CHAPTER FOUR

CLASSIC BRAHMANIC KINGDOM

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CLASSIC BRAHMANIC KINGDOM:
POLITICAL CULTURE OF POONA PESHWAS

The 18th century saw the emergence of classic brahmanic kingdom centred at Pune. The Peshwas arrogated enough of political prerogatives to continue to rule throughout the 18th and early 19th century. The emergence of a particular brahmin subcaste, known as Chitpavan, seems to be endowed with all the political and cultural attributes of sovereign. It certainly points to the changing and greatly flexible milieu in the Indian subcontinent. The brahmanical institution had been passing through some critical phase of its existence, particularly since 14th century onwards under the reformist bhakti movement. They had been under constant scrutiny and surveillance, and their position as a superior caste in the Varna order with their attendant religio-cultural attributes, proved to be too imposing and cumbersome for the general masses. The reformist movements, particularly the bhakti movement, hence, considerably marginalised its dominating existence with its attempt to lift up the lower rungs of society staying on the periphery since the ages. However, the brahmins once again bounced back, that too more in the political realm, seems to show the resistance and adaptive strength of the institution itself.
The brahmins of Maharashtra, under the Chitpavan subcaste banner, was far different from their well enshrined image amongst the people. Similar to some important social groups in the 18th century, the Chitpavans gradually articulated and cultivated the idioms of accountancy and management as well as the art and craft of power and political management. On the way to the political praxis they brought back many of their religious and ritual practices with a conscious attempt to give enough of brahmanical flair to their own floated political culture all around Maharashtra, with Poona becoming the capital of the Chitpavan Peshwas. Richard Temple remarks that "in the cermonial department, which is peculiarly important in an eastern country, it might have been foress that Brahmans, being gifted with beauty of apperence, dignity of main, excellence of manner, and power of elocution, would hold their courts with becoming grandeur. This the three Peshwas certainly did with consumate effect."¹ The Peshwas started getting along with their old and new practices so well that they eventually represented their kingdom based on Hindu Dharma in a far stronger manner than the earlier one. The brahmanic political culture indeed carried strong religious underpinning reflected in their ritual as well as their political practices. Despite a strong fervour of brahmanical culture the regime kept seeking its association

¹ See Richard Temple, Oriental Experiences, p. 404.
with the Mughals and Satara Chhatrapatis to keep up all the norms of political legitimation well intact. The Peshwas equally showed enough of enthusiasm and rationality in not flaunting the tolerant and coextensive attitude of the land to other faiths and religion. They gave enough of respect and regard to other communities as well in carrying them along with their political ambition.

The classic-brahmanic regime started becoming so adaptive and flexible that it went on accommodating various sections of society coming from the lower rungs of social order. Their political establishment needed these sections so strongly that they became more the representative of 'Maratha' as a status then the mere representatives of their caste. Even the brahmin Peshwas, although always keeping away from the 'Maratha category', seem to represent 'Maratha' banner in many a manifestations alongwith their brahmanic culture. The term itself suggests its widening fold with the passage of time. The sense of community, although always at cross checks, equally reflects the maturity of the people in their endeavour to seek an identity of their own self. The relentless expansion which took place under the brahmin Peshwas was equally done under the Maratha banner instead of Chitpavan. The political paraphernalia, was replete with 'Maratha' and 'Marathi' along with brahmanical idioms and expressions.
It is in this context that this chapter seeks to explore the religious and cultural moorings of Chitpavan's political ascent in its drive to represent the regional and community self of Maharashtra along the Hindu Dharma. The preceding chapters provide a clear backdrop in understanding the new regime in a much better form. Tradition always remains a plank upon which the interpretation of new regime takes place despite many new practices equally making its way into the politico-cultural order of the time. Before going into the various aspects of brahmanic culture it would be pertinent to have a brief look at the Politico-cultural capital of the 18th century Maharashtra, the Pune city. The very construction of this city reveals its remarkable religiosity and the Peshwas zeal to nurture it properly along with the city's power symbol the Peshwa's Palace, speaks the religiosity and royalty of the crown.

Poona is situated on the border land of Desh and Maval. It seems to be the main route situated between the seaport of Kalyan to the inside country and from the Deccan in the south to the Malwa in the north. The city has long chequered history right from the time of Rashtrakuta Dynasty. This city, in fact, seems to have derived its significance from the confluence of the two rivers the Mula and the Mutha. Around the confluence there happened to be a temple named
'Punyeshwar'. It seems that the name of the city Poona was derived from this temple itself. Although the temple was destroyed by the Muslims later, but the name of Poona and its apparent religiosity was there in the very confluence of these two rivers as well as the presence of a temple.

The Poona city dates its rise somewhere around 1635 when the adjoining villages of the city was conferred upon Shahaji Bhonsle. Although it was Dadaji Kondadeo, the deputy of Shahji, who seems to be mainly instrumental in the development and prosperity of the city. Shivaji also had fixed up his headquarter at Pune before he shifted over to Raigarh in 1674. It was only under the imperial grant of 1719 that Poona was handed over to Shahu as the sixteen swarajya districts. Shahu appointed Balaji as his representative at Poona. Since the time of Balaji Viswanath the city went through many phases of developments and devastations. Under the Chitpavan brahmmins the city turned out to be a bureaucratic - military city, and subsequently the religio-cultural pre-occupation of the new regime gave a typical brahmanic orientation to this city, hardly visible anywhere in India during the period.

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2 See for a detailed description of Poona's historicity and its subsequent development, in D.B. Parsanis, Poona in Bygone Days pp. 75-90; also see B.G. Gokhale, Poona in the 18th Century.

3 Parsanis., p. 77.

4 Ibid., p. 78.

5 Ibid., p. 78.

6 See B.G. Gokhale, Poona in the 18th Century, p. 193.
However, the opulence and religiosity of the city became a marked feature from the Peshwa period. It was Bajirao I, who in 1732, laid the foundation of the city over the existing Muslim Kasba. He also built this grand residence Shaniwar Wada by the river. He further granted nearby plots to his sardars for their residences, and developed the core peths or wards. The city kept developing under the later brahmin Peshwas, despite being sacked once by Nizam in 1763 and later by Holkar. Over the years, under the Chitpavans, the city acquired such a distinctive brahmanical flair with temples, shrines abounding in great numbers. B.G. Gokhle clearly says "of all other contemporary city of its size, Poona had the unmistakable Brahman stamp, a Brahman conscience and voice, a Brahman life-style with all its shortcomings and achievements".

It was the Shaniwar Wada, the Palace of the Peshwas, which became the main centre of political and cultural activity of the new emerging Poona. Bajirao I laid the foundation of this Palace. The opening ceremony of the Palace was performed as per the Hindu religious customs - on Saturday, 22nd January, 1732. Many colonial administrators have given a graphic picture of the Poona durbar. The huge

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7 Ibid., p. 81.
8 See B.G.Gokhale, Poona in the 18th Century, p.193.
construction and the splendour of the Palace further speaks the royalty of the 18th century Peshwa regime. Robert Mabon, a European artist, who visited Poona durbar around 1790, has given a graphic narrative of the Palace.

"During my stay at Poona", writes Mabon, "I had the pleasure of being introduced to the durbar, or court of the Mahratthas. After waiting there some time, in conference with several Brahmins, attendants of the Peshwa, he made his appearance. I made a salam to him, which he gracefully returned, and advanced to the Musnud or throne; on which he sat down, cross-legged, with attendants behind him armed with swords; one of whom was his chowree-bardar, with a large chowree or whisk, in his hand to keep off the flies. In front of the Peshwa stood his chopdar, with a long silver stick, ready to receive any orders he might be pleased to favour him with. I sat down at a distance in the attitude in which the Peshwa was, viz: cross-legged, as nothing is considered by him a greater piece of impoliteness than extending your legs, or sitting in any manner in which the soles of your feet might be pointed towards him. He was of a fair complexion and appeared to be about twenty-three years of age; his dress consisted of a long jama, overgown, of very fine muslin; a string of very large pearls hung from his neck, a considerable way down his waist; a very fine red shawl, with a rich embroidered border, was thrown carelessly over his shoulders, wore a beautiful cluster of diamonds,
the centre one of which was about an inch square, of a very fine water. On the top of his turban, he wore a small curvature of gold, about three inches high, richly set with emeralds and various precious stones; over the right temple, from the top of the turban, hung several strings of pearls, which terminated at bottom by small red tassels. In this group, on the left, I was introduced to Nana Furanvese, his then Prime Minister, and formerly regent during the time the Peshwa was under age. It is to this sagacious politician, that almost all ascribe the present flourishing state of the Maratha empire. His dress was much the same with that of the Peshwa, but not so splendid ...

