



## Changing attitude of the Rajputs towards the Marathas during the first half of the 18th Century

\* Miss. Lucky Khan

\* Research scholar, Centre of Advance study, Department of History, A.M.U. Aligarh

### ABSTRACT

*The 18<sup>th</sup> Century saw the far reaching changes in the history of Mughal India; with the growing feebleness of the Successors of Aurangzeb it became difficult to safeguard the Empire from the various opponents of the Empire. During this period the Marathas became so powerful that they had started encroaching into the Mughal territories both in the Deccan and the Northern India. In the Deccan their advances alarmed Nizam-ul-Mulk who had started safeguarding his interests and tried hard to stop them, while in the Northern front it was Jai Singh who had taken lead in checking their advances. The Marathas on the other hand were growing day by day and it became difficult to curb them, thus the policies of Rajput towards the Marathas changed according to the changing situations which suited to the present needs.*

**Keywords : Marathas, Rajput, Jai Singh, Peshwa, Gaddi, Maharana**

In the present paper an attempt has been made to bring into light the situations, which prompted the Rajputs to change their policies towards the Marathas and also their personal relations with the other Rajput states involving the Maratha question. There were occasions on which the Rajput opposed the Marathas with full force and vigour, while on the other they had to conciliate with them for their own security reasons.

By the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century, the decline of the Mughal power in India had set in. In the last twenty five years of his life Aurangzeb tried hard to subdue the Marathas, but he was not successful.<sup>1</sup> In 1711 A.D, Maratha Sardar Ganga crossed *Narbada* and after exacting twenty five thousand rupees from the people on the way, he reached as far as Ujjain.<sup>2</sup>

This and successive advances of the Marathas into the imperial territory was alarming not only for the Mughal Emperor but also for the neighbouring states like Mewar. Malwa thus became a vital and sensitive point in the defence strategy of the mughals, and the survival of Mewar very largely depended on effective and timely protection of this border province.<sup>3</sup>

The ever extending sweep of Maratha operations and their growing demands and aspirations caused serious concern to the Delhi court and to the various semi-independent or autonomous princes and Nawabs, such as the Kachhwahas of Amber, the Rathors of Jodhpur, the Bundelas, Sadat Khan of Awadh and Nizam-ul-Mulk of the Deccan.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1725 and 1730, the Maratha advance not only to Malwa, Bundelkhand and Gujarat, but also into Rajputana. In 1725, the Marathas started hovering on the outskirts of kotah - Bundi, but found an entry only after 1732.<sup>5</sup>

Jai Singh dominated the affairs of Amber, from his succession to the Gaddi in 1700 A.D to his death in 1743 A.D. His attitude towards the Marathas during this long period underwent several changes and the other Rajput rulers as well changed their policy towards the Marathas with changing situations. In 1701, at the sieges of khelna, he did good service against the Marathas, and was rewarded by a rise in his *mansab*. Subsequently he performed good service in guarding khandesh and Malwa from the depredations of the Marathas, and was nominated the *Naib Subedar* of Malwa by Bidar Bakht but Aurangzeb disapproved his appointment.<sup>6</sup>

As the governor of *Malwa* from 1713 to 1715, Jai Singh put up a stout resistance to the Marathas, and inflicted a crushing defeat upon them, so that the Marathas kept away from Malwa for two years. Jai Singh's absence from Malwa after 1715 encouraged the Marathas to resume their raids.<sup>7</sup>

Jai Singh did not come into direct contact with the Marathas again till October 1729, when he was appointed the governor of Malwa for the second time. In 1732, Jai Singh became the governor of Malwa for the third time, and accepted the Maratha claims for *Chauth*. It is obvious that between 1719- 1732, a big change took place in *jai* Singh's attitude towards the Marathas. With the help of the mass of Persian and Marathi records available to us, we can determine the time and causes of these striking changes.<sup>8</sup> It appears that a Maratha envoy lived at Delhi almost without a break after Balaji's visit of 1719. The names of Malhar Dadaji Barwe, Anand Rao Sumant, Dadaji Pant Nana and Mahadeo appeared in this connection.<sup>9</sup>

