CHAPTER VI

BASSEIN AREA IN THE 18TH CENTURY

The beginning of the 18th century saw a number of developments at Bombay. In 1704 the two English trading companies were amalgamated. Bombay thrived. A Town hall was built in 1716 and a large church was completed in 1718. As Bombay and the East India Company prospered, so did the difficulties of the Portuguese increase. In fact the Portuguese tried every trick known to them to scuttle the growth of Bombay. The English at Bombay depended for all supplies and necessities of life on imports, mainly from the Maratha country. The Portuguese tried to stop these from reaching Bombay. For example they had planted many spies in Bombay and elsewhere. In fact, they were told about English preparations at Bombay by no less a person than Lakshmibai, widow of Kanhoji Angre.

The Arabs who had been afraid of the Portuguese so far now realised that their strength was waning and started attacking Portuguese ships between 1712 and 1720 AD. The Maratha Navy had become a potent force under Kanhoji Angre and had gained naval superiority along the western coast, especially south of Bombay. They were more or less supreme between 1712 and 1729. The English, the Dutch and once a combined force of the English and Portuguese, all tried to subdue Kanhoji but each attempt failed.

In 1727 the Portuguese appointed an officer to examine the state of the defences at various places and forts. The officer found the “management most loose and corrupt”. There was no discipline. The cavalry was weak, Bassein having only eight fit horses. There were 90 guns ranging from 3 to 24 pounders but trained gunners were not available in adequate numbers. The garrison was 80 men, almost all natives. Towards the sea gate a sand hill had accumulated almost as high as the walls of the fort.

The hill of Dongri, 2 miles east of Sopara was fortified but poorly. The stockades at Sopara and other places had become weak and not fit for the purpose for which they were built. Salsette could be entered easily. This island, which supported Bassein, and even Goa, was unguarded and open to attack by the Siddis, the English and the Marathas. At Thana the three towers or bastions with a total of ten guns could fire on ships but were too weak to stop any land attack. The Versova fort was small and ugly and mostly in ruins. At Manor the walls were barely six feet high and 5 out of 8 guns were unserviceable. The troops were made up of many small detachments. Three companies were from Goa. Six others were locally raised but “they had no pay and had to be fed by their captains.” This report brought some urgency to the Portuguese generals and work started on improving the fortifications. A new fort was built at Thana. New policy was decided upon, mainly to appease the Marathas. The Portuguese nobles, corrupt and self indulgent, were to build a fort or stockade in every village.

Now comes the great Bassein campaign of the Marathas under the command of Chimaji Appa, brother of the Peshwa Baji Rao Ist. The Peshwa was annoyed because the Portuguese had supported Sambhaji Angre against Manaji Angre, a protégé of the
Peshwa. There were also numerous representations made to the Peshwa appealing for help and liberating the people from the tyrannical Portuguese rule. This is sated as the main cause of the campaign in Sastichi Bakhar When Baji Rao sent an emissary to the Portuguese; he was treated very shabbily who even called Baji Rao a Negro. The time was also opportune. Goa was being harassed by Marathas and Angre’s fleet was available. The Peshwa decided to remove Portuguese presence north of Bombay once and for all. The Portuguese religious intolearation is described in Appendix ’B’.

**The Bassein Campaign**

Maratha interest in Bassein started quite early. There was a Maratha incursion in Bassein area as early as 1717. When the Marathas demanded chauth and sardeshmukhi on the strength of the Imperial firman, the Portuguese reply was that the firman was applicable in Mughal territory and not in Portuguese territory. In 1723 Pilaji Jadhav captured Gokarve. Action intensified so much that in 1730 the Portuguese General of the North, Dom Antonio Casco de Melo declared war on the Marathas on 9th May. The initial acrimony was mainly over Kalyan and Bhivandi area which the Marathas wanted. At this time Bassein got a new General of the North, Martino de Silveira de Menezes.

Under the initiative of the new general a treaty of peace and friendship was signed between the two parties.—by Martino de Selveira, Captain General of the Forts and Lands of the North and Signhor Krishnarao Mahadev, Maratha official at Kalyan. This was in November, 1731 The English governor at Bombay, Robert Caivan mediated.