The room in which the Peshwa thus sits in state, has nothing of beauty or elegance to recommend it: on one side, is a row of wooden pillars, over which are hundred purdhas ... The Durbar is a very extensive building in a style peculiar to the Asiatick in general.

"In surveying the Peshwa seated on the Musnud, the eye is dazzled with the immense riches about him; but his effeminate dress and unmanly like attitude which the customs of the people make him under the necessity of observing, takes away from that dignity in appearance, which an European might expect to see in a Prince seated on a throne. After remaining some time with the Peshwa, betelnut was presented to me, which according to their custom is the
signal to depart. I, accordingly, after accepting of it, took my leave⁹.

This description of Robert Mabon, apart from speaking the splendour of the Poona court, also reflects the newly laid out norms of the Peshwas in effecting his sovereign self in a highly prescribed and regulated manner to express the royalty of his political stature. The Poona Palace was given due attention particularly by Balaji Bajirao and Nana Phadnis, with more additions and alterations. The palace consisted of various courts and many big halls, known as Diwan-i-Khaas. The Ganapati Rang-Mahal or the Hall of audience, was a great historic Place of the palace and the city. The hall has witnessed many historic events with large number of chiefs, sardars and foreign dignitaries attending the Poona court and receiving gifts and nazars from the Peshwas.

**Brahman Ruling House**

As it has been stated earlier that the Bhat-Peshwa family with Balaji Vishwanath takes over the charge of the brahmanic regime at Pune. He is invested with the robe of Peshwa in 1713. Being a very favourite person of the Chhatrapati Shahu due to his political and diplomatic skill,

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the new Peshwa lays down the foundation of brahmin government to be followed by his successors with more acumen and effects. In fact Balaji seems to be too busy in restoring the honour and dignity of chhatrapati house then looking at his own government with full attention. Balaji had to continuously meddle between Tarabai and Shahu as well as the Delhi government to install Shahu as the legitimate heir of Satara throne along with his genuine rights over the swarajya territory and the imperial grant of rights over the six subhas of the Deccan. His intelligence resulted in getting the imperial farman in 1719, and thus enabled Shahu to effectively establish the Satara Chhatrapati's house. But Balaji could not live for long and died at Saswad, a village closed to Poona, in 1720. Balaji Vishwanath was left with two sons, Bajirao and Chimaji Appa.

Shahu, in gratitude to Balaji's great service and work, did not hesitate in appointing his son Bajirao as the new Peshwa in 1720. Bajirao Peshwa laid the real foundation of the Maratha state by extending the territories not only in the Deccan alone, but he broke out of the confines of Maharashtra, into the parts of central, western and eastern India. Bajirao successfully managed to raid into various parts of India along with the Maratha military exaction of chauth and sardeshmukhi. He expanded the Maratha swarajya

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10 See for the Maratha Expansion, SPD XIII, XIV.
into a *samrajya*. This process also led to the growth of cultural assimilation with the conquered territories, discussed particularly at length in the fifth chapter. It is during this period, that the foundation of Peshwas Palace at Poona was laid. It became an object of curiosity not only for the 18th century power of India, but also found substantial reflections in colonial administrator's writing. The new conquered territories were being managed by Bajirao's *sardars* and brahmin. The brahmin got fair treatment and filled up the literate bureaucracy of the new regime. However, the Peshwa Bajirao's relationship with a Muslim dancing girl, called Mastani, really antagonised the orthodox brahmin community. The Chitpavan community taking the advantage of Bajirao's absence, who was on campaign, imprisoned Mastani. When Bajirao came to know about it, it greatly hurt him and he died very soon. Bajirao's continuous campaign also drained the Maratha treasury and he fell into the debt to the banking families. The Marathas hailed Bajirao I as the incarnation of Hindu energy.

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12 See Brij Kishor, *Tarabai and her Times*, p. 165.

Balaji Bajirao or Nana Saheb was invested with the Peshwa office by Shahu on 25th June, 1740\(^4\) at Satara. Nana Saheb was equally willing to pursue the expansionist policy of his father and move beyond Attock. He was further enthused in his design as Shahu equally wanted the policy to be pursued vigorously in establishing the Maratha supremacy in north India. Although, once again, Nizam appeared as an obstacle for the smooth Maratha expansion; but Nana Saheb managed to steer his way smoothly into the north Indian expansion. He was able to march from Attock in the Northwest to Madras in the south, and from Konkan in the west to the vicinity of Calcutta in the East. He also got hold over Bundelkhand where Scindia and Holkar played an important role.\(^5\) In south, two Maratha states were already running in Tanjore and Gotti. The former was under the possession of Shahu’s own family and the latter was being ruled by Murarirao Ghorpade.

Alongside the Maratha expansion, the Satara court was beset with too much of intrigues and conspiracies to the real successor of Shahu. It found its manifestation in Nana Sahib’s elimination from the Peshwa office due to defection

\(^{14}\) Balaji Bajirao’s investiture, see SSRPD, Shahu Chhatrapati, No. 103, p. 46, No. 112, p. 49; also see SSRPD, No. III, Balaji Bajirao, The Peshwa here is referred as ‘Tirthrup’, No. 333, p. 208.

\(^{15}\) For Maratha expansion during Nana Saheb, see H.N. Sinha, Rise of the Peshwas, pp. 224-236.
all set to thwart the growing dominance of the Peshwa. Shahu realising the mistake, again brought back Nana Saheb within a very short span of time to the post of Peshwaship, as he found no one capable to handle the various problems of the Maratha state in north, south and Deccan. With the death of Shahu in 1749, Satara was flooded with Peshwa’s troops to install Ramraja as the Chhatrapati. This led to the real strengthening of Peshwa’s position. It was a remarkable achievement on the part of Nana Saheb to consolidate and strengthen the power of Pune Peshwa. And all it was achieved in the Sangola agreement. The Satara raja had to renounce all the sovereign rights and the Peshwa became all powerful by crushing the partinidhi, made compromise with Raghuji Bhonsle, reduced the Dabhade to insignificance, and Tarabai had been strongly restrained. When Tarabai declared Ramraja as an imposter, the raja quickly lost the prestige of his position. The Chhatrapati was greatly relegated to the background, but remained a figurehead of the Maratha power.

Thus with Peshwa arrogating all power around its office and their continuos victory over various parts of India, Nana Saheb also introduced a better system of administration and greatly took care of the peasants interest. But the

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Marathas defeat at Panipat possibly became unbearable for Nana and he died in the same year, 1761.

It was Madhavrao I\(^7\) who succeeded Nana Saheb. Although his reign was indeed a reign of rehabilitation of Maratha prestige and administration. But he was equally facing too many problems. His Uncle Raghunathrao was conspiring against him to take over the Peshwaship. It was from his period that Nana Fadanis was making his way and later became a dominant figure of the Maratha politics till late. Nana became so powerful between 1775 to 1795 that he lived under constant fear of being overthrown by the Maratha community who were rallying around the Satara chhatrapati.

