign, who became a shadowy figure, a mere cipher. Though he continued to be publicly honoured and issue ceremonial dresses he had no authority in the conduct of administration and even his household expenses came to be controlled by the Vice-Regent.\(^2\)

The usurpation of the Pesvas, Scott Waring justly remarks “neither attracted observation nor excited surprise. Indeed, the transition was easy, natural and progressive”. Its greatest disadvantage according to Rawlinson, was that “it aggravated the centrifugal tendencies of the Maratha State, especially the enmity between the Brahman and Maratha, which were at least kept in check while a member of the house of Boshle actually ruled; after the Pesva’s prestige was shaken by the defeat of Panipat, the disintegration became more and more evident.”\(^3\)

The rise of the Pesva not only emphasised the feudalizing process, but also marked the triumph of orthodoxy. The Maratha state was born on the crest of a movement of social and religious reform which had attacked the sacerdotal authority of the Brahmin and laid stress on social equality. Under its impetus all castes and classes had participated in the work of liberation. Sivaji in his administration emphasised merit and talent wherever he found them. His army consisted of local Maratha peasantry, while Brahmins, Prabhus and Sarasvats manned his civil establishment. As the Pesvas rose in importance the complexion of the services slowly began to change. From the time of Balaji Rav (1740-61) his castemen found favour in clerical as well as military services. The Maratha administration became Brahmanical and “the Principal offices of government were” according to Malet either in the possession of Brahmins

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\(^1\) Kincaid and Parasnis, *A History of the Maratha People*, p. 455.

\(^2\) *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. XIII, p. 29; Elphinstone here records his view on the Pesva’s position.

\(^3\) *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV, p. 412.
or so disposed as to be under their control."\(^1\) Other communities felt neglected by the monopolization of power by Brahmins, and made them apathetic to the fortunes of the State.

Justice Ranade makes significant observations on this subject. He remarks\(^2\), “One other general feature, which distinguishes the first period under Sivaji and Sahu from the period which followed the establishment of Pesva’s power at Poona, relates to the fact that while most of the great military commanders in the earlier period were Marhattas (Marathas) with the notable exception of the Pesvas themselves, the men who rose to the distinction in the latter half of the century were for the most part, Brahmins......... This infusion of the racial and caste element among the military leaders of the nation had disastrous effects. There were parties within parties, with little chance of a common and active sympathy throughout all the classes, who had been held together with such successful results by Sivaji, Rajaram and Sahu. The first half of the century, was singularly free from these racial and caste jealousies. In the latter half, they had attained such prominence that concert was impossible, and each great leader naturally cared to pursue his own interest to the sacrifice of the common weal. The Brahmins at this time came to regard themselves as a governing caste with special privileges and exemptions, which were unknown under the system founded by Sivaji, .......... All these distinguishing features of purely sacerdotal or caste ascendancy characterised the close of the century, and introduced a demoralisation of which few people have any correct idea. The State ceased to be the ideal protector of all classes, and upholder of equal justice. Ramdasa’s high ideal of the religion of Maharastra was lowered down to one in keeping with the belief that the State had no higher function than to protect the cow and the Brahmin, and the usual consequences followed such a decadence of virtue.

**Secretariat.**

The secretariat known as *Huzur Daftar* was a big establishment consisting of about 200 clerks headed by the *Phadnis* or Chief Secretary. This establishment was in charge of all sorts of accounts. It received and checked accounts of districts and other subordinate offices and drew up estimates and authorized budgets for the ensuing year. Accounts of all alienations of public revenues, whether *Saranjams, Inams* or otherwise, of the pay, rights and privileges of the Government and village officers, accounts of the strength and pay of troops and expenses of all civil, military and religious establishments were all submitted to the Secretariat. There were daily registers, abstracts of registers, estimates of revenue and expenditure, abstracts of actual receipts and expense, and based on them, were the authorized budgets for districts. The whole of this were consolidated and exhibited in a comprehensive view in “*Tarjamas*’.

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\(^1\) *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 342.

HISTORY – MARATHA PERIOD

District Administration.

It was really through the district administration that the impact of government was carried to the people at large. Each revenue division called indiscriminately as \textit{pargana} or \textit{prant} was under an officer who, in a large district, was known as \textit{Mamlatdar}, and in a small one \textit{Kamavisdar}. The appointment was for a year but cases were not uncommon when the same \textit{Mamlatdar} continued to hold the charge for twenty-five or even thirty years. In the prosperous days of the \textit{Pesvas}, the \textit{Mamlatdars} were men of honesty and integrity and managed their charge with ability. The \textit{Mamlatdar} had under him inferior agents for smaller units known as \textit{Tarafdars, Karkuns, Saikdars} whom he nominated himself. His district establishment consisted of eight members, \textit{Divan, Mazumdar, Phadnavis, Potnis, Potedar, Citnis, Karkhanis} and \textit{Sabhasad} — hereditary officers who were directly responsible to government, whose signatures were necessary to all documents and who were bound to give information of all the misdeeds and malpractices of the \textit{Mamlatdar}. The \textit{Mamlatdars} salary was calculated at one per cent. on the revenue of his charge and varied from five to six thousand rupees a year.

