



The Relationship between Madhavrao Peshwa & Malharrao Holkar

Dr. Kartik Gawande

Head, Dept. of History,
MSS Ankushrao Tope College,
Jalna, MS

Mali N.V.

Research Student

If Holkar claims its historical importance in the medieval period, the ruling family of Holkar of Indore and Maheshwar has its large shares in the early struggle of the Maratha ascendancy in the North. Historical material for both was collected and published by Kshatria Dhanger samaj of Indore, Indore states Gazeleers; but the true historical perspective could not be attained for want of scientific standing of original sources, which were subsequently discovered by scholars properly interpreted by the sons of the soil. The Herculean labours of Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Itihasa Charya Rajwade, Rao Bahadur G.S. Sardesai, Rao Bahadur Kancaid and parasins, Dr. Maharaja Kumar Raghuvirsingh Natnagar Shodha-Sansthan Sitamau and the like have shown the wayout.⁽¹⁾

Panipat was a crushing defeat for the Maratha's. After the loss of the "two Jewels" Sadashiv Rao Bhau and Vishwas Rao and the appalling carnage it seemed that the Marathas power had been shattered to piece.⁽²⁾ But the Marathas proved to be more formidable eleven years after the battle of Panipat. Malhar Rao Holkar remained for the month at Gawalior where he added greatly to his broken forces. He engaged a large number of recruits and thus prepared himself to face the refractory conduct of those, who had become estranged on heaving of the disaster at Panipat.⁽³⁾

Malhar Rao Holkar thought it quite essential to pay his respectful condolences to his Master's family as well as to wait upon the new Peshwa Madhav Rao Ballal on whom the Chhatrapati of Satara had conferred the robes of Peshwaship. The heroic Peshwa Madhav Rao I was only 17 years old when the onerous duties of the great office were entrusted to him. The Peshwa's regime is probably the brightest page in the Maratha History, after Chhatrapati Shivaji and Peshwa Baji rao I.⁽⁴⁾

Holkar-Peshwa humbled Hyder Alli of Mysore :

In 1764 the Peshwa Madhav Rao I started from Poona on an auspicious day on an expedition against Hyder Alli of Mysore. Hyder Alli also did his best to take advantage of the disaster of Panipat by invading and harassing Karnatak and the adjoining territory of the



Peshwa of course the spirited young Peshwa could not brooke this definat attitude of Hyder alli.⁽⁵⁾

Malharrao Holkar received orders from the Peshwa to come to Poona with a force fifteen thousand strong to join the expedition as an early date. A very awakward incident took place at Poona, but for Mahhar Rao Holkar's timely intercession and well suited advice, this incident might have led to serious consequences. The horsemen of Sardar Vithal Sivadeo Vinchurkar were exercising their horses on the maidan in the vicinity of Poona. The Peshwa's troops happened to pass by and some of them remained there to see the horse exercises. some altercation followed, leading to hot words between the Peshwa's troopers and Vinchurkar's sowars. The matter reached the ears of the Peshwa, who was keen about the observance of discipline and a point of honour. The Peshwa ordered that Vinhurkar should be placed in custody and his sowars punished.⁽⁶⁾

On being apprised of this affair, Malhar Rao FHolkar at once proceded to the Peshwa's place and humbly requested that sardar Vinchurkar, who was a loyal and distinguished military leader should not be treated in this way for a mere quarrel between the Peshwa's and the Sardar's troppers.⁽⁷⁾ Holkar further explained that Vinchurkar had done great services to the state and on the present occasion no fault or misconduct was committed by the Sardar. The Peshwa reconsidered the matter and accepting Holkar's arguments; issued orders that Vinchurkar be called to the Palace to explain the whole situation. Vinchurkar be called to the Palace to explain the whole situation. Vinchurkar who was in high wrath and determined to die rather than suffer the indignity of being placed in custody; was brought by Malharrao Holkar to the Peshwa's presence and the whole matter, which had threatened to assume a serious aspect was amicably settled by Vinchurkar's expression of regret for what his troopers had done. Holkar thus came over an ugly danger which was likely to prove as an inauspicious omen on the eve of peshwa's starting on the expedition against Hyder Alli.⁽⁸⁾

Thus the Peshwa Madhav Rao's incessant exertions to wipe away the sad memories of Panipat suffice it to say that in the North as well as in the South of India peshwa Madhav Rao achieved glorious successes and made the Maratha Power stronger than it was in 1761. Malhar Rao Holkar had the opportunity of showing his valour against Hyder Alli only during one of the four expeditions of the Peshwa Madhavrao.⁽⁹⁾ Malhar Rao Holkar proceeded to jejuri, the sacred place of pilgrimage of the Holkar family, where he paid his obeisance to Shri Martand the then went to poona. Holkar halted at Poona for some time and at no distant date had the opportunity of accompanying his young master on an expedition agaionst the Nizam of Hyderabad; who had raised his arms against the Marathas in their hour of peril and



had even marched with an army against the Peshwa's uncle.⁽¹⁰⁾ This expedition is worthy of a careful attention in as much as it served to remove the latent misunderstanding smouldering in the mind of the heroic Peshwa with regard to the attitude of Holkar in the battle of Panipat.⁽¹¹⁾

