

भारत इतिहास संशोधक मंडळ, पुणे

त्रैमासिक

वर्ष : ९४

अंक : १ ते ४

शक : १९४०



मंडळाच्या पहिल्या त्रैमासिकाचे मुखपृष्ठ, १६ जुलै १९२०

मंडळाचे संस्थापक सदस्य



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QUARTERLY

BHARAT ITIHAS SAMSHODHAK MANDAL, PUNE

Vol : 94

No. : 1-4

April 2017 - March 2018





**भारत इतिहास संशोधक मंडळ, पुणे**

१३२१, सदाशिव पेठ, पुणे-४११ ०३०. दूरध्वनी : ०२०-२४४७ २५८१

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खजिनदार - प्राचार्य नंदकुमार निकम

**सदस्य**

- (१) डॉ. अनुराधा कुलकर्णी  
(२) डॉ. संजैराव भामरे  
(३) डॉ. सदाशिवराव शिवदे  
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**QUARTERLY**

Vol. 94

No. 1-4

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**संपादक**

डॉ. श्री. मा. भावे

डॉ. वी. डी. कुलकर्णी





भारत इतिहास संशोधक मंडळ, पुणे  
त्रैमासिक

प्रकारांक :

डॉ. श्री. मा. भावे

अध्यक्ष, भा. इ. सं. मंडळ,

१३२१, सदाशिव पेठ, पुणे - ४११०३०.

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प्रकाशन : ५ जून २०१८

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१३२१, सदाशिव पेठ, पुणे - ४११ ०३०.

अक्षर जुळणी व भुद्रक :

अप्रान्त

४१, गिरीजाधाम, राजेंद्रनगर,

पुणे - ४११०३०. फोन : ९८०३६०५७८३

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भारत इतिहास संग्रह मंडळाच्या 'त्रैमासिका'च्या ९४ व्या वर्षाचे चारही अंक एकत्र प्रसिद्ध करित आहोत. मंडळाचे सभासद व इतिहासाचे अभ्यासक यांच्या हाती हा अंक सोपविताना आम्हाला अतिशय समाधान होत आहे.

मंडळाशी संबंधित असणाऱ्या अभ्यासकांचे इतिहासातील दुर्लक्षित विषयांवरिल महत्त्वाचे लेख इथे वाचायला मिळतील. उदा. यशवंतराव होळकरांच्या फौजा साताऱ्याच्या छत्रपतींवर १८०२ साली चालून गेल्या होत्या, ही हकीकत अपरिचित आहे. मराठ्यांच्या इतिहासावर १७५८ साली डच भाषेत लिहिलेली पुस्तिका, पर्शियन फर्माने लिहिण्यातील शिस्त, ढवळगड या किष्क्याचा शोध हे विषयही कुतूहल निर्माण करणारे आहेत.

सन १९१८ च्या त्रैमासिकात मंडळाचे अर्धवर्षीय के. दत्तो चामन पोतदार यांनी 'तुकारामांची जगनाडी संहिता' असा लेख लिहिला होता. संग्रहकर्ता लेख लिहिण्याची तत्कालीन पद्धती कशी होती याची चुणूक दिसावी व जुन्या संग्रहकांचे पुण्यस्मरण करावे हे महत्त्वाचे उद्देश असे जुने लेख पुनः प्रसिद्ध करण्यामागे असतो. श्री. बाबा भांड, अध्यक्ष, साहित्य-संस्कृती मंडळ, महाराष्ट्र यांनी राजवाडे पुण्यथीला मंडळात दिलेले दूरदृष्टी महाराज सयाजीराव गायकवाड : चरित्रवेध हे भाषणही नेहमीच्या प्रथेप्रमाणे त्रैमासिकात दिले आहे.

दि. १ एप्रिल २०१७ ते ३१ मार्च २०१८ या काळात मंडळात घडलेल्या ठळक कार्यक्रमांचा वृत्तान्त, मंडळाला मिळालेल्या देणग्यांची यादी व ग्रंथालयाचा अहवाल ह्यांचा समावेश प्रस्तुत अंकात केला आहे. तो वाचून मंडळाविषयी आपुलकी वाटणाऱ्या सर्वांना संतोष होईल, अशी उमेद आहे. सर्वात महत्त्वाची घटना म्हणजे २००० साली पुणे जिल्हा न्यायाधिकांनी मान्यता दिलेल्या घटनेनुसार मंडळाच्या कार्यकारिणीचे झालेले निर्वाचन व नोव्हेंबर २०१७ पासून या कार्यकारिणीने हाती घेतलेला कारभार, ही होय. मंडळाची नवी कार्यकारिणी आपले काम उत्साहाने व यशस्वीपणे पार पाडील अशी अपेक्षा आहे.

