Chapter II.

BACKGROUND

The land and its people :

The present state of Maharashtra, ( Formed after the bifurcation of bilingual Bombay State on the 1st May 1960 ) practically includes, all the people whose mother-tongue is Marathi. The present Maharashtra includes eight districts of Vidarbha ( An ancient known from the days of Lord Krishna ) five districts of Marathwada, North and South Konkan and Maharashtra proper. It lies between the 16th and the 22nd degree of north latitude, extending from Daman to Goa on the West; the Satpura range forms its northern boundary; an irregular line joining Chanda to Goa and passing through Nanded, Bidar, Shalapur and Belgaum marks off the South-east limits of the region. To the north of Maharashtra are the rivers Tapi and Narmada, to the extreme south is Warna and to the East is Sina. The territory of Maharashtra is divided into two regions by Sahyadri. Konkan- narrow land between the Western Ghats of Sahyadri and Indian Ocean, and Desh - The eastern slope of Sahyadri. The land of Maharashtra, generally speaking 'yields to much labour a bare measure of subsistence'. The broken rocky nature of the land has made travelling difficult, in the period under our review. The people of Maharashtra were generally poor. There were no rich courts, popular cities or thriving marts to attract merchants. Nor were there regular occasions for the march of large bodies of soldiers as from one province of a
compact and mighty Empire to another ... In their rugged and inhospitable nooks the natives ( Maharashtrians ) had found safety and peace, while the richer plains had been the scenes of revolution and rapine ... The Maratha peoples' inborn love of independence and isolation was greatly helped by the nature. It is but natural, that in such land the people of Maharashtra were economically poor, simple, hard-working. There was no feudalism worth the name in Maharashtra which we witness elsewhere.

The Character of the people :

The earliest reference in respect of the character of the people of Maharashtra is found in the writings of Yuan Chwang. This famous Chinese traveller, who visited this part of India in the 7th century A.D. wrote - "The inhabitants are proud, spirited and warlike, grateful for favours and revengeful for wrongs, self-sacrificing towards suppliants in distress and sanguinary to death with any who treated them insultingly." The soil and climate of Maharashtra is such that it helps develop 'self-reliance, courage,

1. Shivaji and His Times - Sir Jadunath Sarkar, pages 4-5
2. Watter's Yuan Chwang : 239.
perseverence, a stern simplicity, a rough straightforwardness, a sense of social equality and consequently pride in the dignity of man as man'. The nature of the soil, climate, social life and religious principles preached by Maharashtrian saints shaped and influenced the political life of Maharashtra. Dr. Choksey in his book states that 'this extraordinary people who contested for the supremacy of India with Britain were known to their enemies as a people diminutive in stature, of unparalleled cunning, brave, vindictive and possessing more talent and independent principles than any other people of Hindustan. A people who rose from a state of rustic obscurity and rigorous vassalage to become a mighty power must have within them the seeds of greatness. Their national consciousness burst forth into unquenchable ardour that set fire to the mighty fabric of the once proud and glorious Mughal Empire. It was the wild, predatory, almost semi-barbarous Maratha soldier who accomplished the marvels of conquest accompanied by the polished and insidious Brahmin, whose specious politeness and astonishing command of temper often left European hypocrisy in the shade ... wild, turbulent, independent spirited, the Maratha heart ever yearned for leadership and adventure. Cunning and unscrupulous in conquest, they were given to perform the most daring feat with incalculable coldness and astonishing courage.'