The Maratha invaded the territories of the Nizam. Taking advantage of their absence from Poona, the Nizam-Ali invaded the city of Poona and tried to take it but failed. The energetic Peshwa used his best efforts in recalling those of the Maratha Sardars and officers, who had gone over to the side of the Nizam. Naturally the Nizam was considerably weakened in the strength of his army by the wise precautions and measures adopted by the Peshwa Madhav Rao-I. The Nizam-Ali, was encamped at Rakshas Bhuwan on the Godavari. Malhar Rao Holkar, Damaji Gaikwad and others advanced with forced marches and overtook the Nizam. A tough and fierce battle took place on the 10th of August 1763; and secured a glorious victory for the Marathas.⁽¹²⁾ This was the first time when the new Peshwa tasted the danger and the hardship of a battle field and it was an auspicious winning with a memorable success.

Malhar Rao Holkar and Mahadaji Sindia in the Gohad affairs

It has been already mentioned that the Jat Chief Raja Surajmal was very friendly to the Marathas. Najibkhan Rohilla, the inveterate enemy of the Maratha Power and the most unscrupulous intriguer, picked up several feuds with the Jat Chief, the matter culminating in a battle in which the Jat Chief was overpowered and Sayyid Muhammad Khan Baloches cut off the head and a hand from the body of the Jat on 25th December 1763.⁽¹³⁾

Jawaharsingh and Nawabsingh, grandsons of the Jat chief Surajmal solicited help from Holkar for carrying on hostilities against Najibkhan. Holkar went to the succour of the grandsons of Surajmal and rendered some help to them; but Jat army was a victim to defection caused by Najibkhan Rohilla's gold and success was consequently, but a vain hope under such circumstances.⁽¹⁴⁾ Holkar however brought about a reconciliation between the Jat and Najibkhan and this trouble somehow ended at last, the Jats still smarting under the terms imposed on them.⁽¹⁵⁾

During the career of the Peshwa Malhar Rao I, he worked incessantly for the expansion of the Maratha Power. He knew no rest of body and mind and he did not allow his Sardars Sindhia, Holkar and others to take rest. He not only sent expeditions in all parts of India but he resolutely determined to improve the Maratha Navy. Factories were founded at Poona, Nasik, Otur and Bagalkote for manufacturing large cannons and cannonballs; arrows



and gunpowder.⁽¹⁶⁾ He adopted and purchased guns from the English in Bombay. Hence it was that the English were over awed by the rising power much to be lamented.

We have already made some mention of the untiring energy and enthusiasm; the aim of which was to establish Maratha prestige and power in all parts of India by repeatedly sending out expedition. Malhar Rao Holkar had duly reported to the Peshwa, the trouble that arose in Hindustan and the manner in which they were expressed. Holkar was now old and it was necessary to strengthen his position by sending reinforcement as well able officers to share the difficulties and dangers of the responsibility which the Marathas had taken on their shoulders as the virtual rulers of India. The Peshwa therefore explained the pros and cons of the situation to Raghunath Rao-Dada. He was more weak than wicked; and when his vanity was appealed; he was always ready to undertake any arduous task. The Peshwa always behaved with humility towards Raghunath Rao Dada, and always raised his spirit by appealing to his vanity. Even when a matter was successfully decided by the Peshwa himself, he often tried to give the credit for it to Raghoba Dada. In matters of disagreement the Peshwa, however used his independent judgement.⁽¹⁷⁾

Raghunath Rao Dada started from Poona, accompanied by Vithal Shivde-o Vinchurkar and Mahadji Sindhia, whom the Peshwa Madhav Rao-I had recognised as the legitimate successor to the Jagirs of the Sindhia family in spite of the opposition of his uncle Raghunath Rao Dada. This independent judgement of the Peshwa in recognition of Mahadaji Sindhia's claim reflects the highest credit on the heroic Peshwa the "Protector of the weak against the strong", as Grand Duff justly observes.⁽¹⁸⁾

Malhar Rao Holkar joined the expedition under Raghunath Rao Dada and they proceeded together towards Gwalior. The Rajah of Gohad had defied the Marathas and it was now the aim of Raghunath Rao-Dada and Malhar Rao Holkar to punish the recalcitrant chief. Gohad is situated to the North east of Gwalior. This principality was bounded on the west by the Gwalior territories; on the east by the Kali-Sindhu River & on the North by the Jamuna. The Rajah of Gohad owed his rise to the Peshwa Baji Rao-I; who had conferred the fort of Gohad together with the paragona in Jagir on the Rajah for his excellent services to the Peshwa during his invasion of Hindustan.⁽¹⁹⁾

