

# **BALLADS OF MARATHAS**

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Ballads of Marathas by Harry Arbuthnot Acworth

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**HARRY ARBUTHNOT ACWORTH**

**BALLADS  
OF MARATHAS**



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# Ballads of the Marathas

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE FROM  
THE MARATHI ORIGINALS



BY

HARRY ARBUTHNOT ACWORTH

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1894

समर्पण

मादया तुणदोम परक्षकां मध्ये

परम सुशिक्षितं

परम सुज्ञं

आणि परम कृपाळु

अशा मादया प्रिय मातेचा

स्मरणार्थ.

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Thix  
12-14-25  
125-20

## INTRODUCTION

IN presenting to my readers this humble attempt to popularise some of the ballads of the Marathas, it may not be out of place to submit a slight sketch of the early history and the poetic literature of the people whose national energies they commemorate. The Maratha race has been for centuries, and is still, among the most important of those which inhabit the Indian Peninsula. The three most powerful of the Hindu princes who acknowledge allegiance to the Imperial Crown of Britain, viz. Sindia, Holkar, and the Gaikwar, are Marathas, and their court language is Marathi, though this is not the language of the countries over which they rule. But every one of these three princes has his ancestral home in the Maratha Deccan and bears a Marathi name. The same is the case with the princely house of Tanjore. The Maratha ditch at Calcutta testifies to exploits at a scene even more distant from Maharashtra, and on the fatal day of Paniput the Maratha armies upheld the cause of India against the Afghan invader fifty miles to the northward of Delhi, the capital of the Great Mogul.

The British dominion, quelling all internal aggression by a might too great to be contested, has left no opportunity of judging whether the flood-tide of Maratha success would ever have ebbed back into its ancient boundaries, or even have been there overwhelmed by the waves of a newer and more vigorous race of Asiatic conquerors; but during the years when India was 'becoming red,' the Marathas were

probably still the most powerful political integer within it, and if the British flag were withdrawn again into the ocean, and if (an impossible 'if') no other European power intruded, I at least believe that once again, from the Punjab to Cape Comorin, princes and people would listen to the thundering tramp of the Maratha horsemen.

The Marathas claim to be the people of the Maharashtra, or great nation. There has been much speculation as to the origin of the word Maratha. Some take it from Rathod, the name of a Rajput clan, with the prefix *maha*, or great. I believe the word Rathod is in fact derived from nearly the same source as the word Maratha, that is, from the word Ratta, or Rathakuda (रठकुडा or रथकुडा). Some deduce Maratha from Maharashtra, and some from the word Marahatta (मराठ); others hold it to be a corruption of the word Maharatha, or Maha-ratta. Dr. Bhandarkar, in his history of the Deccan, observes that from cave inscriptions it is apparent that from early times tribes of Kshatriyas or Warriors, calling themselves Bhojas or Rathis, were predominant in the country, and that, in the northern part of the Deccan or Maharashtra, they called themselves Maharathis or Great Rathis, but that in other places the name in use must have been Rathis or Rathas. That the name Ratha, or rather Ratta, was common in the Southern Maratha country, is made clear from the interesting account of old inscriptions relating to the Ratta chieftains of Belgaum and Saundatti published by Mr. J. F. Fleet, C.I.E., of the Indian Civil Service (Journal R. A. Society, x. 167-298). In ancient copper-plate grants, as well as inscriptions, we often meet the word Maharatha (महाराठ), and I am inclined to think that the derivation from Maha-ratta is correct. A race is sometimes named after a country, sometimes a country after a race. The Sassenachs of Scotland are called Scotch because they live in Scotland, though they have no



affinity to the race which has given its name to the country. England is called England after the Angles or English, who were by no means the most important section of the Danish or Low Dutch invaders. I think it probable that the name Maharashtra was derived or Sanskritised from the word Maharatta, that is, a race of Maharathas or great warriors, and not that the word Maratha comes by the inverse process from Maharashtra. The best proof of this is that the land of the Marathas is known in their early Puranas as Dakshinapatha or Dandakaranya, and not Maharashtra. At any rate, whether the word Maratha is derived from Maharathod, Mara-hatta, Maha-rashtra, or Maharatha, there is little doubt that it is meant to signify a race brave and hardy, and probably pugnacious.