The Marathas were invited into Marwar by Mukund Singh and Rai Singh, the younger brothers of Abhay Singh, after a civil war between these two and Abhay Singh following the murder of Ajit Singh in 1724. Abhay Singh and Mukund Singh, it seems, even proposed a matrimonial alliance with the Marathas.<sup>10</sup> Abhay Singh lived quietly at Jodhpur between 1724-1730, when he was appointed as the governor of Gujarat in place of Sarbuland Khan.<sup>11</sup>

Abhay Singh perceived at once that he could not resist the Maratha claims for *Chauth* with his limited resources, hence he confirmed the grant of *Chauth* to Bajji Rao and tried to befriend him in order to expel with his help the other Maratha *sardars*.<sup>12</sup> This was followed by a meeting with Bajji Rao in 1731, in return of 13 lakh as *Chauth*, the latter promised to oust the other Maratha chiefs like kanthaji kadam and Pilaji from Gujarat.<sup>13</sup>

But Abhay Singh was soon disillusioned. The *Peshwa* rendered him no help once he had defeated his rival, the *Senapati* Dabhade, At Dabhoi in 1731. The Gaekwads continued to encroach on Gujarat. In 1732, Abhay Singh treacherously murdered Pilaji and seized Baroda, but he failed to gain any lasting advantage, and after losing Baroda in 1734, retired to Delhi where he joined hands with the party led by the *Wazir* Qamruddin Khan, in urging armed resistance to the Marathas.<sup>14</sup>

Thus a sharp divergence came to exist between the attitudes of Jai Singh and Abhay Singh towards the Marathas.<sup>15</sup> Jai Singh's desire to maintain his position in Malwa, even in collaboration with the Marathas. An agreement was signed with Shahu in 1730, by the *Wakil* of Shahu, Jadu Rai. His proposal was to grant "*Tankwah jagir*" worth ten lakh of rupees to Khushal Singh adopted son of Raja Shahu.<sup>16</sup> The Maratha menace in Rajputana became so acute as to drive home the truth that only by union could the rulers defend their states. Raja Jai Singh called a meeting of *Maharana Jagat Singh II* of Nagor, Zorawar Singh of Bikaner, Durjansal of Kotah, Dalal Singh of Bundi, Gopal pal of Karoli, Raj Singh of Kishangadh and other big and small *Rajas* at Hurda, a village in *Mewar*, on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1734 to work out a joint plan of action against the Marathas.<sup>17</sup>

It was agreed in the conference that all the participants would help each other in their difficulties, that they would not employ unfaithful persons, and that all of them would assemble at Rampura with their contingents after the rains to launch a campaign to drive the Maratha out of Rajputana, and if anyone of them could not come in person, he should send his heir or a *Sardar* of note.<sup>18</sup> The agreement however proved still born as the decisions taken were never implemented. Rajput rulers did not assemble at Rampura after the rains of 1734, and preferred to join the imperial offensive against the Marathas, instead of mounting one of their own.<sup>19</sup> In the winter of 1734, the Mughal government decided to drive out the Marathas from Malwa, Bundelkhand and southern Rajputana. There was hardly any chance of Mughal victory over them. Jai Singh thus favoured negotiations, but he was opposed by Sadat Khan and other critics. Jai Singh invites the *Peshwa* for talks, Nizam-ul-Mulk opposed Jai Singh's move but the Emperor ignores his request.<sup>20</sup>

After 1735, the Marathas had begun to attach increasingly high importance to the maintenance of cordial ties with Jai Singh whose help and good will they needed in their negotiations with the Mughal government.<sup>21</sup> When in 1735, Radha Bai, mother of Baji Rao, arrived in Jaipur, Jai Singh came out of his capital to receive her. She stayed in the royal palace.<sup>22</sup> In February 1736, the *Peshwa* reached Jahazpur where he met Jai Singh.<sup>23</sup> Between February 25 and April 30, Jai Singh and Baji Rao met a number of times, and had prolonged discussions to bring about a lasting settlement between the Marathas and Mughal government.<sup>24</sup> The Emperor accepted the terms of the *Peshwa* and also agreed to give two lakh of rupees to Chimaji Appa, as he was now loyal to the Emperor.<sup>25</sup>

