



4. Maharashtra before the Times of Shivaji Maharaj

At the beginning of the seventeenth century CE, most of the territory in Maharashtra was under the control of Nizamshah of Ahmadnagar and Adilshah of Bijapur. The Mughals had entered Khandesh. Their objective was to expand their power in the south. There were settlements of Siddi people, who had come from Africa, along the coastline of Konkan. The competition and conflict amongst the Portuguese, the British, the French and the Dutch, who had come from Europe, was getting intense during this period. There was stiff competition amongst them to capture the markets for trade. The Portuguese had already established their rule in Goa and Vasai on the western coastline. The British, the Dutch and the French had found an entry through the medium of trading companies by setting up factories. All these powers assessed the strength of other powers, kept themselves safe and tried to dominate as much as possible. This conflict had created instability and insecurity in Maharashtra. These different people from Europe were called 'Topkar' on the basis of their customary headgear.

It is necessary to get acquainted with the village (*mauja*), *Kasba* and *pargana* to understand the nature of settlements in that period as also of the officers that formed a link between the rulers and their subjects, and also the markets and the craftsmen. *Pargana* was made up of many villages. Generally, the headquarters of a *pargana* was called '*Kasba*'. A village smaller than a *Kasba* was called '*Mauja*'. Let us get acquainted in brief with Village, *Kasba* and *Pargana* respectively.

Village (*Mauja*) : Most of the people lived in villages. A village was also called *mauja*. The chief of the village was the

Patil. He used to try to bring maximum land under cultivation. When there was any dispute in the village, the Patil resolved it and made peace. A Kulkarni helped the Patil in his work. The Kulkarni kept the record of the revenue that was collected. There were various artisans in the village. They had hereditary rights regarding their occupation. The peasants gave a share of their agricultural produce to the artisans for the services they rendered to the village community. This share was known as *baluta*.

***Kasba* :** A *kasba* was like a big village. It was usually the headquarters of a *pargana*, e.g., Indapur *kasba* of Indapur *pargana*, Wai *kasba* of Wai *pargana* were the headquarters of those *parganas*. Agriculture was the main occupation. There were skilled artisans like carpenters, blacksmiths, etc. in a *kasba*. There was usually a market (*peth*) adjacent to a *kasba*. The Shete and Mahajan were the *watandars* of the *peth*. Every village did not necessarily have a *peth*. The setting up of a *peth* was the job of the Shetes and the Mahajans. For that, they received some land from the government and some rights from the villagers. The Mahajan maintained the accounts of the *peth*.



Do you know?

As per the order of Veermata Jajabai, a *peth* was established in Pashan near Pune. It was called Jijapur. Malpura, Khelpura, Paraspura, Vithapura, in Aurangabad are also new *peths* established in the name of Maloji, Kheloji, Parasoji and Vithoji respectively. 'Shivapur' adjacent to 'Khed' was a *peth* established in the name of Shivaji Maharaj.



Let's learn.

The words 'Budruk' and 'Khurd' are used to show that the two villages are different. The original town is 'Budruk' and the new one is 'Khurd'. For example, Vadgaon Budruk and Vadgaon Khurd.

Pargana : Many villages together made a *pargana*. But the number of villages was not the same in all *parganas*. For example, the Pune *pargana* was a big *pargana*. It consisted of 290 villages. There were 64 villages in the Chakan *pargana*. The Shirwal *pargana* was small. It had only 40 villages. The Deshmukh and the Deshpande were the *watandar* officers of the *pargana*. The Deshmukh was the chief of patils in a *pargana*. The Deshmukh did at the *pargana* level, what the Patil did at the village level. The Deshpande was the chief of all Kulkarnis in the *pargana*. The Deshpande did at the *pargana* level, the work that Kulkarnis did at the village level. These *watandar* officers were the link between the people and the government.

In case of enemy invasion or drought, these *watandars* represented the grievances of the people to the government. Sometimes, these officers misused their powers. They collected more money from the people than was due or did not remit the money so collected to the government in time. On such occasions, the people suffered harassment.



Do you know ?

Vatan is an Arabic word. In Maharashtra, it is used to refer to hereditary land for which the holder does not have to pay revenue.

The calamity of a famine : Agriculture was dependent on rainwater.

If it did not rain, crops would fail. The prices of foodgrains rose. It became difficult for the people to get foodgrains and other things. There was no fodder for the cattle. Water became scarce. It became difficult for people to live in the village. They were forced to leave the village. A famine was a great calamity for the people.

