CHAPTER IV

Sringeri and the Maratha Ruling Houses

Introduction

The Sringeri Matha had connections not only with the ruling families of Karnataka like Vijayanagara and Kaladi but also with the Maratha Ruling Houses of the Deccan and the North during the 18th and 19th centuries. In the Maratha country, wherever the Gurus travelled, the Peshwas, the Maharajas, the Chiefs and the people received them warmly and sought their blessings. The Maratha Ruling Houses made gifts to the Sringeri Matha and bestowed privileges on the Gurus.

Sources

The correspondence between Sringeri and the Maratha Ruling Houses like the Peshwas, Ghorpades, the Sindias, the Holkars, the Bhonsles, the Pawars etc., helps us to know about the relation between the Sringeri Matha and the Marathas. There are 25 Marathi letters, in the Selections from the Records of the Sringeri Mutt, dating from A.D.1738 to A.D. 1894. These letters, bearing different dates, were
written by different Maratha rulers to their subordinate officers and to the Jagadgurus. Similarly, there are over 40 letters spread over about 14 kadatas, most of them in Marathi and a few in Sanskrit, and the script used in either case is Kannada. Normally, the letters received from the Marathas are in Marathi and the letters despatched from the Matha are in Sanskrit. The language, style and contents of the kadatas to a great extent resemble those of the letters recorded in the Selections from the Records of the Sringeri Mutt. If the Peshwa Daftars are properly ransacked, it is hoped to find many more letters pertaining to our study.

Sri Satchidananda Bharati II and Shivaji II

The Sringeri Matha came in active association with the Maratha Ruling Houses during the pontificate of Sri Satchidananda Bharati II (A.D. 1705 - A.D. 1741), 27th in the line. In the Guruvamsakāvya, there is a reference to the valuable presents sent by Shivaji II, son of Rājāram, to the Guru. The letter from Sambhu Chhatrapati of the Kolhapur line to the Sringeri Matha, dated A.D. 1738-39, states that the Chhatrapati sanctioned a State grant of 200 Benas a year to the Matha for worship and Naivedya.
Sri Satchidananda Bhāratī II wrote in his letter to Sri Satchidananda Bhāratī II dated Saka 1661 (A.D. 1739), Bājirao I (A.D. 1720 - A.D. 1740), the Peshwa writes that the persons named Sri Subrao Konheri, Sri Ramachandra Bhat Purāṇik and Mallāri Madhav, had willingly donated certain irrigated fertile lands situated in Umarau (present Amarāvati) of Poona province and the entire land near Gaṅgāthādi to the Matha, further requesting the Guru to visit and accept the agrapuja every year at their places. This land grant is made for the well being of mankind.

As mentioned earlier, much to the embarrassment of Sri Satchidananda Bhāratī II, two Vīraśaiva mathas were established by a minister of Śomāśekhara Nāyaka II. The Śriṅgērī Guru as a sign of protest went on a pilgrimage and was welcomed by the Madhva mathas in Uḍīpi. He then retired to Hālādi. Peshwa Bājirao, who was then campaigning in the Karnāṭaka country, sent a message to the Nāyaka of Keḷādi to have the Vīraśaiva mathas in Śriṅgērī removed, and the neighbouring Karnāṭaka Chiefs also urged him to make it easy for the Guru to return to Śriṅgērī. The Nāyaka issued orders for the removal of the mathas and Sri Satchidananda Bhāratī returned to Śriṅgērī.
In his letter, dated A.D. 1739-40, Bājirao I directed that the Śrīṅgērī Matha should have first place in socio-religious honours such as agrapuja.

Bālāji Bājirao, 3rd Peshwa (A.D. 1740 - A.D. 1761), sent from his camp on the banks of the Kṛṣṇa, valuable offerings to Śrī Saradāmbā and the Guru. The Peshwa during his stay on the banks of the Tungabhadrā, in his own handwriting wrote a letter to Śrī Abhinava Satāhānanda Bhāratī I (A.D. 1741 - A.D. 1767), requesting him to pay a visit to his place and bless him. In another letter to the Guru, the Peshwa wrote that he was extremely happy that the holy personage had visited his place along with his people and blessed them.

