

CHAPTER ONE

DIFFICULTIES OF LEVYING TAXES

The Early Invasions of Gujarat Made By the Senapati and Gaekwad

The Baroda State was formulated throughout the nineteenth century and it started developing an army, bureaucracy and an administrative apparatus. At its core was the army and control over land.

In order to trace the origins of the Gaekwad State of Baroda it is necessary to write at length on the occurrence of some events in the course of the rise of Maratha power in India. There would otherwise arise a difficulty in comprehending how Gujarat was conquered by a single officer of the Maratha kingdom who acted almost in independence of the sovereign and how following his death, his authority was smoothly transferred to his lieutenant; how these two the Senapati and the Gaekwad were successful in withholding the tribute claimed by Shahu and how a struggle ensued between the Peshwa and the Gaekwad which would have led to the dismemberment of the latter had British intervention been not sought by the Gaekwads of Baroda.¹

Shivaji (1674-80) had during the thirty years before his death in 1680 strived to form an independent kingdom, an army with discipline and a systematic civil administration. He was inspired by and strived to imbue his people with feelings of religious hatred towards the Muslims. Although Shivaji's schemes of religious hatred, systematic civil administration, disciplined army and a *swarajya* were not successful, nevertheless, the Marathas learned from him how to avoid the heavy blows of the Mughal army, how to use their mutual jealousies and rivalries to their advantage and how to conduct raids into the plains and rich towns after seizing the hill forts.²

For twenty years preceding the death of Shivaji, Aurangzeb (1658-1707) had exhausted every possible method to crush him and after his death began to follow a policy which led to the

¹ F.A.H. Elliot (1879), *The Rulers of Baroda*, p. 22.

² Ibid., pp. 22-23.

decline of the Mughal Empire. He tried to suppress the Hindus who had become powerful in the state. He imposed *jizyah* on his Hindu subjects and alienated the great Rajput houses—the Rathors of Marwar and the Sisodias of Mewar by his perfidious conduct. After losing the support of the Rajputs to his throne, he, by 1687 had extended the boundaries of the Mughal Empire but effectuated the weakening of the power of the Muslims in India by the annexation of Bijapur and Golconda. Consequently, though Shambhuji (1680-89) did not possess the genius of his father Shivaji, though the Maratha army lost all discipline, though the Mughals succeeded in recapturing a large number of Maratha hill forts and eventually Shambhuji himself was made captive and executed by Aurangzeb in 1689, the Regent, Rajaram (1689-1700) after he lost Raigarh in 1690 and the custody of the late Shambhuji's son, Shahu, who was brought up under Aurangzeb's care, "was able once again to create a centre of authority, far less despotic, it is true, than Sivaji's, at Jinji".³ Whilst Aurangzeb wasted seven years in capturing Jinji, the rapid movements of Santaji Ghorpade, Dhanaji Jadhava and Ramachandra Pant caused disconcertment to the cumbersome Mughal armies. A great number of Marathas were incipiently learning the predatory system of warfare, the end of which was one, but the means to accomplish it were distinct. Before Jinji fell to the Mughals Rajaram had shifted to Satara where he found himself heading larger armies than Shivaji himself had commanded. He made a wide range of predatory excursions till in 1700 Aurangzeb conquered Satara which hastened Rajaram's death. Although other important hill forts were conquered by the Mughals in the next four years and Aurangzeb was still virtually in supreme control of the Mughal Empire, nonetheless the Maratha excursions grew in formidableness. In 1702 Surat was plundered by the Marathas. In 1705 fifteen thousand Marathas led an invasion of Gujarat and pillaged it. Soon, Satara, Rajgarh, Panhala and for a brief period Songarh was reconquered by the Marathas and Aurangzeb unable to curb their predatory warfare died in misery at Ahmednagar in 1707.⁴

Aurangzeb's death led to the release of Shahu (1707-49) and though he faced difficulty initially, he ultimately succeeded in obtaining the allegiance of the leading Maratha *sardars* which was his birthright. An independent kingdom was set up at Kolhapur by the family of Rajaram which had the support of many powerful Maratha *sardars*. "Rivalries of all sorts confirmed the custom of separate action", writes F.A.H. Elliot, "and Shahu would have lost even the semblance of paramount authority had he not been supported first by the good

³ Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, p. 24.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

understanding which existed between him and Daud Khan, who was governor of the Deccan till the Nizam was appointed to that post, and then, by the counsel of Balaji Vishvanath, who in 1714 was elevated to the post of Peshwa or Mukhya Pradhan, and invested with the charge of Purandhar”.⁵ Within a short interval after that year, Balaji Vishwanath (1714-20) designed a new revenue policy which had a twofold objective. The first objective was the consolidation of the State and the second objective was the indispensability of the rendering of help of the Brahmans to Shahu who, although he did not lack ability but was nevertheless brought up in the ways of a lazy Muhammadan noble. In addition to the claims of the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* of the *subhas* of the Deccan by Shahu, the Peshwa held the lands conquered by him under the *swaraj* tenure. In the areas held as *swaraj*, one-fourth of the revenue known as *babti* went directly to the Peshwa whereas the remaining three-fourth called *mokassa* fell to the military chiefs as *jagir*. Besides their *jagirs*, the Maratha *sardars* also held lands and villages bestowed to them as *inam*.⁶

The leaders under whom the Marathas made their entry into Gujarat during the early eighteenth century were the Dabhades and the Gaekwads. In order to comprehend the relationship between the Dabhades and the Gaekwads “and through them of the Maratha political order, especially the relations of the Maratha King and the Peshwa, it is necessary to trace briefly the antecedents of these families and their rise in the Maratha system”.⁷

Bahadur Shah I (1707-12) released Shahu, the son of Shambhuji from captivity and he returned to Maharashtra in 1708. When the Marathas were strenuously struggling against the Mughals there had been a great alteration in their administrative system from the one that prevailed during the times of Shivaji. Under the administration of Shivaji, the central government was strong with the king having absolute powers and the *Ashta Pradhan Mandal*, similar “more or less to our present day executive councils”.⁸ Most of the territorial acquisitions of Shivaji were wrenched away from the grasp of his son and successor Shambhuji who was imprisoned by Aurangzeb and executed in a cruel manner. The Mughals made the son of Shambhuji, Shahu, a captive. However, the exertions of the Emperor for the suppression of the Marathas proved futile because the struggle of the Maratha chiefs continued under the second son of Shivaji and the successor of Shambhuji, Rajaram, and his wife, Tarabai (1700-08). For the encouragement of the Maratha chiefs they started “the

⁵ F.A.H. Elliot (1934), *The Rulers of Baroda*, p. 17.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Thyagarajan, “Political Relations Between the Gaekwads of Baroda and the Peshwas of Poona”, p. 1.

⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

system of assignments of land or districts of land”.⁹ Shahu was strongly opposed by Tarabai and for attracting the Maratha *sardars* towards his side he also started following “the system of assigning land to *sardars* in different parts of India”.¹⁰

There was a necessity of assigning land at first, but it eventually led to the growth of pretensions in the minds of these warlords of becoming semi-independent. The outcome of all this was that power was usurped by military chiefs, who laid the foundation of independent dynasties, concluded peace or declared war without holding consultations with the central authority and used power for their own advantage.¹¹ According to Professor Sinha, “In each *pargana* arose a chieftain who mustered to his standard a number of men commensurate with his ability”.¹² At first the Maratha leaders were tied together by bonds of brotherhood but as time passed this bonding became loose.¹³

These chiefs who had risen to power because of the generosity of the Peshwa remained faithfully subordinate to him while those who rose to power because of their own caliber refused to recognize the suzerainty of the Peshwas. The Dabhades and the Gaekwads were among the chiefs who had risen to power owing to their own caliber. Therefore they always strived to remain independent and worked towards expanding their own sphere of influence. The intervention of the Peshwa in their process of self-aggrandizement led to severe strife.¹⁴

Gaekwad Family: Its Origin and Background

Origin of the Gaekwad Family

We now trace the origin and background of the Gaekwad family. There is an extreme paucity of information regarding the early history of the Gaekwad family. Many bakhars express many contradictory opinions and the authenticity of each one of them is doubtful. One can trace the origins of the family to the village of Davdi. A man named Nandaji, who was one of the ancestors of the Gaekwads, was the *patil* (in charge) of the fortress at Bhor. This fact is

⁹ Thyagarajan, “Political Relations Between the Gaekwads of Baroda and the Peshwas of Poona”, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹² Ibid., p. 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

corroborated by later records which postulate that Pilajirao Gaekwad received Davdi and Bhor in *inam* from Shahu and he bought the *muqaddami* rights of these two places.¹⁵

There are reports about the Gaekwads being associated with Shivaji as far back as 1657. In accordance with one report, one of the Gaekwads married his daughter to Shivaji and that Damajirao Gaekwad I descended from this line of the family. However, this is merely a conjecture as it is not corroborated by other sources.¹⁶

Controversy over the following of Gaekwads

The raids in northern Gujarat and Kathiawar were led by Khanderao Dabhade in the early eighteenth century. The credit for the conquests of the Marathas in Gujarat and their incursions into the Mughal province is given to the Dabhade family. It is supposed that the Gaekwads were in the service of the Dabhade family. The fortunes of Damajirao Gaekwad I were raised by “fighting under the banner of Khanderao Dabhade as his lieutenant”.¹⁷

