

CHAPTER - VI

ESTIMATE

Chhatrapati Pratapsinh whom Mountstuart Elphinstone described as 'the most civilized Maratha' was extremely popular with his subjects. Therefore, his deposition in 1839 and the subsequent annexation of Satara state in 1848 led to a series of disturbances in Satara territory during the days of the great mutiny of 1857 and Satara became one of the important centres of the mutiny in southern peninsula. Even though we refer to this prince as Chhatrapati of the Marathas he was Chhatrapati only for a period of ten years from 1808 to 1818 and that too only in name. In 1818 the British rulers of India carved out a small principality of Satara and installed Chhatrapati Pratapsinh on its throne. However at the time of this revival of Satara state the British rulers intentionally conferred upon Pratapsinh the title of Raja. Therefore, the various reports and the correspondence of the British political agents at Satara we find Chhatrapati Pratapsinh referred to only as 'Raja' and not as 'Chhatrapati'.

Chhatrapati Pratapsinh of Satara (1808-1839) was unique character in the history of the Marathas. Throughout his life he fought for self respect and maintaining the dignity of his throne. Though installed on the throne of Satara by the British rulers, Pratapsinh did not want to remain only as a titular head of the state. He tried to run his state as independently as possible and thus attempted to leave his own mark on the administration of the state.

Chhatrapati Pratapsinh was the eldest son of Shahu II (1777-1808). It is desirable, here, to take into account the real position of the Chhatrapati of the Maratha State on the eve of Pratapsinh's accession to throne. It was during Ramraja's reign that the Peshwa became all powerful and the actual administration of the state remained in his hands only. This was the beginning of downfall of Chhatrapati's prestige. After the death of Ramraja Shahu II was crowned as a new Chhatrapati of Satara. But within a short time Shahu II realized that he was only a nominal head of the Maratha state and he was not allowed by the Peshwa to exercise much of his power. In fact he had to remain as a captive of Nana Phadnis. He was not allowed to move beyond the limits of Satara town and he had to live a frugal life within the meager amount which the Poona Darbar used to pay him.

Such was the situation and the position of Chhatrapati when Chhatrapati Pratapsinh was crowned as a new Chhatrapati of the Marathas, after the death of his father in 1808. Chhatrapati Pratapsinh's position was not very much different from that of his father. He was hardly fifteen years old when he came to power. Like his father Pratapsinh also spent his early life as a prisoner in the hands of Peshwa Bajirao II. The Peshwa had made no arrangements for Pratapsinh's proper education. He was also kept ignorant about the administration of the state.

The new Chhatrapati very soon came to realise the real condition about his own position. He was very clever and shrewd enough to grasp the political condition in the Maratha state. He felt that though the Chhatrapati was master of the state actually he had to work according to the direction of the Peshwa and the Peshwa who in true sense was servant of Chhatrapati had become the master of the state. This situation was not liked by Pratapsinh. He determined to bring about a change in this situation. This was the beginning of his struggle with Peshwa Bajirao II. The relations between Chhatrapati Pratapsinh and Peshwa Bajirao II were cordial upto 1812. However after Chaturising's arrest in 1811 the relationship between Chhatrapati and Peshwa was extremely — strained and consequently the Chhatrapati along with his family was thrown into prison by the Peshwa. Chhatrapati Pratapsinh later on also realised that Peshwa Bajirao II could not do anything for the prosperity of Maratha state. By the treaty of Bassein (31st December 1802) Bajirao II had signed away the Maratha independence to the British. So he was not useful any longer in the interests of the Maratha state. Naturally Pratapsinh thought that this was the time to throw off the yoke of the Peshwa and assert sovereignty of the Chhatrapati.

In his struggle with the Peshwa, Chhatrapati Pratapsinh thought it proper to take the help of the British too. When Elphinstone came to Poona as a resident, he tried to undermine

the position of Peshwa Bajirao II. Therefore, Peshwa Bajirao II also tried to regain his lost power. Thus started the third Anglo-Maratha war, which ended in complete ruin of the Peshwas in 1818. Mountstuart Elphinstone was also a shrewd statesman. He realised that though it was possible to vanish the power of Peshwa Bajirao II, it was not desirable to bring to an end the Maratha Empire. He knew that the Maratha people had great respect for their kingdom which was established by Chhatrapati Shivaji the Great. So in order to appease the Maratha people, the British decided to install Chhatrapati Pratapsinh on the Gadi of Satara. In this way Pratapsinh once again became the Chhatrapati of Maratha Empire on 10th April 1818.

From 1818 to 1832, Pratapsinh's relations with the British remained very cordial. James Grant the first political agent of the new state conducted the administration of Satara state as per the instructions from the sole commissioner Elphinstone, who furnished a complete code of rules by which the government was to be conducted. Chhatrapati Pratapsinh being naturally very intelligent and clever soon got insight into the administration under the able and friendly guidance of James Grant, who trained the Chhatrapati in the principles and details of government and sufficiently acquainted him with a practical knowledge of world. Grant not only instructed him in the art of administration, but cultivated in him higher tasks for literature and general knowledge and education and

instilled into his mind the importance of virtue and character.