Bālāji Bājirao's two letters, one addressed to Śrī Abhinava Satāhānanda Bhāratī of Śrīṅgērī, and the other to a person named Malhārī Pant of the same place, would lead us to an inference that there was a tussle between the Śrīṅgērī Matha and the Muḷuvāgil Matha. The Peshwa received complaints from both the mathas. He wrote to the Śrīṅgērī Guru, stating that he had come to know that the latter was being put to trouble by the Svāmi of Muḷuvāgil Matha and requested him to send Rājēśṛī Malhārī Pant to him immediately to settle the matter.
Simultaneously, the Peshwa wrote another letter to Malhāri Pant, stating that he was informed by the Svāmi of the Muluvagil Matha that the Śrīṅgērī Guru troubled the latter, which, of course, he did not believe to be a fact. However, the Peshwa requested Malhāri Pant to come over to his place to clarify the entire matter. These two letters, besides indicating the Peshwa's judicial mind, also indicate his reverence for the Śrīṅgērī Guru and his Matha. This is confirmed by his another binnavattale to the Guru, wherein, he refers to the Guru's pilgrimage to Rāmēśvara (Setu-vātre) and acknowledges the receipt of vibhūti, mantrēkṣate, gandha and prasāda. In return the Peshwa sent valuable presents to the Guru.

The next Peshwa, Mādhavrao I (A.D. 1761 - A.D. 1772), continued the contacts with the Śrīṅgērī Matha. The letters, which the Peshwa wrote to Triyambakrao Śivahosvāmi Gōsāvi, Triyambakrao Mahipat Gōsāvi, Mahādī Nilakanṭha, Naro Śaṅkar Rāje Bahaddur Gōsāvi, Gōvind Harīsvāmi Gōsāvi, Sakhārām Bhagavant Svāmi Gōsāvi and Fatehsinh Gaikwād are of immense value. They show his reverence for the Śrīṅgērī Jagadgurus and the Matha. The Peshwa instituted an annual grant for agrapuja (the highest mark of reverence) to Śrī Abhinava Satchidānanda Bāhatī I.
The Guru went to Poona in A.D. 1760-1, in response to an invitation from Raghunāthrao, uncle of the Peshwa. From Poona, Śrī Abhinava Satchidānanda Bhārati went to Nasik, where he breathed his last. Peshwa Mādhavrao liquidated the debts that the Achārya had incurred during his stay in Nāsik.20

The next Guru Śrī Narasimha Bhārati VII (A.D. 1767 - A.D. 1770), also stayed in Nāsik and breathed his last there itself. At that time, Mādhavrao and Nizam Ali were at war with Hyder. Owing to the disturbed political conditions in Karnāṭaka,21 the Guru could not take charge of the Matha in Śrīṅgerī. Thus Nāsik became a centre for Śrī Abhinava Satchidānanda Bhārati I and Śrī Narasimha Bhārati VII, to propagate the essence of Dharma. For a period of ten years, it attracted devotees from all over India. Between A.D. 1761 and A.D. 1772, Mādhavrao I gradually enhanced the annual State grant to Śrīṅgerī Matha from two hundred rupees to fifteen hundred rupees.22

Peshwa Mādhavrao, in his letter to Nājesārī Fatehsinh Gaikwād Samser Bahaddur Gosāvī, wrote saying that the Śrīṅgerī Svāmī was a Jagadguru for all and was worthy of reverence and it was befitting on their part to worship him. The Peshwa further asked Fatehsinh to issue orders
in his Taluk to offer agarpūja to the Jagadguru.²³

Sri Satchidananda Bharati III (A.D. 1770 - A.D. 1814), had also close connections with the Maratha Ruling Houses. An unfortunate incident took place during his pontificate. In the course of the campaigns of the Third Anglo-Mysore war (A.D. 1790-2), Parasurām Bhau, the Maratha general, marched on Bidnur. Piṅḍāris and similar marauders accompanying the army led by Raghunāthrao Patwardhan foolishly plundered Sringeri, looted the temples and desecrated the holy shrine of Sāradā (A.D. 1791). Brahmin priests were killed in the affray; and the loot that was carried away was of the value of sixty lakhs of rupees.²⁴ The kadatas²⁵ of the Sringeri Matha shed further light on the incident and the subsequent actions taken by the Peshwa to redress the Matha's grievances.

Peshwa Mādhavrao Narāyan (popularly known as Sawai Mādhavrao, (A.D. 1774 - A.D. 1795), wrote a letter²⁶ to Parasurām Chandra Svāmī (Parasurām Bhau²⁷), stating that the Lambāṇi (a tribal community) and Piṅḍārī²⁸ warriors of his contingent made off with Chandramaulišvara linga, Ratnagarbha Gaṇapati, images of gold and copper, copper vessels, elephants, horses etc. of the Sringerī Matha. The Peshwa further wrote that compensation should be given to
the Guru and the looted articles should be returned and receipt obtained. In reply to this, Parasurām Bhau promised the Peshwa to recover the looted articles and return them to the Guru.  