The district officer was responsible for every branch of administration, civil and criminal justice, the control of militia and the police, the investigation of social and religious questions, agriculture, and trade. As revenue collector he fixed the assessment of each village in consultation with the \textit{Patils}, collected the revenue, heard and decided complaints against village officers. In his judicial capacity he supervised the administration of justice by giving effect to decisions of \textit{Pancayats} or ordering fresh inquiry in case of appeal, apprehending criminals, putting down gang robberies and petty risings. He was also responsible for the general welfare of the district and was expected to attend to popular needs.

In remote provinces such as Khandes, Gujarat or Karnatak there was an officer between the \textit{Mamlatdar} and the Government who was called the \textit{Sarsubhedar}. Like the \textit{Mamlatdar} he was responsible for revenue as well as general administration. Both of them were helped in their work by \textit{Sibandi} or irregular foot soldiers and a party of horse.

Village Administration.

The base of the administrative structure was the village community which has already been described. In the absence of a developed central government village communities throughout the centuries had been left to manage their affairs. Maratha rulers were no innovators and abstained from disturbing the villages in their internal management. The changes that Sivaji effected were in the system of cash payment and direct revenue management. Sivaji perceived that much of the disorder in old times arose as a result of entrusting the collection of revenues to \textit{Zamindars} of districts and villages. They collected more from \textit{ryots} and paid less to government, and used their resources and situation to create disturbances and resist the authority of government. Sivaji dispensed with the \textit{Zamindar} class and appointed paid men as \textit{Kamavisdars}.
and *Subhedars* to collect land-revenue direct from the *royts*. These revenue officers surveyed fields, visited villages and entered into agreements with the *Patils* about the revenue each village was expected to pay. This beneficial change was continued till almost the end of the Maratha State. It was in the days of the last *Pesva* that the farming system was revived with disastrous effect on village communities.

**PUBLIC FINANCE.**

The chief source of public revenue was land and the ruler had to use all his ingenuity to obtain maximum return without drying up the source. In ancient times Hindu rulers demanded one-sixth of the actual produce which demand was raised in emergencies such as war, coronation, marriage in the royal family, etc. Collections of revenue in kind was possible when kingdoms were small. By the 17th century however the demand had been commuted into money payment, though payment in kind continued in hilly regions and as a means of provisioning forts. Land was measured and assessment related to the quality and the produce of the soil by Akbar's minister, *Raja Todar Mal*. Todar Mal's methods were copied in the Deccan by the Nizamsahi minister, Malik Ambar (1605-1626 A.D.). His settlement was based on a correct knowledge of the area of the land tilled and of the money value of the crop and the determination to limit the state demand to a small share of the actual value of the crop. He converted his grain demand into fixed cash rates. These conversion rates did not vary with the fluctuations in the price of grain and from their extreme lowness when they were fixed, were very favourable to the *ryot*. Under Malik Ambar's system arable land was divided into equal areas or *bighas* and the demand on these areas varied according to the quality of the soil. After this had been determined, arable land was divided into *Khalsa* or land which yielded revenue to government and *inamat* or land whose government rental had been alienated through favour or in return for service. After deducting *inamat* land, the *Khalsa* land was entered as containing so much *Bagayat* or garden land and so much *Jirayat* or dry land. Malik Ambar is supposed to have fixed the share at less than one-third which had been the usual exaction before his time. The records showed the details of rent-alienated land. Those owned by *Vatandars* were known as *Dumala* or two-owned *inams*, while those granted to temples and mosques and village servants were wholly *inams*. The details of rent-alienated land were followed by details of revenue-paying land and of the various cesses levied on the craftsmen, the shop-keepers and village-servants or *balutas*.

Under the system, though the amount of cesses varied, the bulk of the demand on each village remained constant. There was no reference to waste land and once the rental was fixed, the management of the village was left entirely to the *Patil* with orders that he

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1 For detailed study of the topics, see Baden Powell, *Land-system of India*, three volumes, *East India Papers*, Vol. IV, esp., the reports of Elphinstone, Chaplin and Roberston.
was responsible for collecting the amount. The Patil thus became the representative of the village with wide powers to exploit waste lands. The holder of the land was likewise responsible to pay his share of the rental to which his land was liable whether he tilled it or not.