On the 5th April 1822, the real power of the Satara state passed into the hands of Chhatrapati Pratapsinh. From that day onwards he became a true ruler of his state. He ruled his state very ably and effectively. All Residents and Governors in the initial stages of Satara Raj were full of praise for the ability, integrity and efficient administration of Raja Pratapsinh. Chhatrapati Pratapsinh successfully tried to raise the revenue of the state. But at the same time he also took care of welfare of his subjects. He did not impose the burden of taxes upon his people. The rate of land revenue was the minimum in Satara state as compared to the then prevailing rate of land revenue all over India. He always cared for the welfare of peasant community. So far as the Judicial administration was concerned, Pratapsinh always tried to deliver proper justice to his subjects. In accordance with the principle of monarchical state, king was the fountain of justice and Pratapsinh performed this part of his duty to the satisfaction of the people in his state. Even the British Government that it were pleased with the administration of the Raja of Satara.

But after 1832, some clashes occurred between Pratapsinh and the British, as a result of which his relations with the British were strained very much. These clashes ultimately led towards dethronement of Raja Pratapsinh on the 5th Sept. 1839.

The main architects of Pratapsinh's ruin were Sir Robert Grant, the then Governor of Bombay, Charles Ovens the Resident of Satara and Balaji Pant Natu who all along acted as a master spy to the British.

The Government of East India Company in India had made three main accusations against Raja Pratapsinh. These were as under - The Raja tried to instigate the local officers of the Company to join hands with the Portugues of Goa and with their help to raise army in Europe in order to overthrow the British from India, and he also attempted to join hands with Appasaheb, the Ex-ruler of Nagpur for making plot against the British. But all these allegations were false. The cause of the conflict between Pratapsinh and the British was infact the issue of control over the six Jagirdars within the limits of Satara state.

Pratapsinh fell foul of the British Government over the question of his Jagirdars. Pratapsinh's contention was that all the Jagirdars within his territory were under his control. But this was not acceptable to the East India Company's Government in Bombay. Captain James Grant who was the first resident of Satara had entered into separate treaties with the Jagirdars within the boundary of this principality, and hence the Company held the view that legally the Jagirdars were not subordinate to the Raja.

The Raja had no friendly relations with the Jagirdars within his territory. In fact he had developed an animus

towards them. On the other hand the Satara Jagirdars were requesting the British authorities in India not to entrust them to the Raja. Some of them even told them that if the Satara Jagirdars were placed under Raja Pratapsinh's control he might emerge as the most powerful opponent of the British in India. The problem, who should exercise absolute control over the jagirdars, undoubtedly led the Raja to the path of deposition. Lord Clare, the Governor of Bombay was willing to forgive Pratapsinh if he accepted the guilt of the charges against him. But Pratapsinh was not prepared for the such a compromise. So the British Government became angry with him. As a result of this Pratapsinh was arrested in the early hours of a morning on 5th September 1839 and sent into exile.

After his dethronement the Raja with his family remained for three months at Neemb, a village few miles away from Satara, till he was permitted to proceed to Banaras. He retout with his family, relatives and followers under the political charge of Lieutenant Cristall on the 7th December 1839 - and reached Banaras on the 16th April 1840. From the day of his arrival at Banaras till the day of his death there, he was engaged in a struggle, in order to clear the charges made against him. For that purpose he sent his trusted servant Rango Bapuji Gupte to London. Rango Bapuji remained in London for twelve years fighting for the cause of his master. Meanwhile Pratapsinh, on 25th January 1847 adopted the son of Balwantrao Raje Bhosale Senapati and named him as Durgasing



alias Tatyaba Raje. Pratapsinh died on 14th October 1847 at Banaras.

Chhatrapati Pratapsinh will be remembered for his various reforms. He was undoubtedly a great reformer. He loved education, and opened many schools in his state. It was Raja Pratapsinh who first of all championed the cause of primary education in rural Maharashtra. He first advocate of women education in Maharashtra. He himself became teacher of his daughter Gojarabai and his wives. He also laid great stress that there was no alternative to education for children of the Marathas so they should take to education. Raja Pratapsinh proved to be a great social reformer. He tried to abolish the cruel practice of 'Sati' in his state before Governor General Lord Bentinck had passed his famous 'Abolition of Sati Act' of 1829. Pratapsinh is rightly regarded architect of modern Satara city. It was he who made the beginning of development of Mahableshwar as a hill station. During his life time Raja Pratapsinh had to fight a fierces battle against the citadal of Brahman orthodoxy and also to face the vedoct controversy the like of which Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had to face in his life time. Raja Pratapsinh was religious minded too. He very much loved the members of his family. He was affectionate towards them, and took great care of every one of them.

While forming an estimate of this excellent prince Major Dr. B. D. Basu in his book 'Story of Satara' wrote, ". . . . the noblest, the best and the greatest of the Satara Rajas - Except Shivaji no other Maratha Prince had evinced such administrative capacity and highly virtuous character as Pratapsinh. . . .". Such a character will always be remembered by the freedom loving people of Maharashtra.