Similarly, the Peshwa wrote another letter to an officer named Rajesṛī Raghunāthrao Nilabhaṭṭa telling him about the plunder of the Sringerī Matha by the Pinḍāris of Parasurām Bhau's contingent and the subsequent observance of a fast by the Svāmī on the bank of the Tungabhadra. The Peshwa ordered him to take necessary action and give compensation to the Svāmī. However, the kadatas do not mention the actual return of the looted articles to the Matha.

The letter from Peshwa Mādhavrao II to Parasurām Bhau, and his positive reply to the Peshwa, pertaining to the loot of the Sringerī Matha by the Pinḍāris, clearly indicates the Marāṭhas' regard for the Jagadgurus. The Peshwa's letters reveal his keen interest and sincerity in giving compensation to the Matha. The positive reply from Parasurām Bhau to the Peshwa would lead to an impression that the foolish plunder of Sringerī was not due to any deliberate intention on his part, but a result of the predatory habits of the Pinḍāris in his contingent.
But the incident as such was certainly an unhappy one. It was highly regrettable that the massacre of the Brahmans and the loot of such a distinguished Matha could not be prevented by Parasuram Bhau, the commandant of the Peshwa. Thus from the kadatas it can be surmised that the loot was accidental. Whereas G.S. Sardesai, the great Maratha historian writes, "Raghunathrao Patwardhan burning with the desire of revenge against Tipu, wantonly destroyed at this time the holy shrine of the Shankaracharya of Shringeri, an affront to Hindu religion by a brother Hindu, the sad memory of which long remained fresh in Maratha memory." This criticism appears harsh from the light thrown on the incident by the Shringeri kadatas.

Like the Peshwas, other Maratha rulers also revered the Shringeri Jagadgurus. With the firm belief that the blessings of the Jagadguru will bring in prosperity to their kingdoms, Hindurao Ghorpade and Daulatrao Hindurao Ghorpade, the two well-known disciples of the Guru, made a grant of 100 moyins a year (A.D. 1782-83) and a grant of a village named Timmanahatti (A.D. 1786) respectively to the Shringeri Matha. After an interval of about seven years, in A.D. 1793-4, Mahadji Sindhia who was on a visit
to Poona, donated the village of Pimpalgaon to Sri Satchidananda Bharati III, to meet the expenses of the Sringeri Samsthana. 34

Sri Satchidananda Bharati III, wrote a letter 35 to Raghuji Bhonsle (son of Mudhoji) of Nagpur, informing him of the receipt of 15,000 (fifteen thousand) silver coins from him for the worship of Sri Saradamba and also for illumination and santarpame (offering food to saintly people) for Brahmins. The Guru blessed the Bhonsle for his success and sent him gandha (sandal) and prasada. At the end of the letter, the Guru wrote to him stating that his disciples in the nooks and corners of the country, owing to their virtues like Dana (charity), Dharma (rule of conduct), Puja (worship) and Bhakti (devotion) have attained fame and he too being virtuous would attain similar fame.

After the short pontifical period (A.D. 1814 - A.D. 1817) of Sri Abhinava Satchidananda Bharati II, Sri Narasimha Bharati VIII 36 (A.D. 1817 - A.D. 1879) succeeded him. He was proficient in Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Marathi and Hindi. The spiritual power of the Guru was so great that the Bhonsle Raja of Nagpur who had indulged in luxury and idleness, and shown disrespect to the Matha, was put to unexpected troubles. Then the Bhonsle
realised his folly and walked to the camp of the Guru at Kämpī, sought his pardon and escorted him to his capital.37

Similarly, the other Marāṭha Chieftains like Jayāji Rao Sindia of Gwalior,38 Tukōji Hōkār of Indore,39 Shahāji Rāj Bhōnsele of Akkalkot,40 Yesvant Rao Pawar and Hybat Rāo Pawar, both of the ruling family of Dhar,41 Bhāskar Rāo Dadāji of Nargund and Laksman Narasīng Rāo Sītōle Dēsmukh of Poona,42 showed their respect to the Sringeri Jagadgurus and made grants to their Matha.

The next Guru who occupied the Sāṅkara Pītha was Śrī Satchidānanda Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bhāratī (A.D. 1879-A.D. 1912). The Acharva undertook four extensive tours of the country. During his second tour (A.D. 1886 - A.D. 1890), he was invited by Rāmachandra Patwardhan, the chief of Jamkhaṇḍī, who presented him a diamond necklace and offered to meet the expenses of one of the festivals in Śrīṅgērī.43

There was a tussle between the Śrīṅgērī Matha and the Saṅkēśvara Matha.44 Raghunāth Rāo Yādav, Secretary, Council of Regency of Gwalior State, wrote a letter (22nd Oct. 1894) to Veda Śāstra Sampanna (well versed in the Vedic lore) Śrī Nāgēsvara Śāstri, of the Śrīṅgērī Matha,
stating that the Government of the Maharaja Sindia of Gwalior communicated their decision that in that State the Sringeri Matha should be given precedence over the Sankesvara Matha.\(^4^5\)