The operation against the Gohad Chief were prolonged for about eight months as he had a strong position and ample provisions.⁽²⁰⁾ During the siege of Gohad a serious danger befell on Mahadaji Sindhia, who was charged with intriguing with the Jat Chief and of supplying him with ammunition and provisions. Raghunath Rao-Dada was incensed beyond



measure. When he heard of these allegations of treachery against Mahadaji Sandiha and issued orders that Sindhia should be visited with the sentence of death.⁽²¹⁾

Conclusion

As soon as this serious affair was reported to the Peshwa Madhav Rao, he sent urgent letters to Malhar Rao Holkar and Vithal Shivdeo Vinchurkar urging them both to adopt measures to save Mahadaji Sindhia at all costs from the wrath of Raghunath Rao-Dada. Malhar Rao Holkar and Vinchrkar did their best to persuade Raghunath Rao-Dada to withdraw the orders but in vain. Holkar was in difficulty

Holkar effected by humility and submission what could not be achieved through entreaties and arguments. At last through Malhar Rao Holkar's fact. Skill and sagacity Mahadaji Sindhia was saved. When Malhar Rao Holkar sent his report to Poona about Sindhia's safety, the Peshwa Madhav Rao was exceedingly rejoiced to hear of the happy news. The siege of Gohad ended in the submission of the Jat chief. Who was brought with folded hands into the presence of Raghunath Rao Dada.

Peace was concluded with the Gohad Chief who was compelled to pay a tribute of three lakhs. Great credit is due to Malhar Rao Holkar for the rescue of Mahadaji Sindhia from this serious danger; as well as for the successful end of the Gohad siege. While these satisfactory issues of the Jat troubles were in progress the health of Malhar Rao Holkar; a hero of this narrative was being undermined by the strain, both of physical work and mental worry. The old Warrior repaired to Alampur to take some repose after all the handships of the protracted siege and military operations. The old warrior repaired to Alampur to take some repose after all the handships of the protracted siege and military operations. The apparent disease and ailment was pain in the ear, but the real malady was certainly the strain of works, which had told on the iron constitution of this gallant warrior.

His life had been spent in the hardship of camp life and the difficulties and dangers of the battle field. The death scene of this old warrior was really touching and imposing. Raghunath Rao Dada, Mahadaji Sindhia. Malhar Rao Holkar and Tukoji Holkar were called to have the last sight of the great hero. Malhar Rao Holkar placed the hand of his grandson Malhar Rao Holkar in those of Raghunath Rao-Dada and begged that the young man might be supported and enabled to serve the shreemont Peshwa Malhar Rao-I. Thereafter he placed his grandson's hand in those of Mahadaji Sindhia and Tukoji Rao Holkar. The latter humbly said to the dying sardar that the (Tukoji Holkar) was a servant and did not deserve that honour. whereupon Malhar Rao replied in a faltering voice and in significant terms 'you are quite fit to maintain my reputation, offer my death and serve the shreemant Peshwa', The gallant



Malhar Rao Holkar then breathed his last peacefully on the 20th May 1766 at alampur, where a cenotaph was built in his honour.

The Peshwa keenly felt the situation arising out of the sad death of Malhar Rao Holkar at a time when the affairs in Hindustan generally and respecially at Delhi were in need of trained and experienced military leaders. In the Peshwa's letter above, the words "A powerful sardar with great influence" from the Peshwa's pen deserve special attention. The absence of Malhar Rao Holkar in the negotiations regarding the Delhi affairs was indeed a great loss to the Maratha government. Had Malhar Rao Holkar lived a few years more; he would certainly have been highly delighted to witness the growing strength of the Maratha Power under this energetic and just Peshwa, who had not only wiped away the sad memories of Panipat but had even impressed the Afghan Ameer with the might of the Marathas who had become more powerful in 1772, eleven years after the battle of Panipat of 1761 A.D.

References :

- 1) G.S. Sardesai-Panipat Prakaran, p. 228
- 2) Ithihasik Sankirna Sahitya Vol II, p.39
- 3) Peshwa's Bakhar (Marathi), p.85
- 4) The Diaries of the Peshwa Madhavrao I, p.140
- 5) G.S.Sardesai-Peshwa Madhavrao I, p 58
- 6) The Diaries of the Peshwa Madhavrao I, p.148
- 7) Ibid, p.57
- 8) Ibid, p.67
- 9) Ibid, p.68
- 10) G.S.Sardesai-Peshwa Madhavrao I p.91
- 11) Phalke-Lekha Sangraha, p.68
- 12) Ibid, p.70
- 13) Ibid, p.73
- 14) J.N.Sarkar-History of Jats, p.152
- 15) J.N.Sarkar-History of Jats, p. 158
- 16) Forrest's Selections, p.141
- 17) G.S.Sardesai-The diaries of the Peshwa Madhavrao I, p.80
- 18) Ibid, p.208
- 19) Ibid, p.382
- 20) G.S. Sardesai- Madhavrao's Life, P.179