It is said that Malik Ambar’s demand on a bigha (4/5 of an acre) came to about 5 annas, which according to prices in 1820, amounted to Rs. 1½ to Rs. 2. The low rates fixed by Malik Ambar greatly enriched the country. The Patils let out waste lands on favourable terms and thus encouraged cultivation and the country which had been depopulated before, began to show signs of prosperity. Malik Ambar’s settlement is known as Tankha.¹

Sivaji in his jagir, succeeded to the Nizam Sahi rule and continued the Tankha assessment. The rates were those that obtained before, government taking one-third and leaving two-third to the producer. The settlement was mauzevar, based on the actual state of the crop, the village making good a lump sum. Malik Ambar’s survey however, had not been very careful. Sivaji introduced a standard measure of a Kathi or measuring rod. The Kathi was to be five cubits and five fists in length.² Twenty rods square made a bigha and one hundred twenty bighas made a chahur. The unit of measurement being fixed a fresh survey settlement was ordered, and the work was entrusted to Annaji Datto.

Annaji Datto fixed the rent at 33 per cent. of the gross produce, but Sivaji afterwards demanded a consolidated rent of 40 per cent when all the extra taxes and cesses were abolished.³

The rates introduced by Sivaji were revised by his successors. As the 18th century advanced, there was an increased abundance of money, partly caused by the continuous working of American mines, and partly because money was flowing into Maharashtra as Maratha power expanded and tributes were levied on surrounding states. The effect was a fall in the value of money and consequent reduction in government share of the produce of the land. To make good this loss, fresh cesses were levied from time to time. Ultimately to do away with the irregularities and uncertainties Pesva Balaji Rav (1740-1761) ordered a new survey and settlement. Lands were measured, classified according to the nature of the soil and the produce they grew, and new rates were levied. For irrigated and garden lands growing sugar-cane and opium they charged rates varying from Rs. 5 to Rs. 6—8 and Rs. 10 per bigha, dry crops were assessed at Re. 1 to Rs. 1—8, per bigha.

¹ According to Baden-Powell, the name Tankha is derived from the silver coin which was used in lieu of the old copper ‘takka’, but the term has become synonymous with a fixed assessment in the lump on a village. Vol. III, p. 205.
² The Kathi, Chaplin says, was about nine feet in length.
³ Outline of Sivaji’s system is given in Sabhasad Bakhar, pp. 28-29.
The Pesva’s assessment came to be known as Kamal standard or the highest possible. This was twice as high as Malik Ambar’s settlement, but there was a difference. In levying the village rental the area actually under tillage and not the whole arable area was taken into consideration.

The social framework of an agrarian economy and the production, and distribution of wealth are conditioned by land tenures. According to ancient Hindi concepts the individul who cleared unclaimed land and brought it under the plough, became the proprietor paying part of the produce for the protection he enjoyed from the state. The Mirasi tenure of the Deccan is the normal outcome of this concept. It was Malik Ambar who gave a firm and definite shape to this idea by making land private property of the cultivator, attaching to the proprietary right the power of sale and granting other lands as the joint property of the village, community.

In the Maratha country under the Pesva’s Government, there had developed two well-defined tenures: Mirasi and Upri. The Mirasi tenure was undoubtedly that of the highest order. The holding descended from father to son, according to the law of inheritance, that of equal partition among the male heirs; the holder’s position could not be disturbed except for non-payment of government demand in respect of land, which was fixed and not subject to enhancement. Should the Mirasdar at any time abandon his lands, he or his heirs were entitled after any lapse of time to reclaim them and this right was not barred by any statute of limitations. The land was saleable and could not be seized for debts. Even if the Mirasdar failed to pay his assessment, the most government could do was to put pressure on him and his brother mirasdars. The tenure gave the holder a right to sit in the village council. Although there is some doubt about the point, the general opinion is that the mirasdar was liable for the rent of so much of his land which he actually cultivated being exempt from any payment in respect of the uncultivated portion.

Elphinstone who made particular inquiries about tenures in Maharastra reported “that a large portion of the ryots were the proprietors of their estates, subject to the payment of a fixed land-tax to government; that their property was hereditary and saleable, that they were never dispossessed when they paid their tax, and that they had for a long period the right to reclaim their estates on paying government dues.......... All the land which did not belong to the Mirasdar belonged to government or those to whom government assigned it. The property of the Zamindars in the soil had not been introduced or even heard of, in the Maratha country.”

The Upri was a tenant-at-will of the government, having no rights except that of temporary cultivation, as provided for by the term of his agreement He took up from year to year as much land as he
wanted to cultivate and paid assessment proportionate only to the crop which he obtained. His assessment was liable to enhancement.

The **Gat-kul** (owner disappeared), **Kauli** (taken on lease) and **Khasbandi** were other tenures which were but variations of the **Mirasi** and **Upri** and need not detain us.