The Marathas also coveted Salsette Island and Thana. The Portuguese had started building a fort at Thana. The local inhabitants were pressed into service. “These miserable people were compelled to work for the construction without food or wage.” The condition of the people, especially the religious persecution was brought to the notice of Peshwa Baji Rao by Gangaji Naik, Babuji Naik and Janardan Naik, who were originally residents of Warne- Bandra- but who had to leave to escape Portuguese persecution. They told the Peshwa that the Portuguese had “desecrated temples and sacred places and put down the Maratha religion and had polluted the Hindus…”

The campaign opened in April, 1737. Maratha advance was made easy because the ghats that protected Bassein and Sopara had not been defended. Arnala was captured by the Marathas on 6th/7th April, 1737. The Marathas then camped at Bhadrapur, east of Bassein. The forts of Saybana, Manori, Bandra and Versova were then attacked. They then attacked and captured Ghodbandar and Thana in Salsette. Since they controlled the waterways the Portuguese at Bassein could not send any help to Thana. At Thana the fort was not fully ready and fortified and it was easily taken, the Portuguese captain fleeing to Karanja. The East India Company sent some men to Bandra but this was not enough and Bandra also fell to the Marathas. During his phase the Marathas suffered only minor reverses such as at Asheri. The chief Maratha generals
of this phase were Shankaraji Pant Phadke, Ramachandra Hari, Chiman Bapuji, Anjurkar Naiks, Antaji Raghunath and Ramchandra Joshi.

Baji Rao appointed Shankaraji Pant Phadke to the Chief command, Gangaji Naik to command the forces against Bassein and Khandoji Mankar to those against Salsette. A force of 1000 troops was also collected at Kalyan. Acting on the information given by an informant, the Marathas crossed the ford at Kalve, attacked Thana and occupied Salsette. After a lull, in January 1739 Chimaji Appa, brother of the Peshwa Baji Rao 1st took personal command. He left Poona on 24th March and one after another the other forts in the area were captured – Katalvada outpost, Dahanu, Kelve, Mahim, Shirgaon and Tarapur. Turning their attention south both Versova and Dharavi were captured thus completely isolating Bassein. The main thrusts of the Marathas are shown in Map 6 placed on the next page.

The force under Phadke hoped to surprise the Portuguese at Bassein but could not as the fight at the ford Rajwal had warned the Bassein fort commander of the enemy’s approach. Chimaji Appa before starting the siege of Bassein made sure that it was cut off from recieving any help. This he did by occupying the whole of Salsette. Thana fort and harbour was secured and a force under Narayan Joshi moved against Parsik. The forts and harbours of Bandra and Versova were also tactically important and these, too, were captured. There was stout resistance at

Map 7 Main Maratha thrusts. Bassein campaign, 1737-1739.

both places and the Marathas suffered many casualties. So also at Manora, which surrendered after a fight before reinforcements of three companies of infantry, and 500 under Antonio Brita da Sylva could reach it.

Versova, which had a small fort, was important because it dominated the western part of the island. The total gains in this phase were Thana, Preyara, Tanjipura, Arnala, Manor and mountains of Santa Cruz and Santa Maria.

The name of Gangaji Naik figures prominently in the skirmishes of this period. Arnala was captured without much trouble. Shankaraji Pant, who was in command, realised the strategic importance of Arnala and immediately started preparing defences. The siege of Bassein was then started. The first attack took place on 8th September, 1737

The Portuguese resisted bravely. The fort was strong and was the main symbol of Portuguese power in Upper Konkan. The walls were high and thick and the bastions carried guns. Bassein creek in the south and marshy land, flooded by sea water in the east, meant that the Marathas could approach only from the north. During this first attack it was found that the ladders used by the Marathas were short by some four feet. The attacks were directed at the bastions of Cavellerio and San Sebastian. The points of attack by the Marathas are shown in Diagram Number 1 placed on the next page.
The Portuguese commander Pedro Guides de Megalhaes was confident of defending the fort as long as the Portuguese naval power ensured that supplies by sea would be sent undisturbed. Indeed, at one stage they received from Goa plenty of munitions, 7000 bags or rice and 1000 zephines. But the Portuguese could not prevent the Marathas from getting more and more reinforcements. It thus became a battle of attrition. Moreover the Marathas adopted a new strategy and, crossing the river Dativre, attacked Mahim and Kelve. This isolated Bassein from the north.

