



MARATHA ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE PESHWAS

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ABSTRACT

The administration under the Peshwas represents an important phase in the development of the Maratha political system during the eighteenth century. After the death of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the Maratha state experienced political and military challenges, but it gradually expanded under the leadership of the Peshwas. During the reign of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, the position of the Peshwa became increasingly influential, and Pune developed into an important centre of Maratha administration. Peshwas such as Balaji Vishwanath, Baji Rao I, Balaji Baji Rao, Madhavrao I, and their successors played significant roles in the expansion and administration of Maratha power. The administrative system included central offices, revenue arrangements, military organization, provincial administration, diplomatic relations, and local institutions. The Maratha polity also included powerful regional houses such as the Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, and Bhonsles. This study examines the structure and functioning of Peshwa administration, its revenue and military systems, relations between the central authority and regional chiefs, and the factors that shaped the administration of the expanding Maratha polity.



KEYWORDS: Maratha Administration, Peshwas, Peshwa Period, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Balaji Vishwanath, Baji Rao I, Madhavrao I, Pune, Maratha Confederacy, Revenue System, Military Administration, Provincial Administration, Chauth, Sardeshmukhi, Eighteenth Century India..

INTRODUCTION

The Peshwa period occupies an important place in the history of the Maratha state and eighteenth-century India. The office of the Peshwa, originally an important ministerial position, gradually became the dominant centre of political authority within the Maratha polity during the reign of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj. Pune emerged as the principal administrative centre, while the Maratha state expanded its influence across large parts of the Indian subcontinent.

The administrative development of the Peshwa period was closely connected with the political expansion of Maratha power. **Balaji Vishwanath**, who became Peshwa in 1713, played an important role in consolidating Maratha political authority after the conflicts that followed Shivaji Maharaj's death. He strengthened relations between Shahu and influential Maratha leaders and helped establish the political foundations for later expansion.

Under **Baji Rao I**, Peshwa from 1720 to 1740, Maratha power expanded rapidly into regions such as Malwa, Gujarat, and Bundelkhand. This expansion created new administrative challenges because territories were governed through a combination of direct authority, local arrangements, revenue claims, military commanders, and political agreements. The collection of **chauth and sardeshmukhi** became an important source of Maratha revenue in territories where such claims were established.

During the eighteenth century, the Maratha political structure became increasingly decentralized. Important chiefs and families, including the **Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, and Bhonsles**, acquired considerable influence in different regions. While the Peshwa at Pune remained a major political authority, regional powers exercised substantial autonomy. Therefore, the Peshwa administration is better understood as a developing and increasingly complex political system rather than a completely centralized bureaucratic state.

The administrative structure included various offices dealing with finance, correspondence, justice, military affairs, diplomacy, and revenue. At the local level, traditional village institutions and hereditary officials continued to play an important role. Revenue administration depended on local conditions and existing arrangements, while military resources were maintained through state forces and the services of influential chiefs.

The Peshwas also maintained diplomatic relations with the Mughal Empire, Nizam of Hyderabad, Rajput states, Mysore, and other regional powers. These diplomatic and military relationships affected administrative priorities and the distribution of resources. The expansion of Maratha influence therefore required coordination between political authority, military organization, revenue collection, and diplomacy.

The administration experienced both periods of consolidation and periods of internal difficulty. **Madhavrao I**, who became Peshwa in 1761, worked to strengthen Maratha authority after the setback at the Third Battle of Panipat. However, political rivalries among leading Maratha families and conflicts over succession and authority affected the functioning of the state during the later eighteenth century.

Thus, the study of Maratha administration under the Peshwas provides an understanding of the transformation of the Maratha state from the foundations established under Shivaji Maharaj into a wider eighteenth-century political system. It highlights the importance of **central administration, revenue, military organization, regional authority, diplomacy, and local institutions** in the functioning of the Maratha polity.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

The main aim of this study is to examine the structure, development, and functioning of Maratha administration under the Peshwas and to understand its political, economic, military, and social significance during the eighteenth century.