3. A History of British Diplomacy at the Court of Peshwas (1766-1818)
Muslim aggression:

Muslim aggression in the Deccan started in the beginning of the fourteenth century A.D. Rajput Kingdoms were defeated by Muslims and therefore Muslim conquerors were penetrating deep into the south. Malikaffar - one Sardar of Allauddin - defeated Ramdeorao Yadav of Deogiri, arrested him and was sent to Delhi. He was made vassal king by Allauddin. Shankardeo, son of Ramdeorav who became the king after the death of Ramdeorao in 1309 A.D. refused to pay annual 'Nazarana' to the Emperor at Delhi. Enraged by this act on the part of Shankardeo, Malikaphur marched towards Deogiri. Shankardeo was killed. And so ended the powerful dynasty in Maharashtra. Dnyaneshwar, the Saint poet of Maharashtra, has praised the king of Deogiri, i.e. Ramachandra for his just rule. Yadav dynasty of Deogiri had held sway over the vast territory of Maharashtra. Even the stone inscriptions, depicting the generosity of the king Ramachandra have been found in the territory upto Mysore.

New Problems:

The death of Shankardeo and the end of the Yadav dynasty of Deogiri created a political vacuum in Maharashtra. The challenges which the people of Maharashtra had to face were not merely political, but social, cultural, military and religious also. The problems can be enumerated as follows:
(1) Muslims were advancing with a tremendous force, with sword in one hand and Koran in another. The destruction of 'Kafir' was their sole aim. Forcible conversion of Hindus was also taking place. There was a danger that the lower strata of the Hindu society could have been easily induced to accept Islam. The problem, therefore, was, how to keep unity in society.

(2) With the advance of the Muslims, certain cultural traditions, peculiar to Muslims only, gradually began to spread in Maharashtra. For example certain festivals were observed in which Hindus also began to participate. There was a change in dress also. The use of Persian language increased. Therefore, these changes created cultural problems.

(3) Hindu society was a caste-ridden society and therefore, inequality in social status, was sanctioned by religion. On the other hand Muslim society was based upon the concept of Universal Brotherhood. The problem, therefore, was, how to secure unity amongst various castes among Hindus; and how to keep the Hindu religion safe from the onslaught of Muslims.

(4) The political void created by the destruction of Deogiri kingdom, created political problems. There was no strong ruler or any other monarch, capable
enough to face the Muslim aggression. There were many petty kingdoms in Maharashtra, which continued to resist Muslims for the next three hundred years. Shivaji was the first powerful Hindu king to fill the Void. Therefore, the political aim or policy of the petty states was to secure maximum independence in practice and to keep the political aspirations of the people of Maharashtra, alive.

(5) The superiority of Muslim arms and war strategy was an accepted fact. Therefore, there was a necessity to adopt a new technique of war-fare, which Maratha army adopted in the 17th century.

Answers to these Problems:

The problem of keeping the unity of the society was tackled in three different manners or ways. The first and the best way to keep unity in society is to have a common enemy and to keep the fire of hatred burning in the minds of native Hindus. The second way is to bridge the gaps between the various castes through the introduction of social reforms. On the ethical side it was very easy to stress the equality amongst people. All are equal before God. The third way is to castigate, to look down upon those individuals who surrendered themselves to the Muslims. No noteworthy attempts, by any of the Maharashtrian Saints, were ever made to attempt the synthesis of these two religious communities, viz. Hindu and Muslim.
Namdeo, Gora Kumbhar, Nivrittinath, Dnyaneshwar, Chokhamela, Mudhesh Chandadeo, Mahalingdas, and several others including the famous Ramdas and Tukaram, are the noteworthy Maharashtrian Saint-Poets who have worked in the same manner mentioned above. Muslims indirectly helped in forging the unity among Maharashtrians by their normal deeds - i.e. destruction of temples, forcible conversions, atrocities committed by them towards women. Namdeo writes in his Gatha "The unclean Yavanas (Muslims) have become kings, sins are being committed everywhere; hence, there hath been Divine manifestation to blot out the evil of Kali. Nama says, The people, having found the Yavanas unbearable, are singing the praise of God: for these are ever the means of redemption - " Namdeo. (Tr. by S.K. Sharma.)