The Portuguese tried very hard to get allies and approached the English as well as Sambhaji Angre. The English declined to give any active help but did provide some supplies. This was protested by Khandoji Mankar and further help was, probably stopped. Sambhaji Angre was not strong enough to do anything. Manaji Angre, on the other hand, captured Uran or Karanja island on 9th June. By now the Portuguese had decided to concentrate on Bassein and give up all the other features such as Tarapur, Mahim, Kelve, Shirgaon and Asheri. Meanwhile the Marathas had captured Dharavi and by middle of 1738 Shankaraji Phadke had cleared the Bassein Creek.

The year 1738 also saw a change of commanders. The Governor was recalled to Goa and another, Pedro de Melao was appointed in his place. On the Maratha side, Chimaji Appa returned to Poona to recuperate on 6th June, 1738 but finding the affairs at Bassein not progressing very satisfactorily, returned and took over the command in December, 1738.

The Marathas tried to escalade the walls but failed. The Marathas now decided to attack Goa and so prevent any reinforcements being sent from there. The attack was launched in January, 1739. The chief commanders on the Maratha side were Dadaji Bhave and Nandurkar. The Maratha attack against Goa is shown in Map 8 placed on the next page. The attack on Bardesh from the south was launched by the Sawants of Wadi.

Map 8. Maratha Attack Against Goa.
This had the desired effect and there was a treaty between the two in May, 1739. At Bassein according to Portuguese sources Chimaji Appa had 25,000 cavalry, 40,000 infantry and 4000 miners and sappers. The logistic train had 5000 camels and 30 elephants. Besides a large labour force. Bassein fort did not have any external defences such as a moat or trenches. The Maratha cavalry could, therefore, totally surround the fort. Artillery bombardment by the Marathas was not proving very effective although the parapet was destroyed at many places. The damage at most places was repaired by the energetic effort of engineers Dom Adriano Gavilla and the General Martin da Silveira. The Marathas, therefore, decided to lay mines “a device in which the Marathas excelled”. First two mines were laid, one against the bastion of St Remedy and the second against the bastion of Cavaleiro. The trenches came so close to the fort that the attackers could throw grenades over the walls. In one of the encounters Captain Joao Xavier Pereira was shot. However, the open trenches were subject to much fire from the fort walls. To circumvent this the Marathas dug galleries, underground. To divert attention the Maratha artillery continued to pound the walls. These mines proved more effective. The bastion of St. Sebastian was destroyed and the Marathas rushed through the breech. Hand to hand fighting ensued. It was only after three months (17 February to 16th May) that the fort surrendered. In fact at one stage Chimaji Appa said in frustration “the only way I can get inside the fort is if some one blows me from the mouth of a cannon”. The casualties on both sides were high, but especially so in the case of the Marathas. On 15th May, the Portuguese raised a white flag and sued for terms. The fort was evacuated on the 23rd May, 1739. On the Maratha side a notable casualty was that of Mudhoji Pant Phadke at the Battle in front of Mahim on 20th January, 1739. The gains to the Marathas were admirably summed up by Danvers. The Marathas acquired the entire northern province of the Portuguese from Bombay to Daman. Four chief ports, 340 villages, Bassein, eight other cities and forts, island of Salsette, and a revenue of Rs. 2,50,000 rupees annually. The Marathas gave very honourable terms. The garrison was allowed to march out and those who wished to leave were given a week to collect their belongings. Many migrated and gave up their estates. The Marathas showed admirable religious tolerance and the churches were not destroyed or the Christians were not persecuted. The fall of Bassein hit the Portuguese very hard. As Cohelo puts it “Thus fell a European city in India, as a stately tree, the growth of two centuries, which fell never to flourish again”. The sar subedar, Shankaraji Keshav, built eight temples in place of those destroyed. The temple at Nirmal, the most fascinating, was built around 1750. (See appendix ‘B’) The Peshwa was now in total control of all the Portuguese area north of Bombay and up to Daman. This caused considerable alarm to the East India Company at Bombay. This was because of the strategic importance of Salsette and Bassein to Bombay as will be narrated in Chapter, IX. The Company now made overtures of peace and friendship. Captain Inchbird was sent to Chimaji and Captain Gordon was sent to Satara to wait upon the Chhatrapati Shahu. These embassies were skilfully conducted and favourable treaties were concluded.
Bassein Under the Marathas

The Marathas did not destroy the churches inside the fort. However, except for repairing the damage caused during the siege, no new construction was undertaken. The political aim of the Marathas was not only to eliminate Portuguese power in the north but also to gain a good port on the west coast to enable their trade to thrive. By this time Gujarat was coming under Maratha influence and Bassein was a good location on the way to Surat.