The position of the **Mirasdar** looked, in theory, very strong. His lands had been measured out and classified, and the standard demand on them had been fixed. If, however, the rains failed, if the village suffered from war or pestilence or if a family calamity intervened, he could always seek remission. Complaints against over assessment, he could take to the **Huzur**.

All the advantages of the position of the **Mirasdars** arising out of a fixed standard rent for his filds were however rendered ungainful by the practice of the levy of extra cesses. Extra cesses were levied in the name of village expenses, presents in kind to village officers (**ganv khare**, **sadli-varid**) Old hereditary district officers (**Desmukh** and **Despande**), though defunct, demanded their perquisites in kind; district officers, their clerks, their peons and even the distant courtiers struggled to batten on the labour of *ryot*.

**Other Taxes.**

Elphinstone mentions some of the cesses in his report. "**Miras Patti**, an additional tax levied once in three years on **Mirasdars**, **Mhar (Mahar) Mharkee**, a tax on the **enams (inams)** of the **Mahars**; **Inam Tijayee**, payment by inamdars of a third of the revenue from their **inam** lands; **Vihir Hunda**, an extra tax on lands watered from wells; **Ghar Patti**, house-tax levied from all but Brahmin village officers; **Danka**, tax for the right to beat a drum on particular religious and other occasions; **Kharidi Jinnas** (Purveyance), the right to purchase articles at a certain rate generally commuted for money payment; **Lagan Takka**, a tax on marriage; **Pat Dam**, tax on the remarriage of widows; **Mhais Pattee**, tax on buffaloes; **Bakra Pattee**, a tax on sheep. There were also occasional contributions in kind called **Fad Farmais** such as bullock’s hide, charcoal, hemp, rope, ghee, **tup**, **tel**, curds, fowl, etc., which were often commuted for fixed money payment. Other taxes were on traders alone. These were **Mohtarfa**, a tax on shop-keepers in the village; **Balutee**, a tax on the twelve village servants; **Bazar Baithak**, a tax on stalls at fairs; **Kumbhar Khan**, a tax on earth dug up by the potters. Ultimately they were paid by the peasants for whom the traders and artisans plied”.

Besides all this and the **ganv kharc**, there were taxes to defray the district expenses not provided for by government, in which were included many personal expenses of the Mamlatdars and a large fund known as **Darbar Kharc or Antastha**, which was a sort of bribe to the district officer, his staff and the court officials, which had official recognition.
“In addition to all these exactions, there were occasional impositions on extraordinary emergencies, which were called Jasti Pattee and Yek Sali Pattee. If these happened to be continued for several years, they ceased to be considered as occasional impositions and fell into regular Sevai Jama. Until the introduction of the farming system these were however rare.”

The independent spirit of the Maratha peasantry and a succession of mild rulers and good administrators saved the country from rack renting, but the inherent weakness came out when Pesva Baji Rav II came to power, sold districts to the highest bidders and let loose on the country a swarm of rapacious harpies.

**Other Sources of Revenue.**

The other sources of public revenues were, (1) Zakat, (2) Forest, (3) Mint and (4) Courts of Law.

_Zakat or Inland Customs_ :-When goods passed from one district to another they were subjected to transit duties which were computed on the basis of bullock-loads. Rates varied in proportion to the value of the article, the highest being eight rupees. As duty was levied separately in each district much inconvenience resulted owing to frequent stoppage and search of property at custom-posts. To remedy this, Hundekaries undertook to carry goods over long distances by arranging to pay custom officers in lump sum. Zakat, was always farmed out. According to Ehphinstone, Zakat before the cession of Poona, produced about five lakhs of rupees.

Another source of revenue was the mint. Coining in Pesva’s time was done both by government, as well as by private agency. The goldsmith paid a royalty for the right of minting money and was expected to maintain purity of coinage. Breach of this was met with fine and forfeiture. Several coins minted at different places were in circulation. Copper coins were in common use. but silver rupees and gold Mohurs were also in circulation.

_Abkari_ did not yield more than Rs. 10,000 the use of spirituous liquor being forbidden at Poona and discouraged everywhere. The result was sobriety among the general mass of the populace, though Maratha chiefs like Daulat Rav Sinde, Tukoji Holkar and Bhosles were known for their inebriating habits.

Forests were not a very great source of income. For cutting wood for building and fuel purposes, a licence fee was levied which was about four annas per bullock-load. For works of public utility, building materials were sometimes given free. _Kurans_ and pasture lands brought in a modest sum.

Fines from losers in a suit and fees from winners were also added to the revenues from the districts.
Another source of considerable yet uncertain revenue was Mulkgiri-tribute levied on neighbouring States. Year after year Maratha armies would move out of their homeland to collect tribute-cauth as they called it. In the early days of the Maratha State, Mulkgiri was no doubt a necessity. The State was surrounded by enemies and only a powerful army could hold them at bay. Where else could the ruler find sustenance for his armies, if not in enemy territory? Sivaji’s expeditions in Khandes, Aurangabad, Gujarat, Karnatak and the subsequent moves of Maratha armies in Malva and Bundelkhand, originated in the exigencies of the State.