गेल्या काही वर्षात अनेक रवी, पुरुष अभ्यासक व उत्साही कार्यकर्ते यांना मंडळाच्या कार्यात रूची वाटत आहे. त्यांच्या सहकार्याने फारसी, मोडी, ब्राह्मी या विषयांचे वर्ग मंडळात घेण्यात आले. रोज संध्याकाळी अनेक इतिहासप्रेमी मंडळी मंडळात येऊन जुनी कागदपत्रे



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## The Maratha People And Their Administration: The British Administrators' Perception

Dr. Sandhya Pandit

This region, today called 'Maharashtra', was always a country of extreme significance because of its strategic location in the Indian subcontinent. It was considered to be one of the most inaccessible parts of India by military strategists.<sup>1</sup> The general impression of this region of the Marathas was that it possessed a distinctive character of land, people and political traditions. Hence every invader found it very difficult to fight the Marathas and take over their dominions. Even for the British this was by no means an easy task. The British succeeded in conquering the Marathas in 1818.

While studying the perception of the British administrators of this region, it is essential to keep in mind that the British were conquerors and the Marathas were the defeated people. Owing to their education and cultural background the British were more rational and had been exposed to new ideas. Comparatively the Marathas were simple people but it was the same people who had travelled all over India, came into contact with different people and different cultures and were accustomed to adjust with them. The military superiority of the Marathas in the 18th Century was indisputable. Their conquests created a well-deserved and accomplished sense of superiority among the Marathas. However, when the British defeated them, the situation had completely changed and the British perceived them from a different point of view. The Marathas who were conquerors before had now become the defeated ones, and the British were looking at them from a conqueror's point of view. The weaknesses of the Marathas also came to the forefront because of their defeat. One more thing we must keep in mind is that this British perception of the Marathas was made generally during the time of the last Peshwa, Bajirao II. Then, neither was the Maratha power at its best nor was the national character of the Marathas which obviously was one factor which led to their defeat. With these limitations, we have to look at the following British perception. Yet, what the British felt about the Marathas is necessary to know because that makes us understand ourselves from a different perspective.

The general British perception of the Marathas was that they were a tough and hardworking people keeping in mind the rough and mountainous terrain in which they lived. Speaking of the Marathas, one British author (Spate) wrote, "The entire region bears the imprint of the Marathas: a tough, hard-working, and cheerful peasantry, ably served by adroit Brahmin elite which maintained close touch with the people."<sup>2</sup> Another British officer writing about his impression about the people wrote that he found the people of the 'Desh' (area above the Ghat region) more able-bodied and better looking than the Mavalas (people of the Maval region). This difference, he said was due to the more heating and nourishing quality of the grain raised in their fields, and on which they subsisted.<sup>3</sup>

Further speaking of the distinguishing traits of the Marathas, the British felt that the Marathas were fairly entitled to be called both courageous and brave. This was because they were patient under suffering, and when roused, or led on, they were bold and enterprising. There are not many instances of treachery among them and, therefore may be said to be faithful to their trust. Yet, whoever was guilty of breach of trust was looked on with a greater degree of contempt. The Maratha rulers never hesitated to punish traitors to the Government in the most severe manner.

According to the British, the Marathas were not ungrateful but, did not possess the refined virtue of 'Gratitude' either. The Marathas were very revengeful of insults to their dignity. They were clamorous in preferring complaints against those whom they hate. In their domestic relations, the Marathas were perceived to be kind and affectionate. Their women were considered to have great influence at home.

In addition to this, the British perception was that the Marathas deserved credit for acuteness of understanding; however, they had strong prejudices as well. Acuteness of understanding and weakness of judgement were qualities of the mind, often combined in the same person, which to the British formed the mental characteristics of the Hindus in this part of India. According to the British, the Marathas use their first quality to form ingenious plans and schemes and 'build Castles in the air'. This they do with untiring perseverance, and then watch patiently and with all the cunning, as does a hunter seizing his moment of



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rights of their fellow creatures, men poor and seeking for fortune were advanced to the highest offices of the state, and "converted the sword of justice, the protector of rights, into the scourge of community".<sup>12</sup>

Generally speaking, they considered Bajirao II's rule and his policies to be oppressive as compared to his predecessors like Nana Phadnis who were known for their great justice and kindness.<sup>13</sup>

Though the British were convinced of the feeble and corrupt Government of the late Peshwa, they believed that it was probably not as bad as imagined since the country had prospered under it in the not too distant past. Therefore they also studied the Maratha administration during the more lucrative and wealthy years of their rule. Their system of administration was generally known and understood. In their opinion, "it suited the people whom indeed it had helped to form, and it was probably capable of being perfected by gradual improvement."<sup>14</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone pointed out that though the Maratha Government might not have been compatible with a very good form of administration, there was something vital in it due to the very fact that it survived so long.<sup>15</sup> He had developed a good opinion of the Maratha system and wanted to preserve as much of it because he believed that it had served the Marathas well.<sup>16</sup>