Dnyaneshwar stressed the following principles - (a) true love towards one's own people (b) firm faith in one's own religion and (c) utmost loyalty in one's own country. Equality has been stressed by all the Maharashtrian saints belonging to different castes in unquestionable terms. Knowledge and learning in Maharashtra was not limited to the priest - class alone, i.e. Brahmins only. Education was open to all the castes. The very fact that saint-poets belonging to lower castes have not only been able to read and write but were also able to produce excellent literature reflecting

5. Namdevachi Gatha
the maturity of thought, proves the statement beyond doubt. This is not merely an accident. Sawanta Mali, Visoba Khechar, Narahari Sonar, Banka Mahar, Chokha, Koormadas, are Marathi saints who belonged to different lower castes of Hindus. All these poet saints of Maharashtra have tried their level best to bridge the gap between various castes of the Hindu society.

The attempts on the part of these sons of Maharashtra might not have resulted into achieving perfect unity among Mahara-

The most powerful tool in the hands of the Maharashtrians...
common people and saint-poets alike, - was the suppression and destruction of temples etc., by Muslims. It kept the anti-Muslim feeling burning for ever. Though the principle of Universal Brotherhood has been accepted by the Muslims, in practice Muslims have not observed this principle even in respect of fellow Muslims. There are many references of injustice done to the Hindus, whenever there was a case between Hindus and Muslims. In 1606 Muslim conquerors burnt all the valuable documents. In 1611 there was a conflict between Narsoji Kumaji Jagdale and Babaji bin Yakubji Musalman. It was a property conflict. Formerly, it was decided that Hindus and Muslims should divide the property equally among themselves. Muslims, later on, have broken the tradition. Muslims were warned, but it was of no use. The murders followed. The murderer happened to be a convert Muslim. The death sentence was proper for him but he was released (reprieved) by the panchayat, because the king was also a Muslim. The letters 85, 139, 172, 175 of Patrasarsangraha vividly describe how Muslims have looted parts of Gujrat, Bombay etc. Letter No. 332 dated 4th July 1631 describes how Poona was looted and burnt by Muslims. In letter No. 2360 (Vol. I) there is a reference of

8. Patrasarsangraha - Part I. - page 7
9. Patrasarsangraha -
10. "
11. "
A Muslim Sardar who is praying to Mahammud. He says "that for your favour I have destroyed 33 temples." This happened in 1566. In a legal document of land purchase there is a reference to how Muslims have wantonly destroyed a village and have arrested the entire population. This took place in June 1629. Another incident, which took place on the 21st August 1629, is referred to, in letter No. 2423, narrates the story of how people fled from the village because Muslims harassed them. In another letter there is an information about the construction of a new Musjid by Ranadulla Khan. It states that, at Santa Bennur, there was a temple of Rangnath. It was totally destroyed and a huge and magnificent Masjid was erected on the same place.

The reference to Muslim atrocities amongst private correspondence, semi-legal documents, clearly shows how anti-Muslim spirit generally prevailed in Maharashtra. It is no wonder, if we come across the same feeling in the writings of Maratha saints. For example the biography of Mudhesh Changdeo narrates how the king of Bedar has harassed Brahmins, how the temple of Pandharpur was destroyed and a Masjid erected on that place, how Badwas have taken

12. Patrasarsangraha - Part 1, 71
13.
14. Patrasarsangraha -
15. Patrasarsangraha -
16.
have taken the idol of God Pandurang to a secret place.

He further expresses his desire "that the temple should be restored, by destroying Masjid; because Pandharpur is our ancient city." Kamadas has also narrated the atrocities committed by the Muslims.

The political void created by the destruction of the kingdom of Deogiri produced three different streams in the political life of Maharashtra. The first is the continuation of the struggle against Muslims. The second is the establishment of Bahamani Sultanate in Deccan; and the third is the establishment of the Empire of Vijayanagar.

