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ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY UNDER CHATTRAPATI SHIVAJI

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Abstract:

Besides being a daring soldier and a successful military conqueror, Shivaji treid to provide his kingdom with a good system of administration. Borrowing certain administrative practices from the Deccan sultanate, he evolved for the Marathas a system of governance in which his central administration was known as the ashtapradhan system. His kingdom consisted of territories known as the swarajya and the mughalai. Swarajya referred to the areas where his system of administration was implemented, while the mughalai territory fell outside the swarajya and was subject to Maratha and other external raids from time to time. To protect people living in the mughalai areas against any external invasions, a contribution was taken in the form of the chauth; and to safeguard them against Maratha attacks the sardeshmukhi was imposed. The levying of these taxes was very similar to the imposition of the jiziya, since all these taxes were punitive in nature and offered protection in return for revenue. In this context the present article deals with the study of administrative system during Shivaji Maharaj.

KEY WORDS:

Chattrapati, Guerrilla warfare, Punj Hazari, Patel, Swarajya, Ashtapradhan System, Chauth and Sardeshmukhi, Peshwa, Nyayadhish, Pandit Rao, Havalgars, Jumladar and Hazari, Bargirs and shiledars. Central administration, local, Provintional and revenue, judicial.

INTRODUCTION:

Shivaji was the supreme head of his government, with all powers-executive, legislative, military, as well as judicial-concentrated in his hands. A council of eight ministers assisted him in the Maratha Central administration- the ashtapradhan system. The ministers received new Sanskritized titles and their functions were purely advisory. According to Rawlinson, "Like nearly all great warriors-Napoleon is a compous example-Shivaji was also a great administrator, for the qualities which go to make a capable general are those which are required by the successful organizer and statesman". In theory, Shivaji was an autocrat, like hi s contemporaries. He could do what he plased However he was assisted by a Council of 8 ministers known as the Ashta Pradhan. It is absolutely misleading to say that Ashta Pradhan was like a modern cabinet. Its functions were purely advisory.

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Central Administration:

The king was the supreme head of the state and all authority was concentrated in his hands. He was assisted by a council of eight ministers known as the "Ashta Pradhan". The Chief Minister of the Mukya Pradhan was called the Peshwa. The other ministers held departmental charges such as finance, correspondence foreign affairs, the army and so forth. All the ministers except the Nyayadhisha or the chief justice also held military commands besides their civil duties:¹

- The Peshwas (Prime Minister) looked after the general administration and the welfare of the people. They were like Wazir or Prime Ministers.
- The Amotya (the finance minister) checked all accounts of income and expenditure.
- The Mantri preserved the daily record of the king's activities and the proceedings of his court.
- The Sachiva was in charge of the correspondence.
- Samant (the foreign secretary) helped the king on matters relating to foreign states and on problems of war and peace.
- The Senapati (the commander-in-chief) looked after the recruitment and organization of the army.
- The Pandit Rao decided the religious cases and disbursed grants to religious and learned men.
- The Nyayadhisha was the highest Judge in the state. The offices of the ministers were not hereditary but depended upon the personal qualities of a person and consent of the king.

PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION:

For convenience and efficiency the kingdom was divided into four provinces. East province was under the charge of a Subedar or Mamlatdar, who was helped by a number of other offices. The province were further divided in Parganas and Parganas into villages. The administration of a village was run by its headman known as Patel. There were also Pachhayats. There were some territories outside the jurisdiction of the provinces.² They enjoyed some sort of Maratha protection for which they collected from these 'Mughlat' a tribute in the shape of Chauth or Sardeshmukhi. Provincial Government remained fully under control of Shivaji.

LOCAL ADMINISTRATION:

For the purpose of administrative convenience, Shivaji divided his kingdom into four provinces and each was placed under a viceroy. To assist the provincial governor there was a council of ministers based on the central model. The provinces were divided into a number of regions called prants. Each prant was subdivided into parganas and tarafs. The village was the lowest unit of administration, run by the village headman known as the patel. The patel carried on his duties with the help of the gram Panchayat, whose members were elected by the villagers. Over a group of villages, there were officers known as deshmukhs and deshpandes who supervised the village functioning. Shivaji abolished the system of granting jagirs and started the system of paying officers in cash.³ When the collection of revenue of any region was assigned to an official, his main concern was only to collect the revenue and not establish control over the people residing there. None of the officers enjoyed a hereditary status.

REVENUE ADMINISTRATION:

Shivaji established an excellent revenue system based upon the principle, laid down by Todar Mal and Malik Ambar etc. The assessment was made after a careful survey and classification of the lands according to their quality and yield. The share of the state was fixed at two-fifths of the gross produce. He abolished the jagir system because it encouraged the spirit of revolt. He discouraged Zamindari system and established direct connection with the cultivators. He did away with the old and corrupt revenue officers and appointed new officers. The revenue could be paid both in kind and cash. In times of famine, loans were advanced to cultivators to buy seed and cattle etc. These loans were recovered by the government in easy instalments according to the means of the person concerned. The accounts of the revenue collectors were carefully examined by the officers. As most of the land was not fertile being hilly, the income of the government was increased by booty, Chauth, Sardeshmukhi etc. Chauth was the 1/4 of the standard revenue. It was collected from those territories which were not under his direct control.⁴ Sardeshmukhi was another tax which was 1/10 of the standard revenue and was charges from the entire area.