The Marathas introduced a fair and peaceful government at Bassein. They named it Bajipur after the Peshwa Baji Rao Ist. It was made the headquarters of a subah with a sardeshmukh posted there. Hindu families who had left the area to escape from Portuguese persecution now returned to some extent. The administration was now carried on in Marathi and indigenous schools opened. The locals, and the native Christians also joined these schools.

The Frenchman Anquetil travelled from Surat to Kanheri caves in Salsette and gives a good description of the country. He found the Bassein country peaceful with many flourishing orchards as at Agashi. He found many Christians going about their daily chores without let or hindrance. He paid a tribute to the religious policy of the Marathas.

The politically insane policy of the Peshwa Nanasaheb in securing an alliance with the British at Bombay to put down his own Admiral, Tulaji Angre, meant that the Maratha navy lost its clout and the entire western coast went under the control of the East India Company. Bassein was not directly affected but it was obvious that the Maratha Navy would no longer be able to come to the aid of Bassein should a necessity arise.

The East India Company always wanted to secure Salsette and Bassein for both military and economic reasons as will be explained in Chapter IX. Control of Salsette and Bassein was essential to protect the northern flank of Bombay. The company also wanted the rice, vegetables and land revenue of Salsette and the ship building of Bassein.

Any detailed discussion of the causes and consequences of the Anglo-Maratha Wars will be outside the scope of this research. However a brief summary may be given since both Salsette and Bassein were involved, and it directly led to the capture of Salsette and Bassein by the British.

The acrimony, and then an open rupture, between the Peshwa Madhav Rao and his uncle Raghunath Rao split the Maratha nation into two camps, In fact it was the beginning of the fall of Maratha power. Raghunath Rao was brave, but insanely ambitious to become the Peshwa himself. He was also a past master in intrigue. After the untimely death of Madhav Rao, his younger brother Narayan Rao became the Peshwa. As
soon as Madhav Rao died, the East India Company thought the circumstances favourable for military action mainly against Bassein, Vijaydurg and Ratnagiri. Narayan Rao was alive to the danger and he appointed Trimbak Vinayak to command at Bassein. Visaji Pant Lele was an enterprising Maratha official. It was he who first found out British designs upon Bassein. But he was corrupt and had misappropriated about Rs. Ten Lakhs. He was, therefore, sacked and Trimbak Vinayak appointed.

Within a few months of Narayan Rao’s Peshwaship, tragedy struck. Raghunath Rao contrived to have Narayan Rao murdered and ascended the masnad of the Peshwaship.

Raghunath Rao was forced in 1773 to leave Poona for good. He made his way to Surat and sought the Company’s protection and help. At the Treaty of Surat signed on 6th March, 1775, Raghunath Rao promised to cede all Bombay Islands, Salsette and Bassein to the English in perpetuity once he got back into power. In the meantime, however, the English decided to make peace with the Marathas and the Treaty of Purandar was signed on 1st March, 1776. Under it the English gave up Bassein but retained Salsette.

The First Anglo-Maratha War was fought to help Raghunath Rao to gain the Peshwaship. The first Bor Ghat expedition in support of Raghunath Rao was under the command of Colonel Egerton, but on his return to Bombay due to sickness, the command passed to Colonel Cockburn. The forces arrived at Panvel across the Thane Creek and then marched over land to Khopoli on 15th December, 1778. Here they remained till 23rd December. The Marathas started attacking the English lines of communications. To add to their worries, Mostyn, who had a good knowledge of Maratha affairs, fell sick and had to return to Bombay were he died in January. Raghoba had assured the English that the people of Maharashtra would come out in his support once the troops reached Maratha territory beyond the ghats. This was proved to be completely wrong. Between Khandala and Karla (Karli in English records) the Company lost two gallant officers, Captain Stewart and Colonel Cay. Captain Stewart’s great courage and skill brought praise even from the Marathas who gave him the title phakada calling him Ishtur Phakada. When the force reached Talegaon, some seventeen miles west of Poona, they found the town in flames. There was a serious shortage of supplies. It was decided to retreat. The Marathas now attacked with renewed vigour. The retreat could have turned into a rout but for the leadership of Captain Hartley who commanded the rear guard. At Wadgaon, west of Talegaon and east of Khandala, a treaty was signed on the 15th March, 1777. Nana Phadnis the Poona minister was keen that Rahunath Rao should be surrendered. Surrendering Raghunath Rao would have put the Company in the greatest of embarrassment. However, they were spared this ignominy as Raghunath Rao had already surrendered to Shinde. The First Bor Ghat Expedition is shown n Map 9 placed on the next page.