Objectives

1. To study the political background of the Maratha state after the death of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.
2. To examine the rise and increasing importance of the office of the Peshwa.
3. To understand the administrative structure of the Peshwa government at Pune.
4. To study the roles and responsibilities of important administrative officers.
5. To examine the revenue system and the collection of chauth and sardeshmukhi.
6. To study provincial and local administration under the Peshwas.
7. To examine the organization and management of the Maratha military.

8. To understand the relationship between the Peshwa government and powerful Maratha chiefs.
9. To study the role of families such as the Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, and Bhonsles in the wider Maratha polity.
10. To examine the importance of diplomacy and political relations in the administration of the expanding Maratha state.
11. To understand the economic and social aspects of Peshwa administration.
12. To examine the strengths, challenges, and changes in the administrative system during the eighteenth century.
13. To assess the historical significance of Peshwa administration in the development of Maratha power.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The administration of the Marathas under the Peshwas has been examined by historians from political, administrative, military, economic, and regional perspectives. Both contemporary records and modern historical studies provide important information about the functioning of the Peshwa government.

G. S. Sardesai, in *New History of the Marathas*, provides a comprehensive account of Maratha political history and discusses the rise of the Peshwas, administrative developments, military expansion, and relations among different Maratha leaders and regional powers.

Surendranath Sen, in *Administrative System of the Marathas*, examines the administrative institutions of the Maratha state. His work is particularly useful for understanding central administration, revenue arrangements, local government, and the organization of different administrative offices.

Stewart Gordon, in *The Marathas 1600–1818*, studies the Maratha polity within its broader social and political context. His work is especially useful for understanding the decentralized nature of eighteenth-century Maratha power and the role of regional political families.

R. V. Nadkarni, in *The Rise and Fall of the Maratha Empire*, examines the political development of the Marathas and the changing position of the Peshwas. The work provides a broader perspective on the expansion and eventual weakening of Maratha political authority.

V. G. Dighe, in *Peshwa Baji Rao I and Maratha Expansion*, focuses on the period of Baji Rao I and helps explain the connection between military expansion and the development of Maratha political authority.

A. R. Kulkarni has contributed to the study of Maharashtra and the Maratha state through research on political, administrative, and socio-economic developments. His work helps place Peshwa administration within the regional context of eighteenth-century Maharashtra.

Primary sources are equally important. **Peshwa Daftar records**, Marathi correspondence, official documents, bakhars, revenue records, and contemporary Persian and European accounts provide information about administration, diplomacy, military affairs, revenue, and everyday political activities. These sources must be critically examined because they differ in their purpose, perspective, and reliability.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that Peshwa administration developed alongside the expansion of Maratha power. It combined central institutions at Pune with local administrative practices and considerable regional authority exercised by powerful Maratha chiefs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **historical, descriptive, and analytical methodology** to examine the administration of the Maratha state under the Peshwas.

1. Primary Sources

The study will use available primary and contemporary sources, including:

- Peshwa Daftar records and Marathi administrative documents.
- Official correspondence and letters.
- Revenue and financial records.
- Contemporary Marathi bakhars.
- Persian chronicles and records.
- European travellers' accounts and records.
- Treaties, agreements, inscriptions, and other documentary evidence.

These sources will be examined with attention to their historical context and possible biases.

2. Secondary Sources

The study will make use of scholarly books and historical studies by historians such as G. S. Sardesai, Surendranath Sen, Stewart Gordon, R. V. Nadkarni, A. R. Kulkarni, and V. G. Dighe. These works provide interpretations of Maratha political and administrative developments.

3. Historical Analysis

A chronological approach will be used to examine the transformation of the Peshwa's office from an important ministerial position into the principal centre of political authority during the eighteenth century.