Harpaldeo, the last king of Deogiri, was flayed alive, decapitated and his head fixed above the gate of his own capital in 1318, by Mubarak Shah and thus ended the powerful dynasty at Deogiri. Yet this was not the end of the fight against Muslims. Local rulers, to name a few, the king of Khelna, Rayri, Kanas of Sonkhed, Hoysals of Warargal, Ballals of Dwarasamudra, Shirkas, Durves of Khandesh, kings of Ashirgad and Baglan, continued their struggle against the Muslim rulers for a period of nearly hundred and fifty years. But these individual struggle against powerful Muslims was of no use. There was no leader worth the name, who could unite all the different forces under the national or religious banner to fight against Muslims. A leader like

18. S.R. Sharma - The Founding of Maratha freedom page 41.
Shivaji was the need of this time. Because 'a stitch in time would have saved more than nine. That the Maratha failure was due to the fatal lack of leadership is amply demonstrated by the subsequent happenings.

As soon as the first phase of Muslim conquest of the Deccan was over, there appeared on the political horizon two distinct groups. Muslims were now divided into two groups. (1) Muslims belonging to Delhi and usually outsiders, i.e. those who hailed from Persia and other Muslim states. (2) Deccani Muslims. The sovereign authority of the Delhi Sultanate was now challenged by the Muslims of Deccan.

Hindus were certainly happy to help Deccani Musalmans. The massacre of Chakan, near Poona, which took place in 1445, was the result of this internal conflict. Many northern Indian Muslims were massacred by Hindus and Muslims of Deccan. This internal conflict ultimately culminated into the establishment of Bahamani (Brahmani) kingdom at Gulbarga. The Bahamani kingdom was aided by the native princes of the Deccan, and from several circumstances in the conduct of war, particularly the desultory plan adopted by the insurgents (who founded the kingdom), which always required the aid of native inhabitants of any country, there is strong presumption of their having contributed more to its success.

19. S.R. Sharma - The founding of Maratha freedom. page 43.
than the Mussulman historian was aware of, or perhaps was willing to allow.

Vijayanagar :

The rise of Vijayanagar in 1336, was a great solace to Hindus in Deccan. Vijayanagar was founded for the protection of cows, gods and Brahmins. This was exactly the aim of Marathas, who later established their independent national state. Vijayanagar, gradually developed into a mighty Empire, which defended Hindu civilization for nearly two centuries and a quarter. The destruction of Vijayanagar Empire in 1565 again created the political vacuum. Bahamani kingdom was also divided among five kingdoms. During this period the Mughal power at Delhi was gradually becoming more and more powerful. The division of Bahamani Empire gave opportunity to many Maratha Sardars to show their skill as a warrior, administrator, politician. Many a prominent Maratha Sardar have saved and served Muslim rulers during this period. Shahaji was one of the most important Sardars of Bijapur Darbar.

Superiority of Armaments :

The defeat of the Marathas of Deogiri was not due to the lack of fighting spirit, valour, courage or even military strategy. Muslims were successful not because they were

20. Grant Duff - History of the Marathas.
superior in these qualities, but because they had superior armaments. Their artillery was superior to the Marathas. Marathas were fighting with swords and arrows. This was useless before the artillery fire. Even the defeat of the Rajputs at the hands of Muslims is not due to any superior internal quality of Muslims, but superiority of armaments. These very Marathas were able to humble a mighty emperor like Aurangzeb because of the new tactic of war-fare - hit and run - which they had adopted. This military factor must also be taken into consideration.

Taking into consideration the background described above, it will be very easy to understand how the spirit of nationalism, Maharashtra Dharma spread all over the Maharashtra. The basis of the new state was partly religious and partly political. In this background, the seeds of future development can be seen. The establishment of the national independent state (Swarajya) in 1674 and quasi-federal state in 1719 are but the natural consequences of different movements started in Maharashtra from the 13th century onwards.

In this chapter, we had briefly reviewed the causes of the rise of Maratha polity - the background and the circumstances which ultimately led to the establishment of an independent sovereign national state of Maharashtra under Shivaji. We shall enumerate the causes of the same in the next chapter.