The Treaty of Wadgaon was not recognised by either Governor Hornby at Bombay or Governor General Wellesley at Calcutta as it had been signed without their concurrence. They called it the Convention of Wadgaon. He defeat led to many recriminations. Colonel Egerton and Colonel Cockburn were sent on leave. Captain Hartley’s skill and
bravery brought him a promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. There was also a complete change in the attitude at Calcutta. Till this time Wellesley was opposed to helping Raghunath Rao. It was also against the policy laid down by London. The Supreme Council in London had specifically instructed Bombay not to harbour Raghunath Rao.

Map. 9. First Bor Ghat Expedition.

Raghunath Rao made matters more complicated by escaping from Shinde’s custody and again arriving at Surat. Now that it was decided to help him a second expedition was planned.

It should be mentioned that Governor General Wellesley had sent Colonel Upton to the Peshwa’s court for negotiations. He travelled through Bundelkhand and Malwa with an entourage of 1500 men, with great pomp. It was to impress everyone with British power. Passports for his travel were granted by Sakharam Bapu. He met Sakharam Bapu and Krishnarao Kale. The meetings took place in a specially erected tent at the base of Purandar fort. Upton personally confirmed that the child Peshwa, the Late Narayan Rao’s posthumous son, was the legal heir and not an impostor. A new treaty was signed with Raghunath Rao. It stipulated that unless Raghunath Rao could prove that the young Madhav Rao was not the son of the late Narayan Rao, he was to act as Regent. Raghunath Rao promised to cede Salsette and many areas in Gujarat. He also consented not to allow any European to settle in Peshwa’s territory without the consent of the English.

Both Salsette and Bassein saw military operations during the war. First the Salsette campaign. In command were Brigadier General Gordon of the land forces and Admiral Watson of the naval forces. The British force reached Thana on the afternoon of 12th February, 1774 and occupied a church some one kilometre on the west of the fort. See Diagram Number 2.. Next to it was a small pond and a grove of mango and tamarind trees, which provided concealment. The fort commander, Anand Belvalkar had less than 2000 men. His advance guard at Chandani had to be withdrawn inside the fort. While the Company’s naval contingent was on its way north, it was attacked by a small force from Kalva bit after a sharp fight it had to retire. By the afternoon of the 13th, the Company’s troops had completely occupied the town and had surrounded the fort on three sides. Maratha reinforcements, when and if they came, could only do so from the north. In fact a Maratha force under Bhagwantrao Khanwilkar with Govindrao Hari

Diagram Number 2. The Salsette Campaign of the British.
had started from the north but they were repulsed, surprisingly, by a small British force. From Poona Visaji Krishna, Shivaji Vitthal and Appaji Ghodapkar were detailed to help Thane. Unfortunately before they could reach, the fort had surrendered. On 12th December. Commodore Watson proposed that part of the force with guns should be sent to encircle the fort from the north but this was not agreed to by Colonel Gordan who wanted all the guns with him to bombard the fort from the south. See Diagram Number 2. It has been said that the fort commander of Thane was prepared to surrender the fort on payment of Rs. Two lakhs, sixty thousand. But this was not agreed to by Bombay Governor Hornby.

Bombardment started once the British batteries had been erected and although the fort guns replied with spirit, they could not prevent the British bombardment, which soon caused a breach in the walls. Belvalkar was sending appeal after appeal to Poona for help but no help was forthcoming in time. The tardiness displayed by Visaji Krishna, Shivaji Vitthal and Appaji Ghodapkar was fatal to the Maratha cause. Why the delay? No rational answer can be given. This can only be explained by noting that the Poona court was so engrossed with Raghunath Rao and operations against him near Surat that the tactical importance of Thana and the need to defend it was not appreciated in time.

On the 28th the breach was considered suitable for an entry. The attempt to fill up the ditch outside the wall was made easy when the Ganga buruz collapsed and partly filled up the ditch. By now the constant bombardment had made the fort’s artillery ineffective. The assault was led by Colonel Keating and by 1500 hrs the fort was captured. The Maratha casualties were much higher than those of the British. Commodore Watson was seriously injured when an exploding shell drove sand into his eyes.