The exigency was followed as a matter of policy by later rulers. Maratha armies spread all over India demanding cauth from Rajas of Rajputana and Bundelkhand, Navabs of the Deccan, Gujarat, Oudh and Bengal, and the polygars of Karnatak. “When the Marathas proceeded beyond their boundaries, to collect revenue and make war were synonymous”, says Grant Duff. “Whenever a village resisted, its officers were seized and compelled by threats and sometimes by torture, to come to a settlement. Ready money was seldom obtained, but securities from bankers, which later were exchanged for bills payable in any part of India.” It was a principle of Maratha commanders to increase the amount of their exactions whenever possible, but in no case to recede from the demands of their predecessors.

This levy of cauth has been defended as a measure adopted by the Maratha State for the protection of its own subjects against foreign aggression and as a means of preparing ground for the establishment of its complete sovereignty. A powerful state requires no protection against weak neighbours; in fact these neighbours look to the suzerain authority for defence against external and internal enemies. The Maratha policy of nibbling at the sources of the neighbouring states brought them little strength. Very little of the cauth reached the central treasury, it was swallowed by the armies and their officer. But the odium it brought on the Maratha name was to prove disastrous to Maratha cause. The policy of Mulkgiri found the Marathas friendless and isolated when they faced the Abdali at Panipat. The amount the foreign tribute brought was so uncertain that no attempt has so far been made to estimate its yield.

Though one may not wholly agree with Munro’s verdit that “the Mahratta (Maratha) government from its foundation has been one of the most destructive that ever existed in India,” one cannot but conclude that the debit side of Mulkgiri weighs heavily against the credit side. For want of consolidation Maratha conquests proved ephemeral; the tributaries raised their heads the moment the tide.

of invasion receded. “The sympathy which the religious aspect of the State might have drawn from Hindus was dissipated by the aspect of plunder which was applied as ruthlessly to Hindus as to Muslims. The peaceful Bengali and the martial Rajput were equally subjected to it and equally welcomed deliverance from Maratha hands.”.

**Total Income of Maratha State and Pesva’s Debts.**

The total income of the Maratha State has been a matter of speculation. It is always difficult to reckon the income and expenditure of a State the boundaries of which were shifting from day-to-day. In the absence of a close study of the Pesva archives we have to depend on statements made by British administrators and writers. Elphinstone at the time of taking over the Pesva’s territories (1818) reported to the Governor-General that “the Pesva’s whole revenue before the last treaty amounted to Rs. 2,15,00,000 of which Rs. 95,00,000 was paid into the treasury and Rs. 1,20,00,000, allotted to Jagirdars.”1 About this time the Maratha confederacy had been wound up and the several States were operating as isolated units. Malcolm who was in charge of Central India Agency has put down the revenue of Sinde, Holkar and Pavars at Rs. 1,27,68,459, Rs. 17,96,183 and Rs. 3,76,000, respectively. This estimate excludes the revenues of two other great Maratha feudatories, the Gaikvads of Baroda and Bhosles of Nagpur.

Lord Valentia, who passed through India in the early 19th century, estimated the revenues of the Pesva’s State at Rs. 71,64,724. Mr. J. Grant of the East India Company estimated the total revenue of the Maratha empire at six crores of rupees towards the close of the 18th century.

The historian of the Marathas, Grant Duff, has a significant passage on this topic. “The nominal revenue of the whole Maratha empire at the period of Madhoo Rav’s (Madhav Rav’s) death (1772), was ten crores or one hundred millions of rupees ; but the amount actually realized including the Jagheers (Jagirs) of Holkar, Sindhia (Sinde), Janoji Bhosle and Damaji Gaekvar (Gaikvad), together with tributes, fees, fines, contributions, customary offerings and all those sources independent of regular collections, which in the State accounts, come under the head of extra revenue, may be estimated at about seventy-two millions of rupees or about seven millions of pounds sterling annually. Of this sum, the revenue under the direct control of the Pesva was about twenty-eight millions of rupees”.

The major part of this revenue was spent on military operations garrisoning forts, equipping armies and maintaining the court and the feudatories. On account of their constant wars, the Pesvas

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1 Elphinstone to Lord Hastings, G. G., 18th June 1818, P. R. C. Vol.XIII, pp. 396-97.
could never rid themselves of debt Baji Rav I writing to his guru says (in one of his letters) that “mounting debts were his constant worry.”. The Diaries of the Pesvas show that the debts contracted by Balaji Baji Rav Pesva between 1740 and 1760 amounted to a crore and a half rupees. This Pesva always talked of bringing rivers of gold from north and south and effecting their confluence at Poona. The defeat at Panipat disorganized Maratha finances and Pesva Madhav Rav died with a debt of Rs. 24,00,000 hanging over his head. The last Pesva had apparently no debts to pay, and was able to collect a large private treasure of his own.