After Madhavrao I, it was Narayanarao who was installed as the Peshwa in 1772\(^8\) and ruled for just nine months before he was murdered in 1773 with the instigation of his uncle, Raghunathrao.\(^9\) Raghunathrao was certainly implicated for this plot. But later Raghunathrao managed to assume the Peshwaship in August 1773. However Nana Fadanis along with others, tried his best to thwart his design. They formed a council of twelve (Barabhai), who refused to acknowledge

\(^7\) For Madhavrao, see SSRPD IX, Vol. I.

\(^8\) Ibid., No. 98, p. 72.

\(^9\) See SSRPD IX, No. 104, p. 79; also see Sardesai; NHM, Vol. III, pp. 25-33.
Raghunathrao as Peshwa. This council of twelve also included Mahadji Scindia and Tukoji Holkar; and these people were planning to execute the coup. When Gangabai, the widow of Naryanrao, gave birth to Madharao II, the problem of Raghunathrao's replacement was over as Nana made possible the idea to procure the robes of Peshwa for Madhavrao II, who received it in May, 1774. Nana, as the chief minister, took charge of the administration. The following proclamation was issued in the name of chhatrapati in 1774, "Raghunathrao has committed the gross sin of bringing about the ruin of the Peshwa Narayanrao, and of forcibly exacting robes of that office from us. He has now been deprived of that position and a force has been dispatched against him under Trimbakrao Pethe. Every one is called upon to collaborate in this sacred task". Thus Raghunathrao became fugitive and died in 1784. The period of Madhavrao II is significant also in the sense that the young Peshwa was accorded the title of Vakil-I-mutalik by the Delhi emperor, which was won by Mahadji Scindia who himself became the deputy.

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After Swai Madhavrao, Bajirao II assumed the Peshwa's office in 1796. From now onwards, the Maratha power rapidly seems to be declining as he was faced with too many contestants of power all around to keep up the dignity of Peshwas office intact. He inflicted too much blow upon Nana and Yaswantrao Holkar that Holkar finally plundered Poona in 1802, Bajirao flew away from Poona to return back only as protégé of the British in 1803. All came to an end with the treaty of Bassien with the British flag flew atop the Shanwar palace, and Bajirao became a fugitive. He ended the rest of his life as a pensioner of the English at Bithoor, near Kanpur, where he died in 1851.

Poets and Pandits of the Peshwa Times

The gradually established dispensation of brahmin Peshwas further derived its legitimacy through their patronage to a large number of scholar poets and sahirs. The very supremacy assumed by the Chitpavan brahmins in out of their political influence could have been strongly contested by the other brahmin sub-castes, namely Desastha and Saraswat. To perpetuate their (i.e. Chitpavan's) hegemony which seemed to be under threat, they started patronising scholars and poets, indicative of the fact that there was a strong undercurrent of religiosity. Brahmns,

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similar to the period of Shivaji, but becoming more overt in the brahmanic dispensation, carried strong religious tinge associated with the practices of brahmanism. But despite all these, the Peshwa's relation not merely remained in relation to ritual authority rather religion and ritual was sought time and again to consolidate and acquire more and more political power, legitimation and social status. Infact, Chris Bayly rightly argues that every where the state builders in 18th century sought the support of holy men. These successor states facilltated the deepening of the existing synthesis between the high religion of brahmanas and particular forms of worship which simultaneously resulted in the creation of strong religious identities.24

The role of sage, swami, scholars, poets and shahirs have generally been perceived as a missing link with the earlier bhakti traditions.25 It seems however that a century long tradition, which had such a strong impact earlier, cannot absolutely die down. Even if the new tradition shows the absence of a particular kind of tradition as was visible earlier, still the religiosiity out of Saint-poets practices can be discerned in the new tradition, as well, in a slightly changed form. The Peshwas were equally influenced


by a particular saint, Brahmendra Swami, who wielded great influence by reason of his being the guru to Shahu and to several members of his court. 26 Balaji Vishwanath was struck by the saint's miraculous power and felt greatly devoted to him. 27 Balaji Vishwanath also had the prophecy of the swami that he would rise to the highest position in the state. 28 Balaji paid his gratitude by granting the village of Pipri on him and by further inducing the king Shahu to grant him the village Dhavadshi near Satara. 29 When swami's Parshuram temple was attacked by the Siddis of Janjira and the idol was desecrated and plundered; the swami was so much enraged and fired that he appealed to Shahu and others to wage war against the Siddi. It was Chimaji Appa who avenged this attack of Siddis. 30 Swami and Shahu greatly appreciated this heroic deeds of Chimmaji Appa. Shahu even showered upon him honour, swords, costly ornaments and dresses. Another sage named Narayan Dixit often corresponded and advised Bajirao and Chimaji Appa during the regency. 31


27 D.B. Parsanis, Brahmendra Swami Dhavadiskar (Bombay, 1945), P. 6; also see along with his contempormary Shri Naryan Dixit, in M.G.Burway, Life and Time of Shivaji II (Shahu) (1680-1749) (Indore, 1932), pp. 55-60.

28 Parsanis, p. 7.

29 Ibid., pp. 11-12.


31 An interesting account of social and cultural life during the Peshwa period could be seen, in V.K.Bhave, Pesvakalin Maharashtra, pp. 88-89.
The pandit-poets of the Peshwa period were mostly brahmins and they were imbued with a greater amount of brahmanical practices and worldly activities. They, unlike the saints-poets of the preceding centuries, were patronised by the ruling class and several important families. Instead of following ascetic and renunciatory life, they, however, believed in living a worldly life and considerably reflected the changing ethos of their age. It seems that the saint-poets of earlier generation did provide some base for the scholar-poets for the use of episodes from the epics and Puranas. It helped in transmitting the message to the masses. The Peshwa period showed 'a shift from unalloyed bhakti to the bhakti garbed in sentiments of sensuous pleasures (Shringara), boisterous bravery (Vira) and unabashed joy to be sought in here and now (Pravritti)'. Their significant contribution was to secularise and humanise devotion by investing bhakti with sensuous overtones. The new focus of religiosity carried with it the synthesisation of metaphysical mysticism and music which was far off from the orthodox religious practices.

The scholar poets of this generation also claimed to be the upholder of Dharma and they strongly professed that it is their duty to bring the people on the path of truth and

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Dharma. The patronage was started by the Peshwas since 1731. However, these poets remained generally engrossed in glorifying the exploits, heroic deeds etc. of the Peshwas. The author of Kampu Kavya, Jagannath Pandit, was formerly under the patronage of the Tanjore dynasty of the princes; but his work seems to have been composed by the order of Nanasaheb Peshwa.\footnote{For a good account of new Bhakti poets, see P.K.Gode, 'Notes on the poets of the Peshwa period', B.I.S.M.Q., Vol. XVIII, No. 2, October, 1937, pp. 46-47.} The work Alamkaramanjusa deals with poetic figures alone and illustrative versus sing the glory of Peshwa Madhavrao I and his uncle Ragunathrao. The work shows that some intimate contact of the poet with the Peshwa darbar must have preceded, followed presumably by the gift of Dakshina. The author of this work, Darashankar, glorifies the exploits of the Peshwa Vishwasrao\footnote{Ibid., pp. 48-49.}. Poets like Madhav Muni were granted land by Bajirao and Nanasaheb; poet Niranjan lived with Bajirao himself.\footnote{V.K.Bhave, Peshvakalin Maharashtra, opp.cit., p. 89-90.} Poet Amrit Rai became famous during Nanasaheb's time. He broke the tradition of writing about ancient heroes such as Bhim and Arjuna rather he started writing about the heroic deeds of the Peshwa's exploits. In his composition 'Pant-Pradhan', he has described all the Peshwas from Vishwanath to Vishwas Rao. Even Mahipati who is famous for his work Bhaktvijaya and Santavijaya served in the Peshwa's court. Bajirao I
recognising the talent of this man and gifted Mahipati with land. The government document of the Peshwa period does have scattered reference to the patronage to Haridasas and the performances of Kirtans on various occasions. In 1767, a considerable amount of money as spent on such performances during the Ganesh festival. Madhavrao II spent hours listening to kirtans to the advice of his elders. The poet Niranjan Madhav (1703-90) was sent on a diplomatic assignment to Karnataka and Tamilnadu by Bajirao and Balaji Bajirao.