According to the Pant Pratinidhi Bakhar in 1699 Damajirao Gaekwad I went to help the second son of Shivaji, Rajaram. If we are to believe this bakhar we may presume that at the commencement of his career Damajirao Gaekwad I might have served Rajaram in the capacity of an independent chief. There is no clarity in the available records of that period with regard to the position of Damajirao Gaekwad I in the service of Rajaram. In fact, by simply going to help the Chhatrapati does not make him an independent chief. There is greater likelihood of his having gone to help the Chhatrapati in the capacity of an officer of Khanderao Dabhade.¹⁸

There are manifold such examples with regard to the subordination of the Gaekwads to the Dabhade family. As late as 1751 when Damajirao Gaekwad II was defeated by Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao and the latter asked the former to cede half of his dominions in Gujarat to him, Damajirao Gaekwad II refrained from doing so by saying that Gujarat belonged to Umabai Dabhade and that he was subordinate to her and further added that she possessed the sole right to take a decision on the matter. Although at that time Damajirao Gaekwad II possessed

¹⁵ Saxena, “The Early Gaekwads”, p. 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

real power in Gujarat, nevertheless, in all but name he displayed that he was loyal to Umabai Dabhade.¹⁹

Another controversy which needs to be cleared is whether the Gaekwads were the lieutenants of Kantaji Kadam Bande which has been specified by Forrest. In accordance with the available sources of that period the Gaekwad was the lieutenant of the Dabhade family and not Kantaji Kadam Bande.²⁰

At the commencement of the career of the Gaekwad raids in Gujarat were led by Pilajirao Gaekwad and Kantaji Kadam Bande, “Kantaji as an officer of Chhatrapati Shahu and Pilajirao as an officer of Senapati Khanderao Dabhade”.²¹ Whenever there was a clash of interests between the two, they always fought with each other. If indeed Pilajirao Gaekwad was a subordinate of Kantaji Kadam Bande he would never have displayed this kind of behavior towards him.²²

An example which will bring further clarity to this controversy is that Khanderao Dabhade placed Pilajirao Gaekwad at Navapura to carry on his raids. However, he was impelled to shift from Navapura as Kantaji Kadam Bande told him that it was part of his beat; ²³so he chose “a hill in a wilderness difficult of access”²⁴ which belonged to the Mewassi Bhils; and at that place built the fortress and town of Songarh, “the cradle of the Gaekwads’ house”²⁵, and till 1766 the capital of their kingdom.²⁶

In 1721 Khanderao Dabhade introduced Damajirao Gaekwad I formally to Shahu from whom he obtained the title of *Shamsher Bahadur* or ‘An Illustrious Swordsman’ which was retained by his descendants and also the post of ‘second in command’ of the Senapati owing to the exemplary valor displayed by him in the Battle of Balapur. There are manifold instances of the Senapati Dabhade giving orders to the Gaekwad for marching towards certain places.²⁷

Considering the examples cited above from the available literature, it is evincible that the Gaekwads were the lieutenants of the Dabhade family. The misunderstanding with regard to

¹⁹ Saxena, “The Early Gaekwads”, p. 12.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

²⁴ Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, p. 19.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²⁷ Saxena, “The Early Gaekwads”, p. 14.

their loyalty may have arisen owing to the fact that both Pilajirao Gaekwad and Kantaji Kadam Bande were conducting forays in Gujarat contemporaneously. Since Kantaji Kadam Bande was conducting forays before Pilajirao Gaekwad in Gujarat therefore some experts might have concluded that he was a subordinate of Kantaji Kadam Bande.²⁸

Another preposterous claim made by Forrest is that Pilajirao Gaekwad fought in the Third Battle of Panipat and died of fever on his return to Gujarat at Savli near Baroda. Although Indra Saxena clears the air that the claim is not corroborated by other contemporary sources²⁹, it is also utterly absurd. Even F.A.H. Elliot and the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Volume VII: Baroda* of the year 1883 clearly state that Pilajirao Gaekwad was assassinated by vile assassins hired by Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur in 1732 at Dakor long before the Third Battle of Panipat which was fought in 1761. It was in fact the son of Pilajirao Gaekwad, Damajirao Gaekwad II, who fought in that disastrous battle because it took place during his reign and not the reign of Pilajirao Gaekwad.