Nation building activities such as education, improvement of agriculture and industry, road-making, building of canals and culverts, public sanitation were conspicuous by their absence. Public roads were dirt-tracks which turned into quagmire and rivers became impassable during the rains. Where ferries were set up by enterprising persons, government swooped down to demand fees. According to Gordon, the first metalled road in Maharashtra was constructed in 1835. In consequence of poor communications passenger traffic was limited to the horse and palanquin, and goods traffic to the bullock. In difficult terrain the bullock was displaced by the human being. This limited exchange of goods and emphasised isolation.

The expenditure on the military in the ultimate analysis reached a part of the people; but this class—the soldiery—made little contribution to the national income. Some of the rulers distributed charities to Brahmans and holymen, but these eleemosynary grants whatever merit they might have conferred on the donors, helped neither the cause of learning nor led to increased production.¹

RELIGION.¹

Religion played an important part in the life of the mediaeval people and the people of Maharashtra were no exception to the rule. By sixth century India—north and south—had been culturally knit together and had come to share the same religious beliefs and ideas. The new Hinduism which had risen by absorbing the best in Buddhism turned its back on abstract nature worship and the accompanying sacrificial rites, and accepted the metaphysics of the Upanisads. The philosophical speculations, however, were reserved for the learned and the erudite. A simple form of worship, worship of idols, emblems of deities and relics of saints, found favour with the masses. The Smritis gave their blessings to this new form of worship and a great mythology in the form of Puranas was created to sustain it and to explain the universal order.

¹ Religious practices of the people is the subject-matter of much of Maratha poetry, right from Dnyanesvar to Ram Josi. Early British historians like Mill, Elphinstone, Duff devote a few pages to describe this aspect of the peoples’ life. The Gazetteers (old edition) give detailed description of the religious life of the community.
The basis of this religious fabric was that the great Divine Being pervaded the Universe, that the soul of every human being was part of that great spirit and it was his duty to seek perfection and reunion with Brahmā by undergoing a process of purification. The highest bliss—Mokṣa was the ultimate reward of the good, while the wicked were punished by being reborn in forms distant from the reunion. The soul which animated the body of the Brahmin was nearest to this state of bliss, provided he fulfilled the ordinances of the faith; but if he did not, his soul would be detained in purgatory after death until sufficient torture had been inflicted to expiate the sins and then sent back to reanimate some other form on earth. Deliverance from countless births a man could obtain by being born Brahmin and by winning merit to merge with the Ultimate. Sadhus and Sanyasis, by their extreme piety and renunciation, could however attain Mokṣa direct and escape being born over and over again. This encouraged a large number of people to turn to the orders of recluse and take to the yellow robe.

The Divine Being, however, was not the active agent who called the universe into existence and made it move. This was the work of Prakṛti. The Divine Nature urged by Prakṛti took the form of Brahma, the Creator, Visnu, the Preserver, and Siva, the Destroyer. Brahma, Visnu and Mahes, with their consorts, became incarnate, assumed a number of forms on the earth to fulfil their missions. These incarnations are the Avatāras. Besides the Avatāras, the Triad' produced a host of deities which amounted to thirty-three crores. Of these, only a few like Indra, the God of heavens, Varuna, the ruler of waters, Vayu, the lord of winds, Yama, the lord of Death, Kuber, the God of wealth and Kama, the God of love, were remembered; and fewer still like Ganapati, Kartikeya, Surya became the objects of veneration. Most of the temples in Maharāstra were dedicated to Siva, Visnu, Ganapati and Devi Bhavani. They occupied prominent places in towns, were raised on lonely peaks, by lakes and river-sides and studded the country-side.*

The ten Avatāras of Visnu are famous and include with the Fish the Tortoise, the great Boar, the Buddha who had revolted against Hinduism. Visnu appeared in these forms to destroy tyrants and to preserve his world order. His exploits as Saviour are the subject-matter of the two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and of the Puranas which came to be rendered in Marathi in the 16th and 17th centuries by Eknath, Mahipati, Sridhar and other Marathi poets and saints and were recited at Kathas and other religious gatherings which were very popular in old days. Visnu