After the capture of Thana the Company also took Versova on the western coast of Salsette and the island of Karanja. However, their attempt to cross Bor Ghat and March towards Poona with Raghunath Rao failed. The English force was under the command of Colonel Egerton with John Carnac to assist him in political matters.

The Treaty of Purandar, signed in March, 1776, brought to a close the first phase of the first Anglo-Maratha War. During the second phase, when it was decided to renew the war on behalf of Raghunath Rao, a force was assembled at Kalpi consisting of six battalions of native infantry, native and European artillery, a regiment of cavalry and 500 Kandhahar horsemen. It was place under the command of Colonel Leslie but on his death Colonel Goddard took over. Goddard marched and reached Surat. When the war was resumed he swung into action capturing Ahmedabad and bringing Fateh Singh Gaikwad into the Company’s fold. He then marched towards Bombay and attacked and took Bassein and some surrounding forts. It must be emphasised that the decision to help Raghunath Rao was taken against instructions received from the Supreme Council in England who had instructed Bombay Government not to shelter Raghunath Rao.
Goddard’s campaign against Bassein is illustrated in Diagram Number 3. The Maratha fort commander, Visaji Lele, had anticipated the attack and had taken many steps to improve the defences. For example, he had re-sited the arsenals so that one stray shot would not destroy all the powder. Goddard, now a Brigadier General, arrived east of the Bassein Island on 12th November, 1780. Here, he was very pleasantly surprised to see that the bridge near Gokharve was intact and not guarded. Anand Rao Raste, the Maratha general sent by Poona to assist Anand Rao had neglected to take this basic tactical precaution. Goddard had erected batteries at Bajipura, Koli Bandar, Pali and Pospie Island. While Goddard marched on Bassein, he sent Colonel Hartley to interdict Maratha reinforcements from reaching Bassein. Harley met and defeated Panse and Baji Pant Joshi near Panvel on 8th May, 1786. Also another force under the brave Ramchandra Ganesh was made to retire after a stray shot killed the commander.

Diagram Number 3. Goddard’s Campaign Against Bassein.

The fort was thus completely surrounded. Heavy shelling by British guns did considerable damage to the walls and inside structures. The counter bombardment from the fort was not very effective. Seeing no hope of any reinforcements from reaching him, Visaji pant agreed to surrender the fort. This took place on the 12th December, 1780. The garrison of about 4000, including 1000 Arabs laid down their arms. One of the terms of the surrender was the handing over of an English deserter, Johnson. He was promptly court marshalled and hanged. 71 Visaji Pant and others elected to join the Peshwa, declining Goddard’s offer of safe conduct to Bombay.

Why the Maratha debacle? 4000 troops surrendered without a serious fight. The artillery was not used efficiently. There were no sorties, no attempt to spike British guns. The only explanation is low morale. The troops had not been paid for a long time. The garrison had alienated the local population and could not expect any support from them. And most importantly, the large relieving force from Poona, under the command of Kanade and Naronha was intercepted and delayed by Colonel Hartley’s force. He engaged the Marathas in numerous skirmishes, retiring to take a new position and then attacking the Marathas again. Military skill demanded that the Marathas should refuse these delaying tactics, by pass Hartley’s positions and rush to Bassein. This was not done.

Goddard now turned his attention to the other forts in the area. Arnala was captured next. Here the large garrison under Madhav Rao Belase fought for some time but ultimately surrendered. Tarapur, Mahim, Takmak 72 were some of the other forts captured.

In the third phase of the First Anglo-Maratha War, Goddard tried to reach Poona via Bor Ghat, The traitor Raghunath Rao with his small force and a large number of
followers were with him. His attempt to reach Poona, however, failed completely. Here the Marathas showed much greater skill and courage. Goddard

Map Number 10. Second (Colonel Goddard’s) Bor Ghat xpedition.

was allowed to reach Khalapur and then ascend the ghats on 9th February, 1781 to Khandala. Here he was struck for two months or so, i.e. till 15th April, 1781. The Marathas attacked both in his front and sent forces to attack him on his flanks. See Diagram Number. 4. placed below. His supplies were interdicted. For example a train of 2000 bullocks carrying stress to Goddard at Khandala was captured. The Pindaris were let loose on his lines of communications. 73 Tukoji Holkar came into play and broke the flanks of the English army. and completely defeated the British.