The Peshwa glory was further enhanced through a tradition known as sahirs. The word shahir is a derivative of the Persian shayar (Poet), rendered as a bard, ministerials, balladers, etc. These sahirs were the most heterogeneous groups, belonging to varied occupations and castes from the brahmins to Muslims. They were totally immersed in the pursuit of the vira rasa (heroism) and Shringara. They were generally patronised by the big and high families, but they remained the real folk poets and artists who saw life as it was lived. This tradition was further boosted when the Maratha expansion broke out of it's confines and got victories. The shahir turned out to be the

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37 Ibid., pp. 190-91; also see J.E. Abbott, Stotramala; A garland of Hindu prayers, No. 6 (Pune, 1929), p. 156.

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bards of the Peshwa regime. The murder of Narayanrao, the peace and prosperity under Madhavrao II, the decline and humiliation wrought by Bajirao II, and his overthrow by the English in 1818, all became subjects of ballads, forming a rich repertoire of history in their poetical perception.39

There had been a good number of bards during the period, but some of them became very prominent. They mostly lived and worked in the second half of the 18th century, of them Parshuram was the oldest. He describes the career of Raghunathrao, Shamser Bahadur and Bajirao II with great feelings. Sagun Bhare (1778-1840) was of Sikalgar (makers of weapons) Muslims castes from Jejuri. He refers to Raghunathrao and Bajirao II. Though a Muslim he shows great familiarity with Hindu religious traditions of bhakti and its varied literatures.

Along with this bardic tradition the development of literature had a slightly amorphous character in the brahmanic dispensation, thus facilitating the very broadening of identity in a very wide form. The literature of the Peshwa period showed its close relationship with the institutions like Purana, Keertana etc. These institutions found out to be the most important medium of cultural instructions. The age old institution, the Keertana, with

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its vocal and instrumental music, dancing etc., proved to be more popular among the masses as well as the ruling class. In the later Peshwa rule, in particular, the many sidedness of the institutions of Keertans found greater scope. The Pada composer, the sahir and the sholar orator singer, who delivered Keeratans, each had his own technique of expression but these were complementary to one another. These permitted a blending of exhibitionist tendencies, peculiar to professional artists. The Pada composers, Madhav Muneeshwar, Amrit Raya, were the popular Keertankars of this times. It was the institutions of Keertana that made the poem of Vaman Pandit and Moropant popular. Since the medium of expression was oral, so it made the authors and poets into a direct public contact. This resulted in the appearance of factors like actuality, conversation, oratory and a profession of details. In creating and maintaining the sound effects or for familiarity the poet restored to rythematic verse and its jingling effects. Some attempts of alliterations, fanciful presentations of stories and descriptive devices were intended to make the presentation of narrations soothing to the ear and mind which created lot of impact. The growth of this kind of literature became a part of the system of education also.

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40 The literature of the Peshwa times had its close associations with the Puranas and Keeratans has been dealt at length, in B.G. Gokhle, opp.cit., p. 201.

The two forms of literature that particularly prospered and written from the professional point of view, were the saheeric poetry, and the prose bakhars; some hold that both were borrowed from the Muslims. The Powada and the Lavanee formed the saheeric literature. In general, the Powada has some gallant exploits of a hero from its theme and it also comes before an audience. Nearly half of the Powada belonged to the Peshwa period which grew in company with the rulers and their urban pleasure seekers. The Lavaneees flourished and boomed forth during the latter part of the Peshwa period in particular under the reign of Bajirao II. This is ascribed to the supreme fondness of the rulers of those times for sensual pleasures.\(^{42}\)

However, the literature of the Peshwa period did not invoke the colloquial colour of earlier period. It has also been criticized as hedonistic, presumptuous in its scholarly display, replete with rhetorical feats and strained in its tones and nuances, its writers have been called pedants rather than poets. They addressed themselves to a new kind of audience, thriving more on territorial annexation and material acquisition, hungry for status.\(^{43}\) Thus the development of literature, although having different character from its earlier contexts, seems to have been

\(^{42}\) G.M. Kulkarni, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-5.

widening and trying to adjust itself with a new trend that is more amorphous, ambiguous etc. The very shape of identity now has to be seen in the changing social and cultural milieu, where tradition itself is unfolding to incorporate varied developments at seemingly different levels, however, strongly carrying its inner essence.

Religion and Ritual Vis-a-Vis Political Authority

The brahmanic dispensation became much more overt in its religious and ritual practices with its endeavour to drive the state along Hindu Dharma. In fact Susan Bayly points out that the 18th century witnessed the developments of South Indian religious life, where the rapid growth of temples and pilgrimage places along with the creation of elaborate new rituals dramatised the rank and power of the region's rulers. The performance of prescribed brahmanical rituals and worship became a strong feature in conformity and loyalty to orthodoxy for the brahmins. The practices were officially encouraged and patronised by the ruling families. The Peshwas in keeping up the brahmanic image intact, performed all the 8 major sacraments (Samskaras) which contributed in the building up of the strong social relationship. They regulated all such practices in

[Note: The number 44 and the page 44-50 refer to a citation at the end of the text.]
preserving the brahmanic prerogatives and asserting their dominance at the ritual plane as well. These sacraments involved the participation and visit of important and powerful families apart from the necessity of brahmin's presence. All these in the 18th century seem to have impelled Bayly in calling it as classic 'Brahmin' kingdom.

The 8 major sacraments involved the birth sacrament (Jatkarma) naming, first outing of the baby (Nishkeramana), first occasion of eating of solid food (anapraparna), first haircut (cheedakaruja) investing with sacred thread (upanayana), marriage (vivaah), funeral ceremonies (anteyasthe). The first five came during infancy. The sacred thread ceremony was obligatory for all the brahmins, and this came at the age of 8 which also signified formal admission into the brahmin order, and the right to learn the vedic lore. This bestowed on them the right to call themselves 'the twice born' (dvija) to distinguish themselves from the shudras. The implication in terms of political connotation by performing these sacraments can be seen in one of the order which was issued in 1780 by Peshwa to Sadashiv Nagnath, asking him to resolve the first marriage of his daughter as it was not performed according to the strict religious injunctions, and to celebrate again the marriage of his daughter with a fresh bridegroom of his
choice.\textsuperscript{45} This order apart from preserving the religious heritage, simultaneously shows the authority being wielded in political terms.

The religiosity to be guided along Hindu faith and Dharma is further evident in one important letter addressed by Gopikabai to Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao. In her instruction to his grandson upon his request to seek advice from her, she asks him to cut short his worship, and since the household priests are performing the daily worship at home, so he should only offer them the leaves of the Tulsi Plant.\textsuperscript{46}

The preservation of holy cattle, holy places and brahmans were the most important elements for the ruling class as they could derive the legitimacy to their rule by keeping up the spirit of the people and by adhering to such principles which preserve the religious heritage of the land. In fact, the Peshwa rule witnessed an attempt to conquer all the holy places. Peshwa Raghunathrao's letter to his mother shows the ambition of taking back Prayag from the Mughals.\textsuperscript{47} For a while, he did succeed in his attempt to bring the holy places of Prayag and Kurusetra under his

\textsuperscript{45} S.P.D., Vol. 43, p. 48. This volume speaks many acts and activities of the Peshwas regarding their religions practices.

\textsuperscript{46} See K.N. Sane, Peshwamchi Bakhar (Pune), pp. 62-66.

