

## **“Peshwa Bajirao-Mastanibaisaheb Gazibo”**

(By Sarjerao R. Deshmukh, West Caldwell, NJ)

In the year 2008, the buildings at the brand-new Kolhapur Campus of ‘RAVI-RAI Sanskrutik Bhavan and Trust’ were named after those men and women who had paid dues in the history of Maharashtra. There, the gazebo was named after “Bajirao-Mastani” as in the title of this paper above and it seems important to express the justification leading to the significance of this pair. Mastanibaisaheb – a princess – received a brutal and unjust treatment from Maharashtra is the topic of this discussion to follow:

**How it all Began?** - Shrimant Bajirao-Peshve, a Brahmin by birth, led the Maratha forces to the gates of Delhi and planted the Maratha standard in Hindustan<sup>1</sup>. It was not an easy task by any means to lead the deccan ponies from the banks of Bhima and Neera hundreds of miles into territory unknown and hostile. After the great Chhatrapati Shivaji, his defiant son Chhatrapati Sambhaji<sup>2</sup>, and the Maratha generals Santaji and Dhanaji, Bajirao (aka Rau) became a peerless commander in the annals of the Marathas to follow. Around AD 1729-30, Raja Chhatrasal Bundela of Bundelkhand came under an attack from Mohammad Khan Bangash, a Rohila from Rohilkhand in the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*. As Bajirao happened to be in the north, the Bundela Raja in distress asked for his help<sup>3</sup>. Bajirao with the Maratha forces galloped into action and drove away the Rohila. For this service, the Raja gave his daughter Savitree – nicknamed *Mastani* – in marriage to Bajirao.

**Background of the Princess:** Chhatrasal Bundela had taken to *Pranami Dharam* (Sect) and according to its tenets, he was to marry the princess he conquered. One time he defeated a *Nawab* and married his daughter. Savitree (aka *Mastani*)

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<sup>1</sup> In those days the region north of the River Narmada was called Hindustan.

<sup>2</sup> He defied the mighty Mogul Emperor Auranzeb for almost eight years who had arrived to the Maratha soil in 1681 with the entire Agra treasury and host at his disposal for the sole purpose of eradicating the Maratha power. And when treacherously captured, Sambhaji refused to beg for mercy or get converted to Islam. For that, he was tortured to death – blinded and flayed alive. After Chhatrapati Sambhaji, Santaji Ghorpade gave hell to the Emperor and denied him his wish to wipeout the Marathas and after 26 years of struggle in vain the Emperor died in Deccan in 1707 – thus, permanently weakening the Mogul Empire losing its imperial power and status. After Chhatrapati Sambhaji, Santaji rose to occasion, when the Maratha statehood was occupied by the Moguls and was without a king or the eight-man council for strategic guidance. This was Santaji’s contribution to help sustain the Maratha State, allowing Bajirao under Chhatrapati Shahu to reach the height of the Maratha ascendancy. About the Maratha supremacy, Grant Duff writes that they were the single largest power in India before the English took charge of her.

<sup>3</sup> The Raja wrote a couplet in Bundeli tongue that can be abridged in a *Purani* account as: Like Goddess Lakshmi’s elephant Gajendra distraught as his foot is caught in the mouth of a crocodile and being pulled away into deep waters – the Raja pleads to Bajirao that he too was in similar dilemma. This writer cannot find the original words or the couple but they mean as follows.

जो गती गजेंद्र की, सो ही गत पावत आज      *Jo gati Gajendra ki, so hi gut pavat aaj*  
बाजी जात बुंदेल की, राखो बाजी लाज      *Baji jaat Bundel ki rakho Baji laaj*

Oh’Baji(rao) you are a Bundela as me, (come and) save my honor! Bajirao arrived on the scene and made Bangash retract.

was born from this union.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, her mother was a daughter of a *Nawab*, as such, a Muslim.<sup>5, 6 & 7</sup>

Dr Kavathekar, Retd. Vice Chancellor, Vikram University, Ujjain, has done a book on Bajirao-Mastani – a 380page Sanskrit Poem titled *Bajirao-Mastaniyam*. Here in his work, he appropriately refers to *Mastani* as a princess. He label of her as a princess is justifiable. Raja Chhatrasal had two (legitimate) sons and one daughter Savitri. In the division of the Bundelkhand, he divided his territory in three parts – two for his sons and one for Savitri. Perhaps for her maintenance, Bajirao seems to have received one-third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of Bundelkhans and that's how the Zhansi region must have come to the Marathas. The Bundela Raja has other unofficial children who did not share a part of Bundelkhand as a part of the division. It is worth noting that had she been a dancer or an unofficial daughter of the Raja, Bajirao would not have received one-third of Bundelkhand for Mastanibai-saheb's maintenance. Such a deed by the Raja clearly suggests that she was his daughter and a princess.