Dabhade and Gaekwad in Gujarat

In the year 1699 Rajaram gave the authority for the collection of *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* in Baglana to Khanderao Dabhade. Khanderao Dabhade and the veteran Dhanaji Jadhava had fought together in the Battle of Ratanpur when the Marathas invaded Gujarat in 1706. During the interregnum between 1706 and 1716 several forays were led by him into South Gujarat and Sorath. The first *mulukgiri* expedition was also led by Khanderao Dabhade and his lieutenant Damajirao Gaekwad I in 1711. Subsequently these expeditions were conducted annually under the leadership of Damajirao Gaekwad I and for many years provided subsistence to his followers in Gujarat and Kathiawar.³⁰

In the meantime as a result of factional realignment at the Mughal Court Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah replaced Daud Khan as the new viceroy of Gujarat. This change led to the annulment of the treaty signed between Shahu and Daud Khan.³¹

Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah had to encounter the depredations of the officers of Shahu when he became the viceroy of Gujarat. For the subjugation of the ravages wrought for by the Marathas, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah dispatched an army against the Marathas who were

²⁸ Saxena, "The Early Gaekwads", pp. 14-15.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³¹ Ibid., p. 16.

encamping with their forces near the river Bhima. For strengthening the Maratha army Shahu dispatched another body of troops commanded by Balaji Vishwanath. A battle took place in the vicinity of Purandar. Though the Marathas tasted some success, nevertheless, they were forced to retreat and conclude peace. Despite concluding peace the Marathas under the leadership of different *sardars* persisted with their usual depredations.³²

Meanwhile Sayyid Hussein Ali Khan quickly replaced Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah as the viceroy of Gujarat. When the new viceroy sent an expeditionary force against the Marathas and attempted to open communication on the road between Surat and Burhanpur, and to liberate it from the ravages of Khanderao Dabhade, who held the command of the road and demanded payment of one-fourth of the money and luggage of all travelers who failed to purchase his passport, he did not meet with success. Khanderao Dabhade worsted the Mughal expeditionary force. Subsequent to achieving success over the Mughals, Khanderao Dabhade proceeded to Satara to make a polite visit to Shahu who recognizing his achievements promoted him to the rank of Senapati in 1716.³³

Several other Maratha *sardars* were also actively carrying out depredations in Gujarat. Sayyid Hussein Ali Khan unable to surmount the difficulties eventually came to terms with the Marathas.³⁴ In 1717 Shahu authorized Shankaraji Malhar to stipulate a treaty, “which with some exceptions was conceded by the Mughal viceroy”.³⁵ The treaty was not, however, ratified by the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar (1713-19). As a result Sayyid Hussein Ali Khan began to plan a visit to Delhi and requested Shahu for aid. Sayyid Hussein Ali Khan was joined by Balaji Vishwanath and Khanderao Dabhade. The viceroy gave a promise that the ratification of the treaty at Delhi would take place at any cost and the Marathas would be granted authority for levying tribute in Malwa and Gujarat which by that time had become institutionalized as a customary practice of the Marathas in those two provinces. The viceroy asserted before the Emperor with regard to the granting of tribute to the Marathas by pleading that the *sardars* who were already in the habit of levying contributions in Malwa and Gujarat would enter those provinces by force and pillage them. He further made pretensions to the Emperor pleading that if Shahu would be authorized to levy tribute in Malwa and Gujarat, he

³² Saxena, “The Early Gaekwads”, pp. 16-17.

³³ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

would, in these circumstances; undertake the responsibility for protecting and improving these territories of the Mughal Empire.³⁶

Balaji Vishwanath and Khanderao Dabhade stayed at Delhi till Muhammad Shah (1719-48) acceded to the Mughal throne in 1719. Though the execution of formal orders was still pending, nonetheless, the new Emperor ratified the treaty with the Marathas. After asking their respective agents to reside at the Mughal Court in Delhi both Balaji Vishwanath and Khanderao Dabhade came back to the Deccan. Soon after coming back from Delhi, the Senapati Khanderao Dabhade was authorized by Shahu for levying tribute in Gujarat in addition to Baglana. Khanderao Dabhade had already been authorized to collect tribute from Baglana by Rajaram earlier.³⁷

During the interregnum when the Senapati Khanderao Dabhade was living at the Mughal Court in Delhi, his lieutenant Damajirao Gaekwad I continued to carry on his occupation in the Deccan and led forays into the province of Gujarat for the realization of dues on an annual basis.³⁸

In consequence of the underhand plots at the Mughal Court in Delhi, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah wanted to conquer a kingdom for himself in the Deccan and sever all ties with the Mughal Empire. With this dream of becoming independent of the central authority he made his move towards the Deccan with a powerful army of 12,000 men. However, he faced opposition from the Sayyid brothers who were supported by Shahu. Shahu dispatched Kanhoji Bhonsle, Haibatrao Nimbalkar and Shankaraji Malhar as well as Khanderao Dabhade for assisting the Sayyid brothers. The two armies met at Balapur in Berar. Although the Sayyid brothers lost the contest, nonetheless, the Marathas emerged meritoriously from the Battle of Balapur.³⁹