\textsuperscript{47} PD, 18, No. 148.
control. Madhavrao infact laid down in his will that an attempt should be made to procure these places, if not by conquest, in exchange of jagir upto Rs.20 Lakhs. It was during Bajirao II that a massive campaign was launched and finally Banaras, Brindavan, Prayag etc. was conquered. The Peshwa’s interest to conquer Banaras began with the expedition of Bajirao I in the north. In 1735, repairs of the ghats on the Ganga in Banaras was undertaken. In the same year, Radhabai, the mother of Bajirao I, went on a pilgrimage to Banaras. There were complaints of discriminations in giving of Dakshina, as Chitpavans were given more than the others. Banaras as a sacred place always invoked lot of interest in the Peshwas as well as the people. Sadashivaik, on behalf of the Peshwa, was superintending the building of ghats, temples and Dharamshalas at Banaras. He gives an account of the progress of the work at Banaras in 1735.

Accompanied with the importance of holy places is holy cattle and the brahmins. There are various references in the Peshwa Daftar which show that several orders were issued by the Peshwas to send cows. In one of such orders, HariGopal,

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49 BISMR, Shaka 1834-35, P. 333.
51 SPD, Vol. 43, P. 8; see also S.V. Desai, The Social Life in Maharashtra under the Peshwas (Bombay, 1980), pp. 96-100.
is asked to send some 400 to 500 cows.\textsuperscript{52} Purohit Bijeram of Hardware writes to Balaji Bajirao that he has sent holy Ganges water and Prasad through Kahar Lalman.\textsuperscript{53} In yet another letter Munshi Chiman Singh asks Peshwa Raghunathrao about his visit to Omkrashwar on the day of Shivratri.\textsuperscript{54} The distribution of Dakshina grant was one of the main duty of political powers, particularly in the month Shravan large amounts of money was spent. There was no fixed amount of charity and it always showed the lavishness of the Peshwa government. In fact, Nanasaheb in 1753, distributed some 16 lakhs as Dakshina to around 80,000 brahmins.\textsuperscript{55} While Bajirao II went ahead in distribution of jewels and gold coins as Dakshina in 1797. Janardan Appaji informs the Peshwa that Rs. 61,108 were distributed among 28, 981 brahmins on account of the Dakshina of the month Shravan. In 1767 the Peshwas spent Rs. 131,500 in Dakshina distribution to brahmins of Banaras. There are some evidences which indicate that an entire village was given away to brahmins as gifts, known as Agrahara village.\textsuperscript{56} The lavish expenditure on various religious and social functions was closely linked

\textsuperscript{52} See SPD, Vol. 43, pp. 15-20.


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., letter No.104, 1766, p. 158.

\textsuperscript{55} MIS, Vol. II, No. 433.

\textsuperscript{56} MIS, Vol. XXI, Nos. 75, 76.
with the legitimacy of the sovereign power. On almost all the great occasions, the Peshwas and the members of the elite groups spent considerable amount of money. These occasions were the investiture with the sacred thread, weddings, funeral ceremonies and the annual oblations to the spirit of departed ones. There were also other occasions of charity as in 1764, when Rs. 50,000 were distributed to needy brahmin families. In 1767, the preachers (Haridasas) were paid Rs. 2682. In the same year Rs. 2602 were spent on healing learned brahmins and some Rs.7000 to feed brahmins at Poona. In 1804, the Peshwa gave a donation of RS. 10001 to the Vishnu temple at Saswad. They also spent money on places like Nasik, Theur, Cincvd etc.\(^57\) The Peshwas took enough interest in pilgrimage, observance of religious festivals\(^58\), feeding of brahmins.\(^59\)

In 1738, when Chimaji Appa (brother of Bajirao I) was unwell, Rs. 30 were spent in commissioning brahmins to offer 1,20,000 ritual chants to the constellation Mars.\(^60\) In 1753, another such ceremony was performed because the rains were delayed.\(^61\) Apart from these expenses, a considerable

\(^{57}\) SPD, 18, 130; 22, 178, 179; 32, 183; 36, 198.

\(^{58}\) SPD, 39, P. 143, 169; 43, P. 75.

\(^{59}\) SPD, 32, 181, 186.

\(^{60}\) SPD, 12, p. 95.

\(^{61}\) SPD, 12, p. 98.
amount of money was also spent on weddings as indicated in some of the expense accounts of Bajirao II. In 1806, his fourth marriage involved an expense of Rs. 16,415 for dinners, Rs. 41800 for gifts of clothes, Rs. 600 as fees to the priest and Rs. 25,744 distributed as gifts (Dakshina at Parvati hills). The death anniversary of Balaji Bajirao cost Rs. 6,318 in 1772. There is no dearth of information in Peshwa Daftar and Poona residency correspondence of the money spent on various occasions by the ruling class. Hence the kings role as the chief gift-giver and receiver as well as the amount of royal expenditure in course of time became the expression of legitimate rule, which simultaneously invoked the eminent status of the king.

Thus, the state under the brahmanic dispensation led by Peshwas, became overtly 'Brahmin Partipalak' the protector of brahmins. Moreover, the brahmanic ideal of free gift was meant to serve the Dharma, and denied any reciprocity between the donor and the donee. In the new realm the brahmins showed all keenness to be a strong part of worldly society and the royal power in order to preserve the Hindu Dharma. But it can be argued on the basis of our previous discussion that the condominium of king and brahmin from which the legitimate sovereignty in India derived its strength remained often in an ambivalent state between universality

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"2 SPD, 32. p. 37."
and political sovereignty. Hence the king's association with brahmins remained a most sought out policy of the state to sustain sovereignties in India.

The Peshwas, being brahmins, remained a strong custodian of the beliefs and precepts of their caste and religion. Susan Bayly states in the 18th century South Indian context that the deity's shrines are seats of sovereign power; the regency should be in a position to control and expand the sacred 'kingly'shrines. Generally the holy places remained the real repository of power.\(^3\) It is in this context that the peshwa's expenditure on various religious establishments, performance of various rituals and sacrifices become very significant in understanding the state's association with the religious institutions. The family deity of the Peshwa was Ganesh.\(^4\) Everyday the Peshwa performed the ritual worship of their deities. The records of day to day residence and camps of the Peshwas allow a unique opportunity to measure the extent of the degree the individual Peshwa supported Ganesh as their personal deity.\(^5\) The Ganesh Rang Mahal, where the image of Ganesh

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\(^3\) See S. Bayly, Saints, Codesses and Kings, pp. 2,48.

\(^4\) The significance of Ganesh for the Peshwas and the Ganapati festival id dealt in Ghurey, Gods and Men (Bombay, 1962), p. 65. See B.G. Gokhle, Poona in the 18th Century, pp. 177-180. The Poona City was consisting of 412 temples around 1810-11.

\(^5\) SSRPD, Part-2, Vol. 2, p. 77; also see M.S. Mate, Legends and Temples, on Ganesh.
was ritually worshipped, was located in the Palace of the Peshwa at Poona. The Ganesh Mahal has been beautifully narrated by Captain Moore when the Peshwas were riding high on their power. Usually the Peshwas spent large sum of money on the celebration of Ganesh festival at Poona.\textsuperscript{66} Ganesh being the family deity, "the Peshwas glorified his cult, built his temples, lavished gifts and almost transformed into a national cult"\textsuperscript{67}. In one particular passage we come across to a vivid description on the occasion of Ganesh festival. "The Ganapati Rang-Mahal was decorated and all the functions were held. Beautiful crystal chandeliers, globes, as well as mirrors and paintings multiplied the beauties of the scene and shed a brilliant light over the assemblage. There in the centre the Peshwa's mansud with gold brocade work was seen shining. On both the sides the principal Maratha nobles, Sardars, siledars and Darbaris, all arrayed in brilliant costume and jewels, were seated according to their ranks and amidst the cries of the chopdars and Peshwa Swami. Madhavrao entered the hall. The whole Darbar presented a picture of varied character and colouring. The singing of musicians, the natch or dancing. The kathas or religious ceremony and all other performances were duly carried out for the enjoyment of all"\textsuperscript{68}. This description


\textsuperscript{67} B.G. Gokhale, opp.cit., p. 185, see also SSRPD, Part 8, Vol. 3; Part 5, Vol. 2.