Relations between the Sringeri Matha and the Marathas continued to be cordial during the pontificate of Sri Chandrasekara Bharati III\(^4^6\) (A.D. 1912 - 1954), 34th in the line. During his period, the renovation of the temple of Sri Sarada was completed, and also a beautiful shrine in white marble was erected over the samadhi (a tomb) of the late Guru, Sri Satchidananda Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bharati, in Narasimhavana. The Kumbhabhiseka of both the shrines was performed in A.D. 1916. On this occasion the Maharaja of Mysore and representatives of the Maharaja Gaikwad of Baroda and several other rulers were present.\(^4^7\)

Similar cordial relations based on mutual regard have continued during the pontificate of the present His Holiness Sri Abhinava Vidyā Tīrtha (A.D. 1954 - ).\(^4^8\)

Thus the Sringeri Matha's relations with the Maratha Ruling Houses which began during the pontificate of Sri Satchidananda Bharati II (A.D. 1705 - A.D. 1741), has continued right up to the present day. The Princely
States in Mahārāṣṭra, as elsewhere are liquidated now, but the members of the royal families and the people in Mahārāṣṭra are still devoted to the Śaṅkarāchārya Matha of Sringeri.
Notes and References

1. Sg.R., Nos. 67-91 (except No.90, which is in Sanskrit, the remaining 24 are in Marathi).

2. Kds. 20, 43, 45, 51, 81, 88, 89, 104, 113, 147, 154, 166, 184 and 185.

3. GVK., XII, VV. 4-8.

4. Sg.R., 67.


7. GVK., XVII, VV.38, 45 and 48.

8. TTW., p.55.

9. Sg.R., 68.

10. TTW., p.59.

11. Ka. 81, No.2.


13. Ka. 113, Nos. 7 and 8.
    The same letters are copied down in Ka. 45, pp.57 and 58.

14. Perhaps an officer of the Matha who could speak, read and write Marāthi.


16. Ibid., No.8. In this letter Malhari Pant is addressed 'Rajamānya Rājesāry'.

17. Ibid., No.144.
18. In kadatas, Mādhavrao I is mentioned as Mādhavrao Ballāl.

19. Sg.R., Nos. 69-75.

20. TTW., p.59.

21. In A.D. 1766, Peshwa Mādhavrao and Nizam Ali were at war with Hyder. Later when both sides were tired of it, peace was concluded in A.D. 1770.

22. Sg.R., 69-75.

23. Ibid., 75.


25. Kd. 43, Nos. 7 and 8; The documents are in Marathi.

26. Ibid., No.7 (Marathi)

27. In shaping the fortunes of the young Peshwa, Mādhavrao II, Parasuram Bhau Patwardhan, along with Nanā Phādānis, Mahādīji Sindia, Haripant Phadke and Rāma Sāstri Prabhune, had their important share. NHM, Vol.III, p.309.

28. The Pindāris lived by plunder and devastation of enemy countries. The Maratha commandants had always in their camps bodies of these Pindari stragglers. For detailed information about the Pindāris, refer to NHM, Vol.III, pp.477-80; 481-83.

29. Kd. 129, No.52 (Marathi).

30. Kd. 43, No.8 (Marathi).


32. Sg.R., 76.

33. Ibid., 77.
34. Ibid., 78.
35. Ka. 51, No. 41.
36. According to TTW., p. 66, Sri Narasimha Bharati VII and according to SS, p. 157, Sri Narasimha Bharati VIII.
37. TTW., p. 67.
38. Sk.R., 83; The record is also found in the personal possession of His Holiness. The letter bears the round seal having a figure of the sun on the top with serpents on either side and inside is written "Sri Jotisvarupa Charanitatpara Madhavrao Suta Jivaji Sinde Mirantara" (Nagari script).
39. Sk.R., 86.
40. Ibid., 87 and 88.
41. Ibid., 84 and 85.
42. Ibid., 89.
43. TTW., p. 76.
44. Situated in Hukkeri Taluk, District Belgaum.
45. Sk.R., 91.
46. According to TTW., p. 84, Chandraśekhara Bharati IV and according to SS., p. 157, Chandraśekhara Bharati III.
47. TTW., p. 85.
48. His Holiness during his second extensive tour of the country visited various places in Maharashtra (1966). In places like Nagpur, Indore, Dhar, Ujjain, Gwalior etc., (once upon a time Princely States) receptions were given to him.