A great famine occurred in Maharashtra in 1630 CE. People were greatly distressed due to this famine. It has been described in these words – 'People were ready to sell themselves for a piece of bhakri, but there was nobody to buy them'. There was a severe scarcity of foodgrains. Entire families were destroyed. Cattle and farm animals died. Agriculture was devastated. The famine put an end to industries. All financial transactions came to a standstill. People had to wander to faraway regions in search of a livelihood. It was a great challenge to bring back to normalcy, the devastated life of the people.

The work of the Varkari movement :

Society was greatly influenced by blind beliefs and rituals. People had become fatalistic and inert. They had lost all initiative. The condition of the common people was miserable. In such circumstances, the Sants in Maharashtra endeavoured to inspire the masses.

In Maharashtra, the tradition of Sants which began with Sant Dnyaneshwar and Sant Namdeo was carried on by Sants coming from various strata of the society. People from all strata of society were part of the Sant tradition. For example, Sant Chokhamela, Sant Goroba, Sant Sena, Sant Sawata, Sant Narhari, Sant Shaikh Muhammad, etc. Sant Chokhoba's wife Sant Soyraibai, and sister Sant Nirmalabai, Sant Muktabai, Sant Janabai,



Sant Kanhopatra, Sant Bahinabai Siurkar and other women were also among them. Pandharpur was at the centre of the Sant movement. Vitthal was the object of their worship. On the banks of the river Chandrabhaga at Pandharpur, the Sants and pilgrims (*varkari*) used to rejoice in their devotion (*bhakti*). There, equality was propagated through *bhajans*, *keertans*, and unity meals (*kala*).

Sant Namdeo : He was a great Sant of the Varkari movement. He was a skilled organiser. He performed excellent *keertans*



Sant Namdeo

as well. He awakened the sense of equality in men and women belonging to all castes through the medium of *keertans*. His pledge was 'नाचू कीर्तनाचे रंगी । ज्ञानदीप लावू जगी॥' His *abhangas* compositions are well-known. Many

Sants as well as common people were influenced by his teachings. He went up to the Punjab, propagating his thoughts. His compositions are included in the 'Guru Granth Sahib' of Sikhs. He propagated the message of Bhagwat religion in all quarters. He built a memorial to Sant Chokhamela at Pandharpur. His work is unforgettable.

Sant Dnyaneshwar : He was a great Sant in the Varkari movement. He wrote the 'Bhavartha-deepika' or 'Dnyaneshwari' which elucidates the meaning of the



Sant Dnyaneshwar

Sanskrit 'Bhagavad Geeta'. He also composed the 'Amrutanubhav'. He preached the importance of the path of devotion through his works and compositions. He showed a simple

way of worship and conduct which the common people could follow easily. He gave the prestige of a religion to the Varkari movement. Though his life was spent in extremely adverse circumstances, he never lost the calm of his mind and never harboured bitterness. His 'Pasayadaan' in Dnyaneshwari uplifts the mind. The poetic compositions of his brothers Sant Nivruttinath and Sant Sopandev and sister Muktabai are well-known.

Sant Eknath : He was a great Sant of



Sant Eknath

the *Bhakti* movement in Maharashtra. His compositions are many and diverse. They include *abhangas*, *gavalana*, *bharud*, etc. He has stated Bhagvat Dharma in detail and in a simple manner. He has portrayed people's life in

Bhavarth Ramayana through the story of Ram. He explained in Marathi, the *Bhakti* part of the Sanskrit work 'Bhagwat'. His *abhangas* show the warmth of devotion. He demonstrated through his own conduct that there is no need to renounce worldly matters for attaining the highest truth, *Paramarth*. He was a teacher of the people in the true sense of the term. He believed that our Marathi language was inferior to no other language. He asked the Sanskrit Scholars forcefully. 'संस्कृत वाणी देवे केली । तरी प्राकृत काय चोरापासुनि झाली ?' He heavily criticised those who hated other religions.