\textsuperscript{68} Gavali, Peshwakalin Samaj or Jaati Sangharsha, p. 70.
clearly states the importance attached to the Ganesh festival by the Peshwas as well as the opulence and hierarchy shown in the very beating arrangement. Such occasions presented an opportunity for the rulers to show their attachment with the prescribed customs and cermonials of a particular tradition to the people at large.

During the Dasahra festival the Peshwas with all his chiefs and soldiers, used to move out of the camp in the vicinity of the city. The whole population of the capital, either as actor or spectators, joined this grand procession which moves towards the sacred tree, Shami, the object of adoration.69 This particular festival was always celebrated most of the Peshwas with all in conforming to the spirit of the people.

It was the grandson of Balaji Vishwanath who built some beautiful temples and buildings at the Parvati hill. Most of the Peshwas had great liking for this hill. Balaji Bajirao was a regular visitor and Nana Padsnis performed the thread ceremony of Narayanrao's son in 1779. Nana gave valuable presents to the temple and Dakshinas were also given.70 Apart from having a deep devotion to their personal deity, the Peshwas often visited the temples of Parvati

69 Ibid., p. 72.
70 D.B. Parsani gives a detailed account of Parvati hill in his Poona in Bygone Days (Bombay, 1921), pp. 29-44.
hills. In fact, Parvati temple became a vivid symbol of the religious devotion of the Peshwas.\textsuperscript{71} The Peshwa as well as Nana, in 1782, seems to be intending for a pilgrimage to Jejuri, Moreshwar and Siddhatek. The Peshwas thus made and offered ceremonial robes to the deity at Jejuri. Later in the day, he also paid a visit to the shrine at Moreshwar.\textsuperscript{72} The distribution of Dakshina was the most important occasion at the Parvati temple. This custom was started by the Dabhades (an important, powerful family) but was carried to an unprecedented height under the Peshwas. The Dakshina ceremony intended for the brahmins at Parvati for receiving money has become an interesting spectacle in Poona, and many Europeans from the residency visited the scene out of curiosity as well. In fact Captain Moore also visited Parvati in 1797 and gives a detailed description of the ceremony where many generous persons as well as the Peshwas entertain brahmins of eminence and make presents to them.\textsuperscript{73} Such a tradition of royal charity and patronage to learning in fact could be traced to the vedic times as the term Dakshina itself suggests. The Peshwas being both brahmin and rulers, not only followed this long tradition, but also gave it a particular brahmanic orientation. It was considered a

\textsuperscript{71} V.K. Bhave, \textit{Peshwakalin, opp.cit.}, p. 218.

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Poona Akhbar}, Vol.II, A.R. 185, 188, pp. 28,32. Peshwas used to make regular visits to the Parvati hills, see, Vol. II, III.

\textsuperscript{73} D.B. Parsani, \textit{Poona in Bygone Days}, pp. 36-42.
matter of great pride and prestige in the popular religious practices to feed large number of brahmins. Madhavrao I wanted to feed 3 lakhs of brahmins in his name at Benaras.\textsuperscript{74} Thus the brahmin-bhojan, giving a feast to brahmins, was one of the most popular religious practices undertaken to earn merit. In 1760, Rs.50,000/- were distributed to needy brahmins. In 1767, Rs. 2602 were spent to ailing learned Brahmins and some 7000 brahmins were fed at Poona.\textsuperscript{75} The performance of these various acts, rituals, and religious ceremonies became the intrinsic part of the legitimacy derived by the brahmin Peshwas, in cultural as well as political terms.

The notion of the Marathas, representing the 'fiercest Hindu' power comes through very clearly in many rituals, ceremonies which the brahmin Peshwa kept to protect the religious heritage of the Deccan. They frequently gave grants of lands to various religious establishments, Peshwas. The Peshwas also made grants of Inam lands to the Devis of Cincvad\textsuperscript{76}. Apart from this, the Maratha state also granted Varasasnas, an annual cash allowances, to its people. The state intended to favour through this grant various priests, astrologers, magicians and scholars. The

\textsuperscript{74} BISMR, Shaka 1834-35, p. 333.
\textsuperscript{75} SPD, Vol. 32, Nos. 30, 183, 186.
\textsuperscript{76} Sanad and Letters, pp. 133, 179.
Varsasnas infact remained a brahmin allowance with its intention to sustain the brahmanic culture. The incomes were often a sort of social welfare, and the recipients of allowances also rendered a valuable service to the Peshwa government. Preston argues that by "accepting an allowance they acknowledged the legitimacy of the Peshwa Govt." The significance of religious grants can also be gleaned through Ajnapatra's remarks, "after the grant is made, there should not be any desire to retake whatever many be the times of difficulty and even in cases of danger to life; on the contrary after remembering the worldly happiness is momentary and considering the fear of the other world, even a sipful of water from what is given should not be coveted even as a joke".

The ruler's religiosity often meant to derive enough of legitimation from the common masses. This is further evident in the replacement of the Peshwa govt. by the British. A Visitor to the Deccan reports that, "the religious and learned Brahmins complain that, in the territories subject to, or connected with the English, the general reverence is daily declining for a religion, no longer countenanced by the Powerful. No new foundations or endowments are to be

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77 Preston, opp.cit., pp. 95-96.
78 L.W. Preston, opp.cit., p. 95.
79 S. Puntambekar, Ajnapatra, JIH, part II, August, pp. 218-219.
expected under the English Government, and the begging Brahmins even complain of a sensible decay of liberality in our dominions"\(^{80}\). Even the Britishers though it better to preserve the ancient rights and institutions existing in this country.\(^{81}\) It is further evident in Elphinstone's statement that the preservation of religious establishments is always necessary in a conquered country," but more particularly so in the one where the Brahmins have so long possessed the temporal power\(^{82}\). Thus under the British, it was decided that all kinds of Inams were allowed to continue. Inam were classed under six heads:

Hindu inams, (2) Husalin inams (3) Devasthan - a grant of land for the maintenance of temple, (4) Dharmadya-charitable grants (6) Dhengi donations.\(^{83}\)

Apart from the Peshwa's attempt to get along with Hindu Dharma through various practices, the political legitimation was derived through some reciprocal acts and etiquettes. Uthoff reports that "Bajirao paid a private visit after his

\(^{80}\) L.W. Preston, quoted, p. 103.

\(^{81}\) Preston, opp.cit., p. 115.

\(^{82}\) M.Eliphintone, The territories Conquered from the Peshwas (1809) (Delhi, 1973), pp. 50-60.

\(^{83}\) S.J. Verma, M. Eliphiston in Maharashtra (Calcutta and Delhi, 1981), pp. 127-130.
religious incursions to Nanaphadnavis contrary to the customary practice of previous intimation. Shahu sends Sankranti greetings to Peshwa Bajirao Ballal. Similarly Shahu also sends his greetings on the occasion of the thread ceremony of Chimaji's son Sadashivrao. These two letters clearly indicate that the Chhatrapati's invitation to Peshwas was a mark of great honour. Such acts were intended further by the Peshwas to receive the respect, and seek peoples legitimation as well. Similar to such acts, Peshwas often made attempts to please the Chhatrapati. When Satara king was on the way to a sacred place called Jejuri, Nanasaheb informs Bajirao that he has left Poona and gone to Khed to meet the king and Virubai on their way to Jejuri, Nanasaheb further sends orders to the officials of Jejuri to make proper arrangements for the king's visit to the temple.

