

PATTERN OF STATE FORMATION IN BARODA: 1720-1939

ABSTRACT

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7 MARCH, 2023

This dissertation has given an account of the pattern of state formation at Baroda under the aegis of the Gaekwad rulers who received help from the British who formulated the Baroda State throughout the nineteenth century. In other words, this dissertation has studied the gradual evolution of the Baroda State from its incipency in the eighteenth century, to its growth during the course of the nineteenth century and the final maturing of the State in the late nineteenth and twentieth century within the time frame of 1720 to 1939 i.e. from the year of its foundation to the year when the death of its greatest ruler Sayajirao Gaekwad III occurred.

The Baroda State was founded in the 1720s by a renowned Maratha freebooter Pilajirao Gaekwad (1720-32) who is considered the first ruler of the Baroda State and from whom the present Gaekwads trace their ancestry. He was born in 1677 and along with his uncle Damajirao Gaekwad I distinguished himself in the service of the Senapati Khanderao Dabhade. His uncle Damajirao Gaekwad I showed exemplary valor at the Battle of Balapur in 1721 and was conferred by Shahu (1707-49) with the title of *Shamsher Bahadur* or 'An Illustrious Swordsman' and also made the lieutenant of the Senapati. The death of the Senapati Khanderao Dabhade and his lieutenant Damajirao Gaekwad I occurred soon after the Battle of Balapur in May 1721. While Khanderao Dabhade was succeeded by his son Trimbakrao Dabhade, Pilajirao Gaekwad succeeded his uncle Damajirao Gaekwad I.

A curious thing happened during the reign of Shahu which resulted in a bitter enmity between the Peshwa and the Gaekwad which only ended with the fall of the former in 1818. During the reign of Shivaji (1674-80) the post of the Peshwa was equal to that of the Senapati. However, the grandson of Shivaji, Shahu, ceded all powers to the Peshwa, made his post hereditary and also made him the *de facto* ruler of the Maratha Empire thus diminishing the powers of the Senapati. This caused deep indignation to the Senapati and led to a bitter rivalry between the Dabhade family and the family of the Peshwa which was inherited by their lieutenants the Gaekwads. Thus the Gaekwads were never keen on becoming a part of the Maratha Confederacy of which the Peshwa was the head with zeal and always strove for their independence.

The first encounter between the Peshwa and the Gaekwad occurred at the Battle of Bhilupur in 1731 when the Peshwa, Baji Rao I (1720-40), intervened in the affairs of Gujarat in 1729. Gujarat was considered as their prey by the Senapati Trimbakrao Dabhade, Pilajirao Gaekwad and other Maratha freebooters who resented this interference by the Peshwa. The

bitter enemy of the Peshwa, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah (1724-48), took advantage of this resentment and formed a confederacy of the Senapati and other disaffected Maratha *sardars* to fight the army of the Peshwa. This resulted in the Battle of Bhilupur in which the better disciplined army of Baji Rao I defeated the confederacy. Trimbakrao Dabhade and the eldest son of Pilajirao Gaekwad, Sayajirao, were slain in this battle. Since Baji Rao I was anxious to fight Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah on equal terms he decided not to be harsh with the confederates. Thus Shahu conferred the title of *Sena Khas Khel* or 'commander of the special band' or 'leader of the sovereign's band' on Pilajirao Gaekwad which along with *Shamsher Bahadur* was retained by his descendants.

Pilajirao Gaekwad also obtained the custody of the youthful son of Trimbakrao Dabhade, Yashwantrao Dabhade, and now with all the resources of the Senapati at his disposal he began to harass the Mughal viceroy of Gujarat, Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur, who unable to defeat him in open battle got him assassinated in 1732 at Dakor.

Pilajirao Gaekwad was succeeded by his son Damajirao Gaekwad II (1732-68). Damajirao Gaekwad II not only avenged the death of his father but also consolidated and expanded the territories of the Baroda State. However, he left the administration of his dominions in Gujarat to his agent Rangoji and began to meddle in the politics at the Court of Poona. As a result of this bad habit of his he was imprisoned by Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao (1740-61) in 1751. He was subsequently released when he agreed to sign the Partition Treaty of 1752 with the Peshwa by virtue of which he agreed to cede half of his dominions in Gujarat to Balaji Baji Rao. But the advantages he gained by signing this treaty with the Peshwa was that, firstly, he threw over the pretensions of the Dabhade family and became the *de facto* ruler of Gujarat. This was easy for Damajirao Gaekwad II to accomplish since Yashwantrao Dabhade was an imbecile man. Secondly, the Peshwa agreed to help him in expelling the Mughals from Gujarat which was accomplished by the combined armies of the various *sardars* of the Maratha Confederacy and the Peshwa by 1758.