Sant Tukaram : He belonged to Dehu near Pune. His compositions or *abhangas* are very pleasing and lucid, reaching the greatest poetic heights. His 'Gatha' is a precious treasure of the Marathi language. He asks us to find

God by showing love to the unhappy and the tormented in the following lines : ‘जे का रंजले गांजले । त्यांसी म्हणे जो आपुले । तोचि साधु ओळखावा । देव तेथेचि जाणावा ॥’ With this viewpoint, he threw in the river Indrayani, the documents of the loans that people had borrowed from him and



Sant Tukaram

freed many poor families from the bonds of loan. He criticized the hypocrisy and superstition in the society in very strong terms. He stressed that devotion (*Bhakti*) should be coupled with morality. His teachings can be summed up as ‘जोडोनिया धन उत्तम व्यवहारे । उदास विचारे वेच करी ॥’ Some dogmatic people opposed the social awakening that he had undertaken, and sank his *abhangas* in the Indrayani. Sant Tukaram faced the opposition with noble courage.

Sant Tukaram’s disciples and associates were of different castes and creeds. They include Navji Mali, Gavnarshet Wani, Santaji Jagnade, Shivba Kasar, Bahinabai Siurkar and Mahadajipant Kulkarni. An important task completed by Gangarampant Maval and Santaji Jagnade was writing down the *abhangas* of Sant Tukaram.

Work of Sants : Sants gave the message of equality to people. They taught humanity. They preached that people should live together in harmony, unity and love. Their work resulted in social awakening. They taught how to live in the face of foreign invasions, drought-like situations or any other natural calamities. Their teachings proved to be a big support for people. Their work created self-confidence among the people

of Maharashtra.

There was a deterioration of ethics and religion in the society. At such a time, the Sants came forward to protect the society. They taught the true meaning of religion. They showed the path of devotion by living amongst people and sharing their joys and sorrows. Some orthodox and dogmatic people opposed them. But the Sants believed that facing this opposition was a part of their duty. Sant Tukaram has explained the mark of a true Sant in these words – ‘तुका म्हणे तोचि संत । सोशी जगाचे आघात ॥’

The Sants elucidated the complex *dharma* of the scholars (Shastris and Pandits) in the language of the people. They prayed to God using simple, everyday terms. They took the view that all are equal before God. They taught society to do away with the pride arising out of caste and *varna* and see everyone as God’s children. A characteristic of the Sants was that they did not forget their duties on the path of devotion. They found God in their work. Sant Sawata said, ‘कांदा मुळा भाजी । अवघी विठाई माझी ॥’ This statement refers to farm work but applies to work in all walks of life. The Sants carried on with their duties even as they were engaged in devotion, teaching and composing verses. They developed the moral sensibilities of the society.



Let’s discuss.

Collect more information about the Pandharpur *vari* and discuss the following topics.

- In which month do the *Varkaris* go on the *vari*?
- How is the *Vari* planned?

Ramdas Swami : He was from Jamb in Marathwada. He explained the

importance of physical fitness to the people, 'मराठा तितुका मेळवावा । महाराष्ट्र धर्म वाढवावा ।'

This message of Ramdas Swami is famous. He gave practical education and lessons in good conduct through his works like *Dasbodh*, *Karunashtaka*, *Manache Shlok*. He stated the importance of people's movement and organisation and founded the Samarth Sampradaya. Chaphal was the centre of this Sampradaya.



Ramdas Swami

He propagated the worship of Ram and Hanuman. He travelled far and wide to propagate his thoughts.

Inspiration for independence during foreign rule : Such was the political, social, cultural, situation, etc. in Maharashtra before the times of Shivaji Maharaj. In that period, Maharashtra was under the control of Adilshahi and other powers. It was not independent. Even so, some personalities and streams of thought were dreaming of freedom. Among them, Shahaji Maharaj, who is considered to be a visionary of *Swaraj* was on the forefront.



Exercise

1. Complete the following chart.

	Village (<i>Mauja</i>)	<i>Kasba</i>	<i>Pargana</i>
What it means			
Officers			
Example			

2. Write the meaning.

- (1) Budruk –
- (2) Balut –
- (3) Vatan –

3. Find out and write.

- (1) People from Africa who had settled along the Konkan coastline –
- (2) The author of 'Amrutanubhav' –
- (3) Sant Tukaram's place –

- (4) He composed *Bharuds* –

- (5) He explained the importance of physical fitness –

- (6) Women Sants –

4. Write about these personalities and their work in your own words.

- (1) Sant Namdeo (2) Sant Dnyaneshwar
- (3) Sant Eknath (4) Sant Tukaram

5. Why were droughts a great calamity for the people?

Activities

- (1) Plan how you will help a Varkari *Dindi*.
- (2) Dress up as Sants and present their compositions.