On the occasion of the Battle of Balapur Damajirao Gaekwad I also fought along with Khanderao Dabhade and for the exemplary valor shown by him in the battle Shahu conferred on him the title of *Shamsher Bahadur* or 'An Illustrious Swordsman' which was retained by his descendants and also made 'second in command' to the Senapati in 1721. This has been mentioned previously also.⁴⁰

³⁶ Saxena, "The Early Gaekwads", p. 18.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

Meanwhile, the death of the Senapati and his lieutenant occurred within a short span after the Battle of Balapur in May 1721; the successor of Khanderao Dabhade was his son Trimbakrao Dabhade while Damajirao Gaekwad I was succeeded by his nephew Pilajirao Gaekwad (1720-32), the son of Jhingojirao Gaekwad and the real founder of the Gaekwad State of Baroda.⁴¹

Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah, meanwhile returned to Delhi and was made wazir of the Mughal Empire and was authorized to defeat and eject the rebellious Subahdar of Gujarat, Hyder Quli Khan. He easily defeated the recalcitrant Subahdar and retained the province by appointing his uncle Ahmed Khan to deputize for him. Subsequently in the same year he came back to the Deccan without obtaining permission of Muhammad Shah with full intent on breaking all connection with the Mughal Empire.⁴²

Controversy over the initial status of Damajirao Gaekwad I

There exists a controversy over the initial status of Damajirao Gaekwad I which Indra Saxena clears. She writes that according to some sources Damajirao Gaekwad I originally held the post of *jasud* or confidential messenger. She argues further that according to the same source “Damajirao Gaekwad I had begun to make raids with a detached force under him”.⁴³ Both accounts contradict each other. If Damajirao Gaekwad I was merely a *jasud* he would never have become a commander of an independent squadron. There is probably according to Indra Saxena a confusion of Damajirao Gaekwad I with Pilajirao Gaekwad who during the initial phase of his career was a confidential messenger in the service of the Dabhade.⁴⁴

One important point highlighted by Indra Saxena is that during the reign of Shivaji there was equality of status in the posts of the Senapati and the Peshwa. However, Shahu ceded all the powers to the Peshwa and made his post hereditary which caused deep indignation to the Senapati whose powers decreased as a result of this move of the Chhatrapati. This was the source of the rivalry between the Dabhade family and the family of the Peshwas which was inherited by the lieutenants of the Dabhades namely the Gaekwads.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, p. 18.

⁴² Ibid., p. 19.

⁴³ Saxena, “The Early Gaekwads”, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

Struggle among Various Maratha Chiefs to Obtain the Right of Levying *Chauth* in Gujarat

The eighteenth century was a century of constant flux when illustrious men like Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah (1724-48), Alivardi Khan (1739-56), and the Naik Hyder Ali (1761-82) were laying the foundations of new kingdoms; when the governors of Surat and Cambay, who were petty Muslim amirs became Nawabs; when there was a rapid transformation of the British traders into conquerors: astonishing change of fortune was taking place among the Marathas too, although their past history was concise, and their political unity weak. The most competent and enterprising men among them rose to great heights, even if they had the humblest of origins, and in instances where their sons or relatives were equally efficient military leaders they succeeded, without knowledge of it, in laying the foundations of princely states: such able men were Balaji Vishwanath, Malhar Rao Holkar, Ranoji Sindhia, Vishwas Rao, Udhaji Pawar, Kantaji Kadam Bande and Pilajirao Gaekwad.⁴⁶

The last three were assigned the task of invading Gujarat “and they carried it out sometimes in combination, sometimes independently of each other; but each knew that the prize could fall to one of them only, and each was a rival of the other two”.⁴⁷ The remark prize here does not mean acquiring territory—because the idea to settle down and become rulers of conquered kingdoms was not in the minds of these Maratha adventurers—instead what they desired was to extract from the viceroy of the Mughal Emperor the right to levy *chauth* in Gujarat. At that time this was adequate for Maratha officers who commanded few bodies of predatory horsemen. There is no doubt about the fact that Raja Shahu had given authority to the late Senapati for levying tribute in Gujarat and that Pawar had also received similar *sanads*, but it can be said without a shadow of doubt that *sanads* back then lacked their usual value: the chief who possessed the ability to impel the Mughals to give him permission for levying *chauth* in Gujarat would not have a want of followers to help him with the work, or authorization, if essential, from Raja Shahu.⁴⁸