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JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION:

Despite the implementation of a proper administrative apparatus, the administration of justice in the kingdom was of a primitive nature. There were no regular courts, neither was there any regular procedure of imparting justice. The panchayats settled disputes in the villages and a common form of punishment was the trial by ordeal. Criminal cases were tried by the village headman or patel. At the imperial level, the nyayadhish heard appeals in both civil and criminal cases while the hazir majlis constituted the final court of appeal. 5

MILITARY ADMINISTRATION:

Shivaji organized this army on an ancient basis with regular gradation of officers. Shivaji established a regular standing army and greatly improved its morale and discipline. The recruitment was done after careful personal inspection. His army was mostly composed of cavalry and infantry. The Maratha cavalry was very-formidable. It consisted of two classes- the borgis or troops equipped and maintained by the state and Sithdars who brought their own houses and equipment and received a stipulated amount from the state for meeting the expenses of services in the field. To prevent disruptive tendencies Shivaji abolished the system of payment by Jagirs and introduced cash payments for his soldiers. The soldiers were kept under strict discipline and regulations were drawn to prevent them from doing anything which might degrade their morals. No female followers were allowed on the camp and a breach of this rule entailed capital punishment. 6 The spoils of war especially the costly articles were to be handed over to the state by every soldier. Maratha army was formidable and most suitable for guerilla war.

ECONOMICAL ADMINISTRATION:

As in other parts of India, a feudal way of life was in operation in Marathwada too. Under this system, the jagirdar or wataradar not only collected the revenue from his jagir or watan, but also administered the region under his jurisdiction like absolute king, maintaining his own army. But since the ascent of Shivaji, a strong military state was established where the fieldoms were in fear of the central administration. He imposed the payment of sardeshmukhi whereby the desh mukhs or existent feudal and dan leaders paid him a tax amounting to 10 percent of revenue. Not encouraging the granting of jagirs to officials, he in a way restricted the feudal way of operations. But at the same time, it is found that Shivaji also gave away makasa mahal or fells on different occasions. He even granted them to a goddess, which was in a way providing for the priests and maintaining the superstructure of caste. 7

For the purpose of tax collection, the prant was subdivided into paragons and tarafs. The procedure entailed a careful survey of the land after which the share of the state was fixed at 30 percent of the produce. Later when other taxes were abolished, the state's share was increased to 40 percent. The cultivator was at liberty to pay either in cash or kind, according to his won convenience and will. The amount of money to be paid to the state was fixed, which meant that there was not much scope for tax collectors to oppress the peasantry. The state's policy was such that it promoted and encouraged agricultural activities by helping peasants through the advancement of money or grain. Shivaji was strict in the collection of land revenue and adequate steps were taken to ensure that no favouritism or oppression took place.

Shivaji's revenue system was beneficent and based on humane considerations. Loans, or the takavi, were advanced to agriculturists by the state for the purchase of cattle and seeds. They were repayable in easy instalments. Extension of cultivation was encouraged by greatly reducing the tax upon lands newly brought under cultivation. The concessional assessment was known as istava. 8 Tax was raised in gradual stages in such a way that the maximum amount was reached over a period of eight years.

FORTS ADMINISTRATION:

The people were taught to regard the fort as their mother as indeed it was for thither the inhabitants of the surrounding village resorted in time of invasions. There were 280 forts in his territory. Each fort was in charge of three officers of equal rank. They acted together and served as a check on one another. 9 This was done so that forts may not be given to enemy by any one officer.

NAVY ADMINISTRATION:

Shivaji well realized the importance of having a navy. His enterprises in Konkan, were often

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hampered by the hostility of the Abyssinian pirates (siddis), who were established at Janjire, a small Island to the south of Bombay. The siddis were fine seamen and good fighters. Shivaji wanted to destroy their power and so built a considerable fleet manned by the sea forming people of the Malabar coast. Ten years of fighting with the siddis followed and the Maratha fleet on the whole gave a good account of itself. Shivaji possessed more powerful navy than other rulers of Deccan.

CONCLUSION:

From the analysis of the administrative systems prevailing in Maratha Empire it could be stated that central government was only the apparition of the ruling king. The king provided direction and guided all the deliberations. Shivaji Maharaj followed the traditions of Hindu Polity in administration. The king was the head of the state and he was regarded as the Protector of Maratha State. He was the law maker, the highest administrator, the Supreme commander of the army and the highest Judicial authority in the state. Yet the king was guided by the Ashtapradhan looked after the welfare of their subjects as defined by Dharma. The administration system of Shivaji was at once efficient and enlightened. The historian Khafi Khan bears testimony to his scrupulous care for the honour of women and children of Muslims, when they fell into his hands. He did not allow any Mosque to be destroyed and whenever a copy of Quran fell into his hands, he treated it with respect. It shows the greatness of Maratha administration during Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

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