* The following are the chief places of pilgrimage in Maharāstra: Aundha Naganath, Ghirsnesvar of Ellora, Vaijanath of Parali, Bhima Sankar and Tryam-bakesvar, all dedicated to Siva; Vithoba of Pandharpur and Kala Ram of Nasik dedicated to Visnu; Ganapati temples are at Morganv, Theur, Ranjanganv,s Lenyadri, Ozar, Siddhatek, Madh and Murud. Famous Devi temples are at Kolhapur, Tuljapur, Jogadica Amba, Mahur, Saptasrngi, Kurkamb, and Aundh. Famous Khandoba shrines are at Jejuri, Pali and Pemur.
was worshipped as Narayana with his spouse Laksmi or Rama with Sita by his side, Rama’s name was sacred and would be on the lips of a dying man. Ganapati was a god of happy omens and the remover of difficulties and would be invoked on all auspicious occasions. Siva’s cult was a popular one. Siva was worshipped in the form of the phallus, obviously a relief of the prehistoric past and a compromise of Brähmanism with pre-Aryan cults.

Siva’s consort Bhavani was as much an object of adoration as Siva himself. She is always represented in her beneficent form shown as a beautiful woman riding a tiger in a menacing attitude to destroy the demons of sin and darkness. With Khandoba, Bhavani occupies the position of the tutelary deity of the Marathas. Sivaji the founder of the Maratha state derived inspiration from the Goddess Bhavani. He had a shrine built in her honour at Pratapagad. Another famous temple dedicated to the Goddess stands at Tuljapur. Marathi ballads always begin with invocation to Bhavani.

Khandoba: Khandoba, literally “Sword Father” guarded the country. He was the “Isvar Dev” or Guardian Deity of the Deccan. As a guardian he is shown at his chief shrine at Jejuri, as a king, the great protector, and more often as horseman with a sword in his right hand, and his wife, Mhalsabai, sitting beside him. He was the chief household god of all Hindus in the Deccan from Brahmans to Mahars. His house image was always of metal, never of wood or of stone. He drove away the evil which caused sickness.

Maruti: Maruti, also called Hanuman, is the Monkey God. Very few villages in the Deccan were without their Maruti a rudely embossed monkey—figure, sometimes within the village and sometimes without but generally near the gate. He was supposed to be the guardian of the village and its crops. He was a special favourite of the celibate and the sportsman.

Equally important with the public or communal worship was the worship of the family deities. Every household would have a corner assigned to worship and here would be a small collection of the Aradhya Daivata, the Kulsvami or the tutelary deity, which in many cases would be Devi Bhavani or Khandoba. There would be small brass idols representing Balkrsna, Parvati and Ganapati, saligram representing Siva, and a few taks which represented the family ancestors. A Maratha after ablution in the morning would spend some time in the Puja before starting the work of the day. The higher castes spent more time and money over the daily rituals. Special days and occasions were marked for the public worship of particular deities by offering them incense, flowers and fruits and other gifts through Brahmin priests. The Ekadasi of Asadha and Kartika became occasions for pilgrimage to Pandharpur; Maha Siva Ratri was dedicated to Siva and there were special days for public worship of Rama, Ganapati and Dattatraya.

Sabhasad, Life of Siva Chatrapati, pp. 11, 23, 32, 37, 49.
The family priest or Upadhyaya advised the family about religious and social observances. But its keeper of conscience was a saintly person of repute. In Hindu religion Sadhus and sanyasis have always been held in respect on account of their selfless life and renunciation of worldly affairs. Some of these sanyasis would get such celebrity that people would flock round them for advice and instruction. Such a person was styled a Guru or a Mahapurus, Sivaji, the founder of the Maratha State, respected Ramadas and on one occasion made a gift of his kingdom to his Guru; he likewise respected Mauni Bava of Patgari and found time to visit him amidst his busy rounds of duties. Brahmendra Svami was the spiritual guide of the Pesva family and much respected at Sahu Raja’s court. Maratha chiefs sought his intercession in their affairs. Mahadji Sinde used to seek advice of a Muslim Pir Sah Mansur and was accustomed to prostrate himself at his feet daily.

Despite the general prevalence of Hindu beliefs the worship of pre-Aryan tribal gods continued to thrive. The general mass of the people were ridden by superstition and Brahmin priests did little to discourage queer ceremonies and strange rites. In villages, temples to Bhairoba and Jotiba were common. Bhairav was kept happy by application of oil and sendur and cured snake-bites. He also forecasted the success or failure of undertakings. Mhasoba, Vetal, Vaghoba, Satvai, Tukai were other godlings the villagers feared and worshipped. These aboriginal godlings had been transformed into manifestations of Siva and his consort, and were supposed to look after the health and welfare of the villagers. The nearby fields and orchards, and hills had their spirits to be appeased with buffaloes, goats and fowls, depending on their degree of malevolence. There was not a river ford or tank which was not haunted by spirits and ghosts. Even the gates and walls of forts were not free from their influence.¹

The Bhakti movement of the middle ages was a protest against the ritual of Brahmanism and the superstition of the masses. The supremacy of one god was the first creed with everyone of the saints. The various forms in which god was worshipped were believed to merge finally into one supreme providence. The grovelling concepts prevalent among the people, the aboriginal and village gods, their frightful rites and sacrifices were denounced in forceful language. In the annual concourses at Pandharpur and Jejuri men forget their caste distinctions and hailed each other as brothers united in a common endeavour. The movement had a general liberalizing influence on society and created a healthy democratic atmosphere, rare elsewhere in India.