The Senapati instructed Pilajirao Gaekwad to turn his attention mainly to the Surat *Atthavisi*, and he also augmented his strength by forming an alliance with the Raja of Rajpipla, who was an old enemy of the Mughals. In 1720, however, he led an expedition into north Gujarat

⁴⁶ Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

and succeeded in obtaining a share of the *chauth* of a part of that country; simultaneously there was an establishment of a *gumashta* or agent by him at the *haveli* of Ahmedabad. Moreover, in 1723 he led an expedition against Surat and inflicted a defeat on its new governor, Momin Khan, following which there was regularization in the levying of tribute in the *Atthavisi*. Pilajirao Gaekwad entered Gujarat through the Baba Piarah Pass and proceeded towards Karnali, where the *desais* or *patels* of Padra, Chhani and Bhayali in the *pargana* of Baroda joined him and the *patel* of Padra was particularly useful to him owing to his immense knowledge about the country south of the Mahi.⁴⁹

As has been mentioned before that Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah, just before severing all ties with the Mughal Empire, had made arrangements for the running of the affairs of Gujarat, and, retained the government of the province by leaving his uncle Ahmed Khan to deputize for him. The Imperial Court, in order to reestablish its influence, secured the appointment of Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk as the Governor of Malwa and Gujarat, and he in turn told the valorous Shujat Khan to deputize for him. Ahmed Khan was ordered by the Nizam to maintain his position in Gujarat so he called upon Kantaji Kadam Bande to help him by giving him the promise of solitarily levying the *chauth* in Gujarat and the combined armies of the two inflicted a defeat on Shujat Khan and killed him near Ahmedabad. This befell in 1724, at a time when the brother of Shujat Khan, Rustam Ali Khan, had just gained some ground over Pilajirao Gaekwad in the neighborhood of Surat, and had impelled the Raja of Rajpipla to forsake his alliance. In order to seek retribution for the death of his brother, Rustam Ali Khan brought his campaign against Pilajirao Gaekwad to a close, and persuaded him to join him in the fight against Ahmed Khan and Kantaji Kadam Bande by giving promises to him. Crossing the Mahi at Fazilpura, the two allies came face to face with their enemies on the plains of Aras, in the *pargana* of Petlad. However, Pilajirao Gaekwad had come to a surreptitious understanding with Ahmed Khan so upon the commencement of the battle he betrayed his ally by capturing his artillery and turning it against him. Rustam Ali Khan was subsequently defeated in a series of battles and skirmishes and fled to Vasa near Ahmedabad where he committed suicide so as to avoid being captured alive by his enemies.⁵⁰

Then Ahmed Khan conferred half of the *chauth* of Gujarat on Pilajirao Gaekwad while he had earlier given the promise of bestowing the *chauth* of Gujarat entirely on Kantaji Kadam Bande. The two chiefs fell out as a result of the division of the spoil the final culmination of

⁴⁹ Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

which was an open breach and battle at Cambay in which Pilajirao Gaekwad was defeated and impelled into retirement at Matar near Kheda. But Ahmed Khan had a keen awareness that he could not hold his own in the upcoming struggle with the Subahdar without the help of both the Marathas, so he intervened and assigned the *chauth* of the districts north of the river Mahi to Kantaji Kadam Bande, and the *chauth* of the districts south of the river Mahi to Pilajirao Gaekwad, viz. Baroda, Nandod, Champaner, Bharuch and Surat. After the close of the campaign, Kantaji Kadam Bande took retirement in Khandesh, and Pilajirao Gaekwad went to Songarh, whilst the Senapati settled at Dabhoi. However, Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk had a determination to seek retribution for the death of Shujat Khan and to drive the uncle of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah out of Gujarat and in order to achieve his aim he won by persuasion the help of the Babi family and of Abhay Singh, the Maharaja of Jodhpur. Since he was a competent and enterprising man he succeeded in his objective and for some time ejected the Marathas from Gujarat. His son Khanazad Khan fought two battles with Ahmed Khan and his allies, Kantaji Kadam Bande and Pilajirao Gaekwad, the first one at Sojitra, and the second one at Kapadvanj, and on both occasions inflicted decisive defeats on them. Ahmed Khan had to flee from Gujarat; and despite the continuous struggle of Kantaji Kadam Bande and the successful campaigns of Antaji Bhaskar, Pilajirao Gaekwad after being worsted in the two battles tried to unsuccessfully seize Baroda from its governor Hasanuddin but had to flee to Cambay and from there seek retirement in Sorath.⁵¹