The continuous exchanges, acceptance of gifts, invitation for attending marriages and various other ceremonies between the Peshwas, the rajas and the powerful families, remained the most important thread of the same objective. Chris Bayly argues that the king's role as chief

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84 Palemer's Embassy, Vol. 6, p. 2.
86 Ibid., p. 1.
gift-giver and receiver was a real reflection of his ancient status as sacrificer-in-chief as well as the preserver of the order of castes. Royal expenditure clearly reflected the 18th century expression of legitimate rule. In one letter Trimbakrao gives the news about the marriage of the two daughters of Satara king, the arrival of Sambhaji of Kolhapur for the ceremony, the performance of sacrifice at the new temple which the Pratinidhi had erected at Mahauli etc. In a letter Udaiji Pawar most humbly acknowledges the invitation from the Peshwa to attend the thread ceremony of Vishwasrao. He, however, received it after the date of celebration. Manoji Angria sends dress of honour to Vishwasrao on the occasion of the thread ceremony of Madhavrao. Similarly, Malharrao Govind in a letter dated 1750 to Nanasaheb acknowledges the receipt of an invitation for the marriage of Vishwasrao. Tarabai sends a present to the Peshwas three hundred mangoes of excellent variety and two kinds of Inam especially prepared for him. This last

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88 See C.A. Bayly's stimulating discussion on 18th century power pattern all around India, in Rulers, Townsmen and Bazars: North Indian Society in the age of British expansion 1770-1870 (Oxford, Delhi, 1992), p. 59.

89 SDP, 18, p. 3.

90 SDP, Vol. II, p. 27.


letter clearly shows an attempt on the part of Tarabai to cement her relationship with the Peshwas. This was done so that the legitimacy of Kolhapur as a new sovereign centre against Shahu’s Satara can be established. But Kolhapur despite having its independent existence, could not become as important as Satara and Poona.

Brahmin Beuraucracy

The brahmanic kingdom built up its independent sovereignty by evolving a highly sound and effective bureaucratic apparatus. The Peshwas ‘by virtue of the Mutalik seal and the jagir tenure, became the highest judicial authority in his own territory and over the districts assigned in Jagir to the sardars.’

The Maratha state during this period wielded enormous amount of power and authority. Closely linked with the legitimation of sovereign power acquired by the Peshwas, is the notion of bureaucracy which has been posited for early modern Europe. The emergence of Chitpavans as a strong political force in the form of Peshwas certainly led to the separation of their functions from the purely ritual activity to the worldly and business domain. Such a

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separation of power has been viewed by Susan Bayly\textsuperscript{95} as quite striking because it not merely remained a feature of Maharashtra, but also that of places like Madras and Konkan. The Lokika brahmin of Madras and the Navayat lineages of the Deccan emerged as a 'tightly knit administrative body'. But she further argues that the rights, shares and honours with distinctly religious connotation became bound up with the general growth of accountability and exchange. This, for Bayly, did not lead to a creation of a secular domain and bureaucracy in the Weberian sense of rational administration.\textsuperscript{96} This characterisation to me seems to presuppose a complex displacement of religion in the creation of bureaucracy and secular domain. It simultaneously calls upon modernity to give meaning to the term tradition, thus submerging the significance of tradition beneath the impact of modernity associated with civil society, nation-state etc.

In its modern connotation, the concept of bureaucracy is certainly associated with impersonal and formalised delineation of official jurisdictional areas, hierarchies, channels of appeal, legalistic method of conflict resolution


\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., pp. 71-72.
and private domain. However the ideology of universal dominion associated with Indian kingship in both its Hindu and Muslim variants employed an artificial categorical grid which approximated to the form of a bureaucratic dominion imposed by the modern state. In the Indian context the universalist Dharma might have ruled out the political reciprocity, but at the practical political plane and particularly in the 18th century, its forms and implication is evident in the manner of wielding the power and authority. The political reciprocity becomes one of the important ingredients of Indian political sovereignty, which can be seen in the background of the above discussion and the power wielded in the realm of social and religious matters.

The pattern of authority and government, evolved by the Peshwas, comes through in an interesting manner in the observation and statement made by the Britishers. Despite having British legacy and the European superiority, they could not conceal their appreciation towards a totally different form of administration then at work in Maharashtra. But it is not to say that such observation correspond to the notion of bureaucracy rather it indeed shows the futility of positing the notion of bureaucracy in the context of early modern Europe. William H. Tone, a

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97 See on bureaucracy, in David Miller (ed.), The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought (Blackwell).
European observer, while surveying the administration of the Maratha countryside, speaks that, "how everything respecting this extraordinary people becomes an object of curiosity in particular their principles of govt. excite our attention, as they discover a mode of thinking and actions totally different from the European policy. The very local arrangement of the empire are peculiar, the territory of the different chiefs being blended and interspersed with each other"\(^9^8\). Similarly, Alexander Dow, writing from experience says that "the nation of Marathas, though chiefly composed of Rajputs, or that tribe of Indians whose chief business is war, retain the mildness of their countrymen in their domestic government. The Marathas represented as barbarians, are great and rising people, subject to a regular government, the principle of which are founded on virtue"\(^9^9\).

These two observations clearly point to the fact that the very attempt to look at the pattern of political development in relation to the European kind of development greatly reduces the significance of such a notion such as bureaucracy, secular domain etc. Thus, the 18th century Maratha kingdom has to be strictly seen in its own terms as the importance of the various concepts and categories are

\(^9^8\) William H.Tone has been quoted in L.W. Preston, *The Devs of Cincvakd*, opp.cit., p. 23.

rooted in overlapping tendency. Since the notion of bureaucracy and secular domain etc. are modern phenomena, so the understanding of it has to be seen in its temporal milieu.

It is generally believed that the creation of Maratha administrative institutions owed a lot to the ancient Hindu kings in the Deccan.\textsuperscript{100} It is possibly due to this that the Maratha kings being Hindu rulers were both temporal and spiritual heads of the state.\textsuperscript{101} The administrative structure created by the Peshwas was similar to the Shivaji's model with a few modifications in the territorial division and the titles of officials. They continued the old system and tried offences against caste and religion with the help of Brahma Sabha and Jatisabha.\textsuperscript{102} The chief justice derived his social and religious jurisdiction from the Peshwas and punished social and religions wrongs by administering penance with the help of Brahmasabha.\textsuperscript{103} It was the customary right of the brahmins of the holy places to administer penances to those who submitted to them.

\textsuperscript{100} S.N. Sen, A.S.M, p. 363.
\textsuperscript{101} B.I.S.M., 29, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., pp. 57-58.
\textsuperscript{103} S.P.D., Vol. 43, pp. 50-56.
In cases of offences which were directly punished by the state, the government at the completion of the punishment dispensed penances to the offenders concerned through the agency of the Brahmasabha, and thus helped them to restore their own castes. Naturally in such cases government levied both the Raj-danda and Brahma-danda, according to the capacity of the culprit but the latter was spent for his purification and handed over to the brahmins, by the local public officers. In other cases, involving social and religious offences, the persons expelled were expected to visit the brahmins of the holy places for purification.

The judiciary sought its strength from the old Sanskrit treaties on law like mitaksara and Manu's code. Apart from these, they also depended upon old customs to transact cases of various kind. These old customs prescribed, among other forms, trial by ordeal. The Maratha judges regulated ordeal of fire and water as well as appeal to divine intervention in the form of an oath taken in a sacred temple. The trial by ordeal was an important feature of this period. In the absence of documentary evidence and witnesses, the device of getting divine proof was resorted through ordeal. If the Majlis of the place of origination thought it necessary to

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try the suit by means of divine proof, the litigants were sent to the public officer of the place and to the local govts, after its performance 'Thalpana' was given in favour of the party, which was absolutely necessary in the case of trial by an ordeal.\textsuperscript{106} These were various forms of ordeal but the most common ordeal was a piece of metal out of a pot full of boiling oil. This had to be performed in a temple of special sanctity and at an auspicious moment previously fixed by the government. The ordeal had to be witnessed by the villagers of the party as well as by a government officer deputed for that purpose.\textsuperscript{107} Ordeals with boiling water and burning lamps are also mentioned. In the latter case truth was supposed to be indicated by the period of burning.

It appears that the Sultans of the Deccan didn't interfere with the social and religious traditions of Hindus. Whenever a matter involving religious or social cases of the Hindus were brought to the public officer, they either referred it to local Brahmasabha or Jatisabha or settled it with the help of Majlis (assembly) of the Diwan (local govt. officers) and the gopa and the caste people.\textsuperscript{108} Maratha state had no original jurisdiction over social and

\textsuperscript{106} See V.T. Gune, Judicial System, pp. 105-109.