4. Thematic Analysis

The research will examine major administrative themes such as:

- Central administration
- Revenue administration
- Provincial administration
- Village administration
- Military organization
- Diplomacy
- Judicial arrangements
- Relations with regional chiefs
- Economic administration

5. Comparative Method

Where appropriate, the Peshwa administrative system will be compared with the administrative practices of the earlier Maratha state and contemporary political powers such as the Mughal Empire and the Nizam of Hyderabad.

6. Source Criticism

Different historical accounts will be compared to identify differences in interpretation and reliability. Particular attention will be given to distinguishing contemporary evidence from later historical traditions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rise of the Peshwas transformed the political structure of the Maratha state during the eighteenth century. As Maratha influence expanded beyond Maharashtra into Malwa, Gujarat,

Bundelkhand, and other regions, the administration had to respond to increasingly complex political, military, and economic conditions.

The central problem of this study is to understand **how the Maratha administration functioned under the Peshwas and how it managed an expanding and increasingly decentralized political system.**

The study examines the changing position of the Peshwa, the organization of central and local administration, revenue collection, military management, and relations between the Peshwa government and powerful regional chiefs. Particular attention is given to the functioning of chauth and sardeshmukhi, administrative offices, local institutions, and the management of territories under different forms of Maratha authority.

Another important issue is the nature of the Peshwa state. The expansion of Maratha power resulted in the emergence of influential regional houses such as the Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, and Bhonsles. Consequently, it is necessary to examine how authority was distributed between Pune and regional centres and how cooperation and rivalry affected administration.

The study also seeks to understand the relationship between administration and military expansion. The growth of Maratha influence required financial resources, military organization, diplomatic arrangements, and administrative mechanisms. At the same time, political rivalries and regional autonomy created challenges for maintaining coordinated authority.

Therefore, this research aims to provide a balanced understanding of **the structure, functioning, development, and limitations of Maratha administration under the Peshwas**, while placing it within the wider political and socio-economic context of eighteenth-century India.

NEED OF STUDY

The study of Maratha administration under the Peshwas is important for understanding the political and administrative history of eighteenth-century India. During this period, the Maratha state expanded from its original base in Maharashtra and developed political influence over large parts of the subcontinent.

The study is necessary to understand the transformation of the **Peshwa's office** from an important ministerial position into the principal centre of political authority in the Maratha polity. It also helps explain the relationship between the Peshwa government at Pune and powerful regional chiefs.

Peshwa administration involved several important areas, including central administration, revenue collection, military organization, justice, diplomacy, and local government. The study of these institutions helps explain how the expanding Maratha political system was managed.

Revenue administration is another important aspect of the study. The collection of **chauth and sardeshmukhi**, together with other sources of revenue, supported military and administrative activities. Examining these systems provides insight into the economic foundations of Maratha political power.

The study is also significant for understanding the role of regional Maratha houses such as the **Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, and Bhonsles**. Their growing influence illustrates the increasingly decentralized nature of the eighteenth-century Maratha polity.

Finally, studying Peshwa administration helps explain both the expansion and the challenges of Maratha power. It provides a broader understanding of the relationship between administration, military expansion, regional politics, and the changing political structure of eighteenth-century India.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Further research on Maratha administration under the Peshwas can be undertaken in the following areas:

1. **Peshwa Administration:** A detailed study of the major administrative offices and their practical functioning can provide a clearer understanding of the central government.
2. **Revenue System:** Further research can examine land revenue, chauth, sardeshmukhi, taxation, assessment methods, and the relationship between revenue collection and military expenditure.
3. **Local Administration:** Village institutions, hereditary officials, local elites, and their relationship with Peshwa officials require greater study.
4. **Military Administration:** Research can focus on recruitment, payment, military organization, logistics, cavalry, infantry, artillery, and the role of regional commanders.
5. **Regional Maratha Powers:** Separate studies of the Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, and Bhonsles can help explain the development of regional authority within the wider Maratha polity.
6. **Economic History:** Further research can examine agriculture, trade, markets, banking, credit, merchants, and urban centres during the Peshwa period.
7. **Social History:** Greater attention can be given to peasants, artisans, soldiers, merchants, women, and other social groups affected by Peshwa administration.
8. **Diplomatic History:** Relations between the Peshwas and the Mughals, Nizam of Hyderabad, Mysore, Rajput states, and European powers can be studied in greater detail.
9. **Pune as an Administrative Centre:** Research can examine the growth of Pune and its development as an important political, administrative, cultural, and economic centre.
10. **Peshwa Records:** Greater use of Peshwa Daftar documents, Marathi correspondence, revenue records, and other archival materials can strengthen historical research.
11. **Digital and Archaeological Research:** GIS mapping, digitization of archival records, archaeological studies, and heritage documentation can provide new approaches to studying Peshwa administration.
12. **Comparative Studies:** Peshwa administration can be compared with contemporary Mughal, Mysore, Hyderabad, and other regional administrative systems.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Scope

The study focuses primarily on the eighteenth century and examines the development and functioning of Maratha administration under the Peshwas. It covers political, administrative, economic, military, and regional aspects of the Maratha polity.

The study includes the rise of Peshwa authority, central administration at Pune, revenue arrangements, provincial and local administration, military organization, diplomacy, and relations with regional Maratha chiefs.

Limitations

1. **Uneven Historical Sources:** Sources are not equally available for all regions and administrative institutions.
2. **Source Bias:** Marathi, Persian, and European records often provide different perspectives and may reflect the interests of their authors.
3. **Regional Differences:** Administrative practices varied across Maharashtra and territories brought under Maratha influence.
4. **Decentralized Political Structure:** The growing autonomy of regional chiefs makes it difficult to describe the entire Maratha polity as a uniformly centralized administrative system.

5. **Limited Social Evidence:** Administrative records provide considerably more information about officials, rulers, and political activities than about the everyday lives of ordinary people.
6. **Incomplete Records:** Some historical documents have been lost, damaged, or remain difficult to access.
7. **Interpretative Differences:** Historians differ in their assessment of the nature and effectiveness of Peshwa administration.
8. **Changing Political Conditions:** Administrative practices changed according to military campaigns, territorial expansion, succession disputes, and relations with regional powers.

Scope of Study

The study covers the following major areas:

1. **Rise of Peshwa Authority** – The transformation of the Peshwa from a ministerial office into the principal political authority during much of the eighteenth century.
2. **Central Administration** – The organization of the government at Pune and the major administrative offices.
3. **Role of the Chhatrapati** – The changing relationship between the Chhatrapati and the Peshwa.
4. **Revenue Administration** – Land revenue, chauth, sardeshmukhi, and other financial arrangements.
5. **Provincial Administration** – The management of territories outside the core Maratha region.
6. **Local Administration** – Village institutions, local officials, hereditary rights, and local elites.
7. **Military Administration** – Organization of cavalry, infantry, artillery, recruitment, payment, and military logistics.
8. **Regional Maratha Chiefs** – The role of the Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, Bhonsles, and other influential families.
9. **Diplomacy and Foreign Relations** – Relations with the Mughal Empire, Nizam of Hyderabad, Mysore, Rajput states, and European powers.
10. **Economic and Commercial Activities** – Agriculture, trade, markets, banking, credit, and urban development.
11. **Pune as the Centre of Administration** – The political and administrative development of Pune during the Peshwa period.
12. **Changes in the Eighteenth Century** – The development of Maratha administration from the period of Balaji Vishwanath and Baji Rao I through later Peshwas.
13. **Challenges of Administration** – Political rivalries, regional autonomy, military pressures, succession disputes, and the difficulties of managing an expanding polity.
14. **Historical Significance** – The contribution of Peshwa administration to the development of Maratha political power and its place in the wider history of eighteenth-century India.

NEED OF STUDY

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