The war ended with the Treaty of Salbai concluded on 17th May, 1782. Salbai was a small village 20 miles south of Gwalior where Mahadj Shinde was camping. 74 The main provisions of the treaty which contained seventeen articles were as follows:

- Bassein and all other places taken by the British since the Treaty of Purandar should be restored to the Peshwa. Territories in Gujarat would be returned to the Peshwa and Gaikwad. Bhadoch was given to Shinde for services rendered.
- The Island of Salsette and the other smaller ones near Bombay should remain with the Company.
- Raghunath Rao was to be surrendered to the Peshwa through Shinde. He would have to spend the remainder of his life on a pension at a secluded place in Maharashtra.

In 1787 the Polish traveller Dr Hove travelled through Salsette. He describes it as showing signs of great decay. From Versova to Thane, Hove did not find a single village. 75 The next year he travelled from Surat to Bassein and found things in much better shape. The coastal strip from Dahanu to Bassein was tilled the whole way. He also writes about the presence of many tigers! In 1790, however, the rains failed and there was a famine. The British later granted large estates to foster agriculture. During the last fifteen years of the century the Chinese trade had increased. As Bombay prosper, so did Bassein decline.

Critique

The political and military ethos of the three powers, Portuguese, English and Marathas has been described in Chapter VIII. The Military importance of Bassein and
Bassein area has been given in Chapter IX. However, one cannot leave this topic of the Anglo-Maratha War without analysing the performance of both parties. This is significant to the later happenings at Bassein.

The war was not something to be proud of, for either side. 

Both parties made many mistakes and some blunders. The British look at the Treaty of Salbai as a great victory. This is not quite correct. The Company had to restore all territories captured by it, except, of course, Salsette. Indemnities that the Poona Government had agreed to pay at the Treaty of Purandar were dropped. Gaikwad’s role as an independent chief had to be modified and he again became subordinate to the Peshwa.

Militarily, both parties made several errors. The English undertook the First Bor Ghat expedition in haste and without adequate planning. They should have waited for Goddard’s arrival or of other reinforcements. Advancing up to Poona would mean having a very long supply line, a line that they were not in a position to defend or maintain. Goddard’s retreat was prompted, almost entirely, due to logistic problems.

On the Maratha side, no attempt was made to annihilate the enemy forces on the field of battle. This was an aim as true and valid as later propounded by Clausewitz. Harassing the enemy is one thing, crushing him is quite another.

Scorched earth tactics employed in your own land alienated the people. To lose Salsette, Bassein, Kalyan, and many other forts was a disgrace to Maratha arms.

The Poona durbar almost never sent reinforcement in time, or the commanders of the forces despatched, like Raste, Dhulap, Naronha, were guilty of much tardiness. The Marathas had lost that mobility which in the times of Shivaji or Baji Rao Ist, had made them unbeatable.

Morale was a key factor. After Shahu, the Chhatrapati became a cipher. The soldier’s loyalty was now to be given not to the king, but to his minister. This was not good for morale. Then, after the murder of Narayan Rao and the death of Sawai Madhav Rao, the soldier was now asked to be loyal, not to the Peshwa, but to his minister. This further diluted morale. During the time of Nana Phadnis, there was neither a king, nor a country. There was no cohesive territorial entity which could be called a Maratha State.

The acrimony between the Maratha sirdars was ruinous to the Maratha cause. The open hostility between Daulatrao Shinde and Yeshwantrao Holkar was responsible for more than half the ills with which the Maratha power suffered.

An oft repeated reason given for Maratha defeat was the better troops of the Company. This is not quite correct. The native soldier serving in the Company’s army, and those serving in Maratha army, were of the same caste and creed, came from the same provinces, often from the same village. They displayed the same degree of personal grit and courage. The difference lay in the way they were led. The Company had
outstanding soldiers and commanders. Daulatrao Shinde and the Peshwa were conspicuous by their absence from the field of battle!!

These were, then, some of the causes of Maratha debacle. A debacle which only ended with the surrender of the last Peshwa, Baji Rao IIInd to the Company in 1818.

The rest of the 18th century did not see any event of note occurring at Bassein or Salsette. The great upheaval in Maratha politics and the part played by Bassein comes in the next chapter.