The Maratha had become menace to Mewar territory as early as 1724. Maharana Sangram Singh and Sawai Jai Singh also apprized the *Nizam* with the situation regarding the Maratha raids into various parts of Rajasthan.<sup>26</sup> These moves of the Maharana naturally alarmed the Marathas, so Shahu sent his two officers in Mewar to discuss the whole matter with *Maharana*.<sup>27</sup> Otherwise there existed cordial and friendly relation between Mewar and Marathas as Maharana Sangram Singh II took in his service some of the Marathas.<sup>28</sup> But these good relations proved of no avail and Marathas showed no sign of relaxation. The *Maharana* warned Jai Singh against the

Marathas.<sup>29</sup> It appears that Sawai Jai Singh not only gave an assurance of help to Mewar but also persuaded Durjansal of Kota to join the alliance against the Marathas.<sup>30</sup> But in spite of the defensive alliance, the Maratha incursion continued to unchecked.<sup>31</sup> In 1728, Raja of Shahpur attacked the Maratha camp.<sup>32</sup> The Maratha sustained heavy losses and escaped to the place of safety with great difficulty.<sup>33</sup>

In the same year the vassals of Mewar, Banswara and Durgapur allowed the Marathas to realize 50,000 and 1, 13,000, from their territory. The *Maharana* knew well that these states were ever desirous of severing their ties, and overthrowing their allegiance to Mewar.<sup>34</sup> Shahu had sent a *Parwana* to Raghujai and Kanhoji asking them not to create disturbance in Mewar territory in view of the friendly relations existing between Raja Sawai Jai Singh, Rana Sangram Singh and himself.<sup>35</sup>

Sawai Jai Singh was keen to enhance his position in Rajasthan. The first victim of his aggrandisement was Budh Singh of Bundi whom Jai Singh replaced with his son in law Dalal Singh in 1730. Pratap Singh Jadav, the elder brother went to south, and met *Peshwa* for Budh Singh's favour.<sup>36</sup> In 1734, Sindhia and Holkar restored the authority of Budh Singh on Bundi. But soon after Jai Singh restored Dalal Singh to the '*Gaddi*' of Bundi.<sup>37</sup> The loss of Malwa to the Marathas coupled with their interference in the Bundi succession case had dawned on the Rajput rulers. They felt that the weak and falling Mughal power is incapable of resisting or even restraining Maratha expansion and they realized the supreme necessity of shouldering the responsibility of self defence.<sup>38</sup>

In September 1741, Malwa had finally granted to the *Peshwa* Balaji Baji Rao. This brought the Marathas to the very borders of Rajasthan and the situation of Mewar became all more precarious.<sup>39</sup> Sawai Jai Singh died on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1743, and Ishwari Singh who was then at Jaipur succeeded to '*Gaddi*' of Jaipur,<sup>40</sup> and he was given due recognition not only by the Mughal Emperor but also by his neighbouring Rajput rulers. But this was a great disappointment to the *Maharana*.<sup>41</sup> Ishwari Singh came and sought the support of Marathas, which had far reaching effects on the situation.<sup>42</sup>

Thus began the injurious practice of helping the Rajput chiefs one against another without care and caution, by receiving heavy bribes from them.<sup>43</sup> The *Maharana* sent his *Wakil* Kaniram in 1746 to obtain the support of *Peshwa*.<sup>44</sup> The *Wakil* offered an amount of fifteen lakh if effective military help was given to get the *Jagir* of twenty four lakh for Madho Singh.<sup>45</sup>

Thus on the basis of the present study, we can conclude that there were mutual dissensions and conflicts among the various Rajput chiefs and such internal dissensions proved a welcome opportunity for the Maratha interference in Rajputana. The Rajput rulers started changing their policy towards the Marathas according to their own need, and play them against one another. They tried to befriend them on one occasion and shun them on the other. Thus the relationship of the Rajputs with the Marathas was not a permanent feature but kept changing.

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