



HERITAGE ENRICHMENT OF KASHI: MARATHA'S CONTRIBUTION

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of Maratha rule in Maharashtra and expansion of their power in the north brought drastic changes in the power and policies of the north India. The earlier Maratha rulers had neither the time nor the resources to indulge in architectural activities due to their protracted wars with the Mughals. However some pictures can be drawn about the characteristics of the Maratha style from later buildings such as forts, palaces and temples.

It is true that Maratha architecture lacked the beauty and grace of the buildings of the Mughals and the Rajputs. Later, Marathas tried to renovate the traditions. They speedily constructed and renovated throughout India. Donations and religious grants to temples and

charities to Brahmins, scholars and puraniks helped to renovate the old ideals of religion.

KEYWORDS: power and policies , architectural activities , characteristics.

INTRODUCTION:

It was under the ruling of three Peshwas that the Maratha history reached its zenith .Marathas were considered as the saviours of Hinduism who fought the onslaught of uncompromising Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Later the Maratha kingdom was extended by the Peshwas among whom Baji Rao Peshwa I (1721-1740) had a great role to play. Gradually the Peshwas became the de facto rulers of Maratha Empire. The Maratha Sardars or chieftains like Gaekwads of Baroda, Sindhias

of Gwalior, and Holkars of Indore expanded the power in North India and became powerful after the Peshwas. They then established their own kingdoms.

During the days of the Marathas, Indore was an important hub between the Deccan and Delhi. However after the death of Madhavrao Peshwa Indore became the capital of the Holkar state until Rani Ahilyabai Holkar moved the capital to Maheshwar. Devi Ahilyabai Holkar built hundreds of temples, bathing ghats at pilgrim centres and undertook various other religious and charitable works. Among the temples which she built in all parts of India, two were particularly significant and their reconstruction gave immense pleasure and satisfaction to crores and crores of Hindus. Both Somnath and Kashi Vishwanath were held in highest veneration by the people, being two of the twelve Jyotirlingas, and was therefore favourite target of the Musalman rulers. Only about a century ago Somnath and Kashivishwanath temples were razed to the ground on Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's orders. Reconstruction of these temples by Ahilyabai Holkar therefore became all the more significant and cause of wide spread

rejoicings. A grievous hurt inflicted on the psyche of the nation was being healed by a frail widowed queen residing at Maheshwar.

An inscription at Varanasi throws light on the construction of Kashi Vishwanath temple by Ahilyabai. After praising Malhar Rao Holkar, the inscription says "... by her virtues Devi Ahilyabai had secured a permanent throne in the hearts of men ... God Vishwanath appeared to her in dream and commanded (her to build the destroyed temple again). A worshipper of Tarkeshwar explained to her the dream. With his consultation the Devi then built a splendid temple of Kashi Vishwanath ... A great sacrifice was performed, and amidst great pomp and ceremony, the idol was installed on Thursday the Shravan Vadi 8, Shaka 1712 (1790); the worshipper Murari got also permanent appointment and abode in Kashi.

The unique directional change of the sacred Ganga led to the development of the ancient city, Kashi, on the west banks of the river, facing the rising of the sun and making thus the Ghats of Varanasi sacred for all Hindu rituals. The western bank of the river is marked by lofty palatial buildings built mostly by kings and feudal lords from different parts of India between eighteenth and twentieth century. Stone steps flank the river on its western bank and lead down from the city to the river water. These steps are called "Ghats" and although they seem to be a continuous stretch of stairs, they were built in different historical moments. There are around 40 to 60 stone steps on each ghat, depending on the height of these ghats. The area along the ghats is dominated by various shrines and temples. The ghats are marked by octagonal raised platforms built for public use and smaller rectangular platforms that are closer to the river, built for use by the Brahmins for religious rituals. This is where the ritual bathing of the pilgrims and the daily bathing of the inhabitants of the city take place. The ghats are also a place for sports, exercise, meditation, socialising and rest. The palatial buildings along the ghats were built under the patronage of the Marathas.

Ahilyabai Ghat:

At the place of an old site of Kevelyagiri Ghat, in c. 1778 queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore made this a pucca ghat. For the first time name of a person was added after the ghat. She was also responsible for rebuilding the Vishvesvar temple, as exists at present, in 1777.

Shitala Ghat:

In c. 1740 pt. Narayana Dikshit the preceptor of Bajirao Pesava-1, made this ghat pucca. In fact, this is the southern extension of Dashaswamedh Ghat, where exists Dasasvamedha Tirtha and images of Dashaswamedheswar and. After the famous Shitala Temple was made, this portion of Dashaswamedh ghat is called Shitala Temple.

Baji Rao Ghat:

Baji Rao Peshwa built this ghat in c. 1735 that is how it is named after him, and also a palace. Later in 1830 queen Baijabai of Gwalior get it repaired and rebuilt; she had also erected the colonnade around the Gyanwapi well. In the upstream part there is a temple of Dattatreya, so that this was referred as Dattatreya ghat. Presently this is assumed to be a part of the Scindhia ghat.

Scindhia Ghat:

Formerly it was known as Vireshwar Ghat, after the temple of same name lying at the top. In 1780, Ahilabai Holkar of Indore made the ghat pucca. In 1829 queen Baija bai had get it repaired and remodeled; and again in 1937 Daulatarao Scindhia made the entire ghat pucca. The shrines of Vsistha and Vamadeva, and Atmaviresvara are at the top. The Paravata tirtha lies in the close by Ganga River.

Mangala Gauri Ghat:

This was built by Balaji Peshwa-I in 1735, after whom this is also known as Bala Ji Ghat. Later in c.1807 Lakshman Bala of Gwalior repaired and renovated this ghat. In a mid-seventeenth century it has a reference. At the top of the ghat in a temple compound there are images of Gabhastisvara, Mangala.

Durga Ghat:

The name derived its association with the Brahmacharini Durga temple. In 1772 Narayan Dikshit, a guru of Peshwas, had purchased land from local resident fishermen and built two ghats: Durga and the succeeding one, Brahma Ghat. This was rebuilt and repaired in c. 1830 by Nana Phadanavis, a Diwan of Gwalior State, who's building at the top of the ghat, is known as Phadanavisa Wada.

CONCLUSION:

Politically the 18th century was one of Hindu revival. Though the Maratha successors of Shivaji could not build up a large unified empire and they produced virtually no monumental urban architecture but they contributed their share towards the culture and heritage of North India.

Varanasi was given official status as a kingdom by the Mughals in 1737. In the 18th century under the influence of the Marathas (1734-1785) a substantial part of the city was rebuilt. Bajirao Peshwa (1720-1740) patronized the construction of Manikarnika and Dashashvamedh Ghats and nearby residential quarters. A number of ghats, water pools and noted temples of Vishvanatha, Trilochana, Anaapurna, Sakshi Vinayaka and Kala Bhairava were rebuilt under Maratha patronage. Queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore built the present Vishvanatha temple in 1775-1776. As one ghat after another was added, temples rose, the city regained its gaiety, and its educational system was revitalized. Thus Marathas helped to renovate and enriching the Hindu traditions in Kashi part of North India.

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