But the following year (1726) fortunes again swung in favor of Pilajirao Gaekwad; Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk got no aid from the Mughal Court, and was forced to again surrender the right of levying *chauth* in the districts south of the river Mahi to Pilajirao Gaekwad. But a new personality made his appearance in the competition and struggle for levying taxes in Gujarat: this was the Peshwa Baji Rao I (1720-40), the successor of Balaji Vishwanath, who had a rivalry with the Senapati, the immediate superior of Pilajirao Gaekwad and hence coaxed his partisan Udhaji Pawar to eject Pilajirao Gaekwad from Gujarat. Although Udhaji Pawar led several successful campaigns against Pilajirao Gaekwad he was unable to eject him from Gujarat; and Kantaji Kadam Bande who harbored the same jealousy as Pilajirao Gaekwad with regard to the intervention of the Peshwa in the affairs of Gujarat, decided to

⁵¹ Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, pp. 23-24.

again join him in his campaign, and both of them made an unsuccessful attempt at seizing Baroda.⁵²

Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk at last was impelled to give way to one of the two Maratha factions and as the mightier among the two was the Peshwa he granted him the *sardeshmukhi*, except that of Surat and the adjacent districts, and the *chauth* of Gujarat with exception of Surat—and five per cent of the city of Ahmedabad's revenues in 1727. The essential condition of the agreement was that Baji Rao I should not provide assistance to discontented zamindars and other elements that were disturbing the public peace of Gujarat. Among the elements that were disturbing the public peace of Gujarat included Pilajirao Gaekwad, the ally of the Bhils and Kolis who had by now succeeded in capturing both Baroda and Dabhoi while Kantaji Kadam Bande had successfully captured Champaner.⁵³

This treaty was not brought into effect till 1729, and by this time Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah had been seriously weakened by Baji Rao I for length of time after a campaign which was long drawn but successful. Pilajirao Gaekwad had shown that he would not protect the country despite the *chauth* of Gujarat being granted to him and Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk began to feel⁵⁴ “the weight of the Peshwa's arm”⁵⁵ by the depredations carried out by his brother Chimnaji Appa in the *pargana* of Petlad; yet the action of Chimnaji Appa led to anger and anxiety in two domains. The viceroy had unjustifiably incurred the wrath of the Mughal Court in the vain hope of asking for its support; the Delhi court now appointed in place of Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk, the infamous Rathor Maharaja of Jodhpur, Abhay Singh, as the new viceroy. Abhay Singh defeated Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk at Adalaj near Ahmedabad with the help of the Babi family and after emerging victorious in a second battle against him made an entry into the capital and took charge of the government and appointed Momin Khan as the governor of Cambay. As a result of the actions of his brother, Baji Rao I had incurred the wrath of the Maratha chiefs, who considered Gujarat to be their prey, and the enemy of the Peshwa, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah was careful in keeping this feeling alive and formed a confederacy against the Brahmin faction which consisted of

⁵² Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, p. 24.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

Chimnaji Pant, Udhaji Pawar, Kantaji Kadam Bande, Pilajirao Gaekwad, and the Senapati, Trimbakrao Dabhade.⁵⁶

In 1731 Baji Rao I at the beginning made up his mind to capture Baroda; however, allied with Abhay Singh, who pragmatically maintained the terms of the treaty signed by the Peshwa with Sarbuland Khan Mubariz al-Mulk, when he launched the invasion of Gujarat, he was inhibited from putting his plan into practice on receiving the news that Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah was marching against him. When he was marching from Baroda he was driven back by the troops of Pilajirao Gaekwad but this did not discourage him from advancing on the army of Trimbakrao Dabhade which was encamped at Bhilupur lying between Baroda and Dabhoi and the Senapati's army was soon joined by the forces of Kantaji Kadam Bande and Pilajirao Gaekwad. The army of the Peshwa was smaller than that of the confederacy, but its efficiency was greater, so after a severe battle in which Trimbakrao Dabhade fought gallantly, Baji Rao I emerged completely victorious. Trimbakrao Dabhade himself and the eldest son of Pilajirao Gaekwad, Sayajirao, were killed in action; Pilajirao Gaekwad also received severe wounds and facing great difficulty somehow succeeded in escaping to Songarh along with his remaining two sons Damajirao and Khanderao. Janoji Dabhade and Maloji Pawar were among those killed in action while Udhaji Pawar and Chimnaji Pant were made prisoners of war and Anand Rao Pawar received grievous wounds.⁵⁷