The earliest mention of the word Maharatta that I know of is in connection with a deputation of missionaries to various countries by King Ashoka to propagate the faith of Gautama Buddha. In the Mahavanso (Turnour's 'Mahavanso,' pp. 71, 72) the Buddhist monarch is described as deputing 'the hero Maha Dhammarakkitto' (Mahadhumrakettu? Phœbus, what a name!) 'to *Maharatta*,' and further on we read in the same work that 'the sanctified disciple 'Maha Dhammarakkitto repairing to Maharatta there 'preached the Mahanarada Kassapa Jataka of Buddha, and 'that eighty-four thousand persons attained the sanctification 'of Magga, and thirteen thousand were ordained priests by 'him' (Ibid. p. 74). In the cave inscriptions at Karle and Bedsa, which are supposed to belong to a period between the 1st and 4th centuries A.D., we find the words Maharatha and Maharathini. One of them records 'the religious gift 'of Mahabhoja's daughter Samadinika the Mahadevi Maharathini and wife of Apadevanak,' and another commemorates the gift of a lion pillar, 'Sinha Sthambha,' from 'Agimitranak, son of Goti, a great warrior, a Maharatta.'

Little or nothing is known of the history of the Marathas before the Christian era. In the first century of the Christian era they rose to prominence under their King Shalivahana. There are many traditions current concerning this monarch in the Maharashtra. Though differing in details, they confirm the belief that he waged war with King Vikrama of Oojein, and that in one of their several battles the latter suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Shalivahana. Vikrama was driven beyond the Nerbudda, and begged for peace, which was concluded on terms which preserved Vikrama's power and era north of the Nerbudda.

There is a difference of 135 years (not 133 as stated by Grant Duff) between the eras of Shalivahana and Vikrama, and Grant Duff founds on this difference the remark that 'the eras themselves refute this story, unless we suppose that Vikramajit had prior claims to sovereignty and that the era was reckoned from the time of some of his fore-fathers'; but to this it is to be replied, first, that there are two eras of Vikrama, one current in India north of the Nerbudda, and the other in Kashmir, and, secondly, that the name Vikrama denotes not an individual but a dynasty, like Pharaoh, or Tudor, or Stuart. The Rajatarangini (a history of the kings of Kashmir), a work admitted by such scholars as Colebrooke and Turnour to be an authentic record of historical events, establishes the fact that the Vikrama who conquered Kashmir, and established his power and era there, was a contemporary of Shalivahana, the Maratha king.

The birth and career of Shalivahana are of course to some extent mythical. He is variously spoken of as the son of a Kunbi or husbandman, and of a Koombhar or potter. But there is no dispute as to his being a Maratha. He was called Satavahana as well as Shalivahana. After defeating Vikrama he made Paithan his capital. According to Jinaprabhu, a

Jain writer (*v. Journal, B. B. R. A. S.*, x. 134, 135), during the reign of Satavahana the city of Pratishthan (Paithan) became very rich, having wide roads, large temples and houses, brilliantly white markets, strong walls and wide ditches, and Satavahana having freed all the people of Dakshanipatha (Maharashtra) from debt, and conquered the country as far as the Tapti, introduced his era into it. Describing the city of Paithan, the writer breaks forth into the following eulogium : 'The city of Pratisthana is the jewelled head ornament of the glory of Maharashtra, and is beautified by pleasure-giving palaces, and chaityas (temples) cooling to the eyes. It contains 68 sacred places for the public, and within its walls as 50 heroes were born, it was called the city of heroes' (*Journal, B. B. R. A. Society*, x. 135). Shalivahana was a patron of learning, and an author, and wrote several works in the Maharashtri language. To this subject I shall revert further on.

There is no continuous record or tradition as to Shalivahana's successors, but it is generally believed that his dynasty ruled at Paithan till the close of the third century A.D., when it was overthrown by the powerful Maratha house of the Rashtrakutas. Here and there, however, the cave inscriptions of Pandoo Lena in Nasik and Nanaghaut in Junnar afford us a glimpse of the doings of the earlier dynasty. In a very long inscription at Nasik a king named Satakarni Gautamiputra is described as having 'rooted out the dynasty of Kshatriya and established the glory of the Satavahana family.' He is spoken of as King of Kings and ruler of Asika Asmaka (?), Surashtra (Soreth in Kattyawar), Kuraka (?), Aparanta (Konkan), Anup (?), Vaidarbha (Berar), and Akaravanti (Malva). His commands were obeyed by many kings, and his beasts of burden drank the waters of the three seas. He was descended from a long line of kings. He appointed places and times for religion