STATE OF LEARNING.²

The Marathas, generally speaking, were an unlettered people. The priestly class studied a few religious tracts and memorised ritual

¹ Mss. Accounts of forts Rayagad, Sinhgad, Purandar, etc., in the Pesva Daftar.

² Based on Selection of Papers from the Records at the India House, vol, IV, evidence of Elphinstone, Thackeray, Briggs, Chaplin.
which enabled it to conduct religious worship at temples and at private houses and ceremonies on occasions of birth initiation, marriage, death, etc. The Puraniks read to the gatherings the stories from Puranas and mixed their recitation with philosophical dissertations about the nature of God, of the universe and of human destiny in the scheme. The rest of the Brahmins and Kayastha Prabhus were literate, but their learning did not go beyond the knowledge of reading, writing and a little arithmetic. Good handwriting and knowledge of accounts were looked on as great assets and found for the possessor a place in the establishment of a big inamdar, jagirdar or Mamlatdar of the district. If he had a patron at the court he would go to the capital and be absorbed in the central secretariat, the Daftier. The Pesva and the chiefs as a mark of their interest in learning would collect manuscript copies of religious tracts and the Puranas and would distribute charity to learned Brahmins once a year in the month of Sravan. The Sastri well-versed in Vedas got the highest reward of a sawl and a few hundred rupees, others got them in a descending scale. In the days of Nana Phadnis the Poona Government was annually spending Rs. 60,000 on the Sravan Daksina. The expenditure increased in the time of his successor, not because there was more learning, but the charity became indiscriminate.

This encouragement to Sanskrit learning made little impact on the life or the people, resulted in no mechanical improvements and brought no tangible gains to society. No attempt was made to know the phenomena of the physical world and stock the mind with useful knowledge. If the object of education is to set the mind free to inquire and to rationalise, the primitive type of education that was in vogue in the eighteenth century Maharashtra, could not achieve it. No great universities comparing with Oxford or Cambridge rose and no great development in philosophy, literature or political thought, took place. The result was a thickening gloom of superstition and an irrational fear of the unknown.

Rajwade has put the matter in a forceful manner in his Introduction to Volume I. He says “The fact of the matter was Maratha culture had become stagnant and showed itself impervious to new knowledge and new ideas. Learning of those days ran into three types—Vaidik, Sastrik and practical. The practical type of educated men found useful in administration and business of everyday life. The Vaidiks and Sastris received royal patronage while school teachers looked to popular support. Practical learning consisted of the knowledge of Three “R”s—reading writing and arithmetic. Bakhars of Maratha and “Muslim kings, tales of Vikram, Vetal, chronicles based on stories in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata or on the legendary accounts of Hindu and Muslim kings, knowledge of account-keeping, land measurements, of correct forms of address and a little religious poetry completed the stock-in-trade of a literary person of the day. Most of the Brahmins, traders and upper class Marathas acquired this type of learning. These three
classes had little knowledge of the world outside their personal experience. The geographical knowledge of even diplomats and soldiers did not extend beyond what they acquired by their personal exertion. These people were little aware of countries and people outside India. The rulers on account of their contacts with foreigners naturally came to know more. Compared to the wide extent of information of Western rulers, their knowledge was contemptible. There was none at the Pesva’s Court who showed awareness of the existence of European Sciences, none knew of schools, colleges, conferences, museums, associations in which study of critical sciences was encouraged.”

Superstitions.

Belief in omens and prognostics was common to all classes. Not only thunder, lightening hail-storm and earth quakes filled men’s mind with alarm but the hooting of an owl, chirping of a bird at an unusual hour or even twitching of the eye, frightened them and made them run to the priest to seek appeasement of the evil. Even forts and jagirs were supposed to suffer from the presence of evil spirits which could be exorcised with the help of priestly mediation.

In 1763 when Raghoba was besieging the fort of Miraj, Govind Hari Patvardhan was assured in his dream by the Pir of the place of ultimate victory. Raghoba often fasted and denied himself food so that his nephew whom he hated should come to harm, in 1774-75, ghosts played such havoc in Southern, Konkan that special officers were appointed to punish persons who had raised the spirits. The dead wife of Amrt Rav, son of Raghoba, took to walking at night and frightening people. These irrational fears were carried to an excess and continued to fominate the minds of men in Maharastra for a long time.