It was indeed fortunate for the confederates that Baji Rao I had a great anxiety to fight Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah "on equal terms"⁵⁸ so he decided not to deal harshly with them. He conferred the post of Senapati on the youthful son of the late Trimbakrao Dabhade, Yashwantrao, and gave him permission for the collection of the *chauth* of Gujarat, but stipulated that for the future half of the revenues were to be sent to Raja Shahu *through the Peshwa*, and that added conquests of tributary States were similarly to be taken into account. As Yashwantrao Dabhade was a minor, Pilajirao Gaekwad was appointed *mutalik* and also bestowed with the added title of *Sena Khas Khel*, 'commander of the special band' or 'leader of the sovereign's band' which together with *Shamsher Bahadur* was retained by the descendants of the Gaekwad dynasty.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Elliot, *Rulers of Baroda*, p. 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Pilajirao Gaekwad, as *mutalik*, having all of the Senapati's resources available for his use did not delay to attack and irritate Abhay Singh. He was successful in his enterprise since the people of Gujarat sided with him, and at length the viceroy, the wicked Abhay Singh, the same prince who in order to ascend the throne of Jodhpur had induced his brother to murder his father Maharaja Ajit Singh, had no better plan to relieve himself from his enemy than to assassinate him.⁶⁰

He was successful in his objective because the accredited Marwari agents of Abhay Singh accomplished their task by murdering Pilajirao Gaekwad in 1732 at Dakor. However, the death of the enterprising founder of the Gaekwad State of Baroda only swung the pendulum in favor of the Gaekwad dynasty. Pilajirao Gaekwad was succeeded by his worthy son, Damajirao, the chief who was successful in becoming the sovereign of a large kingdom from a mere lawless adventurer.⁶¹

Role of Pilajirao Gaekwad in establishing Gaekwad Rule in Gujarat

Pilajirao Gaekwad was the main architect behind the foundation of the rule of the Marathas in Gujarat. His birth took place in 1677 and he hailed from a very ordinary family in the village of Davdi and began his career as a confidential messenger with Khanderao Dabhade. One can safely conclude that he was a man with immense ability by his dramatic rise from a very junior post under the Senapati to go on to become one of the prominent military chiefs of the Maratha Confederacy. Although he started his career by fighting under the banner of the Senapati, by displaying exemplary valor in the wars, he succeeded in achieving the independent command of a *paga* and later on he was promoted to 'second in command' in the army of Khanderao Dabhade. In 1731, a year before his assassination, he was conferred by Shahu with the title of *Sena Khas Khel* which was not only an exclusive military honor but bestowed on him a high status among the Maratha *sardars*.⁶²

One of the remarkable achievements of his reign was the construction of a fort at Songarh, which remained his stronghold and the capital of the Baroda State till 1766, and from Songarh he conducted raids in Gujarat for collecting tribute at the behest of the Senapati. He made good use of the favorable situation arising from the enfeeblement of the Mughal

⁶⁰ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol. VII: Baroda, p. 173.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Saxena, "The Early Gaekwads", pp. 42-43.

Empire and the secessionist tendencies of the viceroys of Gujarat who wanted independence from the Empire. By his diplomatic maneuvers and growing power Pilajirao Gaekwad was able to persuade the Mughal viceroys and eventually secure the *chauth* of Gujarat from them.⁶³

He possessed the acumen for the development of the rule of the Gaekwads in Gujarat. He never entertained antagonistic feelings for the local populace. He enjoyed the friendship and goodwill of the local potentates who were instrumental in the formation of the Baroda State.⁶⁴

The rising power of Peshwa Baji Rao I caused discontentment to Trimbakrao Dabhade, the son and successor of Khanderao Dabhade and the increasing intervention of the Peshwa in the affairs of Gujarat culminated in the Battle of Dabhoi in 1731 which benefitted Pilajirao Gaekwad immensely. Trimbakrao Dabhade was slain in the battle and the Peshwa conferred the title of Senapati on his minor son Yashwantrao Dabhade and made Pilajirao Gaekwad the *mutalik*. Real power eventually passed into the hands of the Gaekwad family since Yashwantrao Dabhade turned out to be an imbecile man and thus the overlordship of the Senapati from here onwards became nominal.⁶⁵

The growing power of Pilajirao Gaekwad alarmed the Mughal Emperor and the viceroy of Gujarat, Abhay Singh, who hatched a conspiracy and got him assassinated at the hands of vile assassins hired by him in 1732 at Dakor and thus ended the career of one of the most illustrious Maratha *sardars* whose contribution in the foundation of the Maratha dominion in Gujarat was immense.⁶⁶

Although Pilajirao Gaekwad was the father of eight sons from his three wives, his eldest son, Sayajirao was slain in the Battle of Dabhoi in 1731. Thus, he was succeeded by his second son, Damajirao and during his lifetime he had bestowed the *jagir* of Kadi on his son Khanderao and the *jagir* of Khandesh on his son Prataprao.⁶⁷

⁶³ Saxena, "The Early Gaekwads", p. 43.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 44-45.