Subsequent to his participation in the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, Damajirao Gaekwad II not only added new territories to the Baroda State by expelling the members of the Babi family from all their dominions in Gujarat except their ancestral domain of Sami Radhanpur but also espoused the cause of the uncle and rival of the successor of Balaji Baji Rao (whose death occurred soon after the Third Battle of Panipat) Peshwa Madhava Rao I (1761-72). The person whose cause Damajirao Gaekwad II was espousing was Raghunath Rao. As a result

he suffered an ignominious defeat along with Raghunath Rao at the hands of Madhava Rao I at the Battle of Dhodap in 1768. He died soon after this battle.

The death of Damajirao Gaekwad II dealt a severe blow to the Baroda State. Not only was there no addition of new territories but the Gaekwad became in a true sense a tributary of the Peshwa. Moreover, the death of Damajirao Gaekwad II led to the ushering in of internal strife, family dissensions, and succession disputes in the House of the Gaekwads which were artfully exploited by the Peshwa to his advantage. Fed up of this suzerainty of the Peshwa the famous Prabhu minister of Anandrao Gaekwad (1800-19), the grandson of Damajirao Gaekwad II, Raoji Appaji, sought the help of the British East India Company in order to preclude the influence of the Peshwa.

The new bilateral relations between the East India Company and the Baroda State were established with the signing of the treaty of Subsidiary Alliance on 6 June, 1802 between Anandrao Gaekwad and the Company, whose gains were consolidated in the form of the Definitive Treaty of Baroda signed between the two parties on 21 April, 1805.

The East India Company not only liberated the Gaekwad from the suzerainty of the Peshwa but also from its internal enemies who were attempting to destabilize his rule and the incubus of Arab mercenaries. Finally, the Baroda State emerged as a sovereign state beginning with the reign of Sayajirao Gaekwad II (1819-47) when the rule of the Peshwa ended subsequent to his defeat at the hands of the British in the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-18).

Although there was a tremendous clash between the Baroda State and the Bombay Government over the system of guarantees or the Bahandhari System during the reign of Sayajirao Gaekwad II the differences between the two powers were resolved towards the end of the reign in 1841 and friendly ties were once again resumed. Moreover, during the reign of the successor of Sayajirao Gaekwad II, Ganpatrao Gaekwad (1847-56) the British withdrew this vicious system of granting guarantees to certain persons in Baroda because they realized that it was being misused by the subjects of the Gaekwad to show disrespect to their sovereign and had become a rampant source of corruption in the State.

The successor of Ganpatrao Gaekwad, Khanderao Gaekwad (1856-70) cooperated with the British during the Revolt of 1857 and prevented the rebellion from spreading to Western India in general and Gujarat in particular. As a reward for the services rendered by Khanderao Gaekwad during the period when there was an existential threat to British rule in

India, the Government of India bestowed on him the right of adopting a successor in 1863. Thus Khanderao Gaekwad further cemented the ties of the Baroda State with the paramount power.

The successor of Khanderao Gaekwad, Malharrao Gaekwad (1870-75) was deposed by the Government of India in 1875 on grounds of bad governance. The widow of Khanderao Gaekwad, Jamnabai, was asked to adopt a twelve year old boy from the village of Kavhana in Khandesh who traced his descent from Pilajirao Gaekwad. This boy, unlike his predecessors, received modern education from the British and also learnt the principles of good governance from them and went on to become the famous Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1875-1939), the greatest ruler of the Gaekwad dynasty, whose rule also constituted a break from the past. During his minority from 1875 to 1881 the administration of the Baroda State was carried on by the illustrious Diwan, Raja Sir T. Madhava Rao.

During the reign of Sayajirao Gaekwad III the Baroda State finally attained full maturity. There was development of public infrastructure on a massive scale and the modernization of the Baroda State commenced with reforms in the field of education, land revenue administration, health and sanitation etc. Sayajirao Gaekwad III also introduced social and religious reforms in the State and worked for the uplifting the untouchables, women, and other oppressed sections of Indian society. By his hard work and dedication he made Baroda one of the most progressive princely states of British India.