\textsuperscript{107} S.N. Sen, opp.cit., p. 223.

\textsuperscript{108} V.T. Gune, B.I.S.M., 1946, p. 57; also see Gune's Judicial System, pp. 102-113.
religious offences. Such causes, if referred to government, were tried with the help of Brahmabasha or the Jatisabha. The Peshwas continued the same system. 109

The Brahmabasha was headed by a dharmadhikari. It was composed of the learned brahmins, such as Mimansa, Mahabhasya Pandit, Puranile and the like. The Jatisabha was constituted by the members of the caste and who were collectively called as 'Daiva' or fate. They had jurisdiction over all sorts of offences that led to the degeneration of the caste and their right to expel such offenders, was sanctioned by customs. 110

It has been pointed out earlier also that the Chhatrapatis and the Peshwas were not only the secular but also the ecclesiastical head of the state. Such combination of secular and the religious authority necessitated the Peshwas to regulate social affairs as well. There are various instances where the Peshwa was the fountain of all justice. While giving decision to the people, he followed the rules laid down in Hindu sacred books. 111 The cases were referred to brahmins, well versed in Vedas and Sastras. A brahmin woman Savitri's case was referred to the

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109 Ibid., pp. 50-57.
110 Ibid., p. 58.
111 T.T. Mahajan, Maratha Administration in 18th Century, (Delhi, 1990), p. 22.
Dharmadhikari and other Brahmins well-versed in Vedas and Sastras of Kasaba karad. Peshwas were also supposed to decide about the religious rights and customs of their non-Hindu subjects. The dispute about the priesthood of the parties was decided by an officer of the Peshwas.

The state wielded considerable amount of power in various social activities as well. A learned swami of Kolhapur received letters of introduction from the Deshmukhs and Despandes who were instructed to help the swami to collect charities. In another letter, the Peshwa ordered Rs. 25 to be given to meet the expenses of Sati ceremony, the state would help in the reconstruction of a broken temple.

One of the important part played by the Peshwa government was the regulation of the caste matters. The government in this regard wielded enormous authority and power. This further points to the fact that the whole notion of bureaucracy and the creation of secular domain posited for Western Europe has to be considered seriously. The use of the concepts and categories like secularism, communalism

114 R.V. Oturkar, opp. cit, p. 204.
115 Ibid., p. 203.
etc. is a modern category and if used in the medieval context reduces the very logic of the operation of government. So, to understand secular institutions in terms of the displacement of religious beliefs and rituals would tantamount to denigrating the secular credentials of earlier states, despite its legitimacy derived through religious beliefs and rituals. R.N. Bellah, in fact, rightly argues that secular ideologies have taken on moral authority in many civilisations around the globe, some what in the manner of world religions, despite their rootedness in European culture.\textsuperscript{116}

Fukazawa argues that the Maratha state played a vital role in regulating the caste matters; from the forfeiture and restoration of caste-status of individuals to the division of castes; the formulation of caste codes and the stabilisation of caste distinctions. The system itself was an order of society protected, controlled and stabilised by the government.\textsuperscript{117} The rulers, being brahmins and the upholders of the brahmanic civilisation, attempted traditions and regulations governing the system. The regulation of caste system by the state shows that how a


\textsuperscript{117} The prevalent caste system and its administrative regulation is dealt at length, in H. Fukazawa, The Medieval Decan; Peasant, Social System and States 16th to 18th century, (Oxford, Delhi, 1991), p. 107; also see S.V. Desai, \textit{opp.cit.}, chapter on caste system; Ranade, Introduction to the Peshwa's Diaries.
ruler is bound to protect and maintain status order of society within the traditional Hindu concept, such an exercise further evokes the rules and procedures laid down in the Dharmashastras. Within this hierarchy of castes, brahmins still enjoyed the highest social status and on many occasions the Peshwas summoned the representative brahmins priests from various holy places and made a decision based on their expert opinions. But, unlike the earlier period, the brahmin supremacy and their high status in the society was questioned at many levels and it is possibly in this context that the rise of various families in central and western India from their obscure origin testifies the waning orthodox value of brahmanic traditional institutions.

Conclusion

The Maratha identity during the brahmanic dispensation had foundation in the period of Shivaji where the relationship between the king and brahmin was gradually getting entrenched, and emerged as the legitimate political expression of the time. The legitimation of kingship transcended or tried to bypass the existing social milieu by strongly invoking Indian classical texts, which in fact filtered through in many ways and became fictitious over time. Unlike this king-brahmin relationship, the

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118 See Fukazawa, Opp. cit, p. 98.
dispensation dawned itself with the era of brahmanic hegemonisation. The Chitpavan Peshwas, out of their gradually acquired political strength, gave a particularly brahmanical form to the political culture which apart from Maharashtra, became a symbolic reference around the subcontinent. The religiosity came through so strongly that it not only had the reflection in their personal life, but in most of their political acts and activities. The administrative bureaucracy seemed to be abounding in transacting cases of the kind which can strongly guard the religion of the land. This is further evident in British government's own policy to preserve and maintain all the religious rights. Grants made by the Peshwas were continued even after, the fall of the Peshwa government in conciliating the people and winning the loyalty to the British government. So the brahmanical forms and idioms provided unprecedented brahmanical colour to the Peshwa's rule. This politico-religious forms under brahmanic dispensation at Pune also questions Louis Dumont's understanding where the kingship is encompassed within the religion, and brahmin represents merely the religious realm. It seems that kingship itself remained beneath the weight of religion and its various practices.

In many ways the Peshwa government could not overcome the problem of being absolutely independent as it sought its legitimacy from the two established centres of power, that
of Delhi and Satara. In fact, Poona’s relationship with Satara in one or the other way, brought people’s legitimation to the Peshwas as a sovereign political power. The very understanding of Satara receding into the symbolic background in the general historical writing questions Poona’s sudden emergence as a political centre in the 18th century, as the very internal logic of the building of empire in every part of the globe takes time to stabilise before coming into a force to be reckoned with. The emergence of Chitpavan as a tightly knit administrative body in the 18th century is inextricably linked to a relationship which they maintained with the Chhatraptis of Satara since the time of Shivaji. In 18th century the brahmanic institution was also exposed to the vagaries of change at every front, where its own attempt to mobilise various resources in strengthening its political hegemony, had to compromise and reconcile with recessive themes which went against their dominant motifs, simultaneously bringing in stresses and strain in their established brahmanic ideology while incorporating a synthesis between brahmanic high religion and popular beliefs. Moreover, the very concept of ‘Maratha’ became much more flexible as it made other sections equally striving to into its fold. Despite brahmins keeping away from the category, the ‘Maratha identity’ seems to be turning into a form of social status. Moreover, the brahmin government itself was imbued with Marathi forms and Maratha status. It has also been made clear that the very
component of political sovereignty can go against the concerns, rhetorics of courts and nobilities which in turn widens the very notion of tradition in regulating the power and authority. Tradition now assimilates new elements and makes its boundary flexible in terms of its representation in the construction of identity. It simultaneously questions the notion, concept and category, such as bureaucracy, secular domain identified as an intrinsic part of modernity and civil society. Tradition itself shows that the rationality of such categories in its temporal milieu can co-exist with its representation of extreme conventional forms as well as changing and reinterpreting conventional constructions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PESHWAS AT POONA</th>
<th>Year (in A.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balaji Vishwanath</td>
<td>1714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baji Rao I</td>
<td>1720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balaji Bajirao</td>
<td>1740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhavrao I</td>
<td>1761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narayanrao I</td>
<td>1772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raghunathrao</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhavrao Narayan</td>
<td>1774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bajirao II</td>
<td>1796-1818</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDIA BY AROUND 1805

Fig: 1.3
Source: K. P. Diksit, Maharashtra in Maps
(Maharashtra State Board, Bombay, 1986)