Speaking of the social conditions of the people, the British discovered that they followed many vices<sup>17</sup> and falsehood in all shapes pervaded all ranks.<sup>18</sup> But the British believed these to be strictly prohibited by the Maratha Government and only were very recently tolerated owing to the corruption of the Peshwa's officers.<sup>19</sup> However the greatest evil which prevailed, according to the British, was 'Infidelity to the Marriage Bed'.<sup>20</sup> They looked at the inhuman practice of Sati with great horror and never approved of it. But one positive quality of the Marathas in the city of Pune which was highlighted by the British was that of drunkenness being almost unknown in the Maratha country.<sup>21</sup> There was little or no demand for spirituous liquors by the great mass of the people but it could become prevalent if they could afford to purchase them easily.<sup>22</sup>

Education as a regular system was certainly unknown amongst the people. Whatever little education existed was confined to the Brahmmins and the shopkeepers. The few schools which existed were disproportionate to the population due to the general poverty of the

agriculturists who required the services of their children on the fields and in attending to their cattle. The British found the general illiterateness of the cultivators remarkable in a stage of civilization. However in 1826 a British officer wrote that though the cultivators could not write, they were intelligent, highly observant and could lucidly explain the rationale of the agricultural process – a skill absent in many educated English farmers. In his opinion it would not be challenging to teach the cultivators. In fact, it would lead to several important effects, like "The mind of the cultivator would be invigorated with new ideas, new views would be associated, a spirit of improvement, interprise and innovation might spring up in place of the apathetic routine that at present prevails in rural economy, and in the social relations of life".<sup>23</sup>

According to the British, during the reign of Bajirao II there existed no fixed rule in certain judicial matters. For instance, when a man was convicted of a criminal offence the laws of the Shastras were to be followed. However, the Shastras mentioned the punishment but not the mode of its execution especially in cases of death sentence given for murder.<sup>24</sup> All this was very unusual for the British. Another mode of execution which the British were keen on suppressing was the horrid practice of murder by poison.<sup>25</sup>

The British felt that the Marathas would not trouble the Magistrate much. They had family quarrels, and sometimes one village had dispute with another, but their enmities seldom went beyond altercations and were usually handed down from generation to generation.<sup>26</sup> Vesting of arbitrary and ample powers to District Managers, by the late Government, in British opinion gave rise to partial oppression and abuse. Their awarding punishment on the spot saved the prosecutors and the witnesses the expense and inconvenience of a long journey to the Huzur Kacheri. These decisions at least had the advantage of being speedy though whether always just or not is difficult for them to say.<sup>27</sup>

Elphinstone found the existing Maratha Police good though he found the Maratha judicial system rotten to its very core. To him the superiority of the Brahmmins seemed obsolete and absurd. Similarly there was no consistency or regulation in the system of justice. In spite of the prevailing disorder and confusion in the judiciary, the British appreciated the Panchayats most, of all the institutions of Maratha polity.





In their opinion, the institution of Panchayat had managed to survive and meet out cheap and tolerable justice.<sup>28</sup> They were convinced that the Panchayats gave good justice and that 'if it were possible to hit upon a mode of regulating their proceedings, it is the mode of giving justice best adapted to the natives of this country'. The British also felt assured that if they required to do away with the Panchayat system, the change would be effected without a murmur, as the dependence on English honour and discrimination was quite great. In the same breath, they also speak of it being a serious evil to abolish the custom of Panchayats, and later see its abolishment bring the dispensation of justice to a deplorable condition due to want of people.<sup>29</sup> The Maratha practice of clipping of ears of professional thieves, or of depriving them of their hands or feet was not appreciated by the British at all.<sup>30</sup>

To reiterate the point that we have been stating so far that most of this perception of the British administrators that we have seen has mostly been with reference to the last Peshwa Bajirao II's reign. About the Maratha rule prevalent before Bajirao II, Robertson had this to say - "The general sense of the most intelligent natives of the old school", writes Robertson, "dwell with veneration on the recollection of Nana's rule, and it is probable that at no period of the rise and progress of their powers was the internal Government of Poona Mahrattas more correct or vigorous than it became under this statesman".<sup>31</sup>

It is also interesting to note Elphinstone's overall analysis of the Marathas. He writes, "Taking the whole as a nation, they will be found to be inferior to their Mahomedan neighbours in knowledge and civilization; but less tainted with pride, insolence, tyranny, effeminacy, and debauchery; less violent, less bigoted, and (except while in armies on foreign service) more peaceable, mild, and humane".<sup>32</sup>

These statements discern that though the British wrote from a conqueror's point of view, it was still an objective analysis of the Maratha people and their administration as it highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the Maratha character and also their positive and negative qualities.

◆◆◆◆



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