In addition, based on other published material, such as, 'Deccan Letters,' she was an expert horse rider. She could ride stirrup to stirrup with Bajirao and was no less than any Maratha commander in operating a sword and lance. No 16 year old dancer could claim so adaptable. These accomplishments point towards her regal birth and childhood training, and not as a dancer.

**Her Northern Heritage:** Mastanibaisaheb must be well trained in singing and (classical?) dance; if so, that was her North Indian heritage. In the North (of

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<sup>4</sup> This account by this writer is based on the oral interview of January 4 & 5, 2009, with the descendants of Bajira-Mastani, today the family is known as the *Nawabs* of Banda.

<sup>5</sup> Senior researchers in history, Dr. Lata Akalujkar and Dr. Madhuri Munshi have different account: Mastani's grandparents in the days of Aurangzeb were proselytized at Benares. At Panna, the couple with their daughter sought asylum with Raja Chhatrasal. At the directives of his *Guru*, Chhatrasal reinstated this Brahmin family to the Hindu fold and married their daughter. This girl is *Hujurin Rani Begam* the the wife of Raja Chhatrasal.

**Ref.** (Marathi) Daily Tarun Bharat Dt 15-12-2015 (दैनिक तरुण भारत (कोल्हापूर) - दिनांक १५-१२-१५)

**Comments:** This writer finds the Akjukar-Munshi account flawed. If indeed, Chhatrasal took the Brahmin grandparents of *Mastani* to the Hindu fold and married their daughter, she should have a Hindu name and not *Hujurin Rani Begam*.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Khobarekar's account is yet diverse.

For rescuing from the Mogul on-slot, the pleased Raja Chhatrasal of Bundelkhand, the remuneration included a beautiful dancer named *Mastani*. Taking her as his wife, Bajirao built a palace for her within the walls of Shaniwarwada (the official residence of the Peshwa). . . . Nanasahab Peshwa (Bajirao's son) was married in 1730. *Mastani's* reference first appears in the account-ledge of this marriage. In 1734, she had a son by Bajirao. He was named Sansherbahadar. Later, he served as an elite *Sardar* (Knight) in the Peshwa army. He completed his education along with the Peshwa's (Bajirao's) son(s).

**Ref:** Khobarekar, Dr. V. G. (a Marathi Text) – *Maharashtra-cha Itihas – Maratha Kalkhand (Bhag 2) 1707 te 1800*. (Publisher) *Maharashtra Rajya aani Sanskruti Mandal, Mumbai* (Publisher) (Pg.139)

**Comments:** This writer finds the Khobarekar account faulty as well, for example:

It seems obvious that a dancer's name would never be endorsed in the family wedding account-ledge, unless she was Bajirao's wedded wife. Also a dancer's son would not have the same status as those of the Peshwa's in education, unless he was the son of Peshwa.

<sup>7</sup> About her origin, G. S. Sardesai has an account similar to Khobarekar and seems equally faulty.

**See:** Sardesai, G. S, *New History of the Marathas*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi 110 055 Second edition 1986 (Vol II Pg 493-94)

India) even today, women celebrate marriages with the *ladies-sangeet* with dance and singing. To this day, the festivities of *Holi and Janm-ashta-mi* are celebrated by the North Indians with sings and dance, even by those away from their niche. For them singing and dance is an art form – a cultural heritage. Opposed to that, in Maharashtra, the dignified women covering their heads, shoulders, and front with a *pallu* (the end piece of their *sari*) not only that they would not dance in public or in the presence of men but they won't give their presence in the company of outsiders – the men folks in particular.

**Cultural Gap with the Orthodoxy:** A person of such a heritage, upon making her domicile in Pune, had she danced at Shanivarwada at her husband's request on the festival of *Jamm-ashta-mi or Ganesh-chaturthi*, due to cultural difference, her opponents must have gone against her. Among the ill-wishers were Bajirao's mother Radhabai, brother Chimaji, and son Nanasaheb as a force opposed to her among others including the community of priests the family depended upon and associated with for the daily religious rituals and services and must have declared her a dancer. Thus, when the orthodoxy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Pune saw her dance, for them, the heavens must have fallen loose. Some of these people, especially, Chimaji-Appa and Nanasaheb<sup>8</sup> were not only capable but crafty enough to circulate bogus and fake documents to show Mastanibai-saheb as a dancer in a campaign to drive her away from Bajirao. Along with many Indian centers of worship, Maharashtra too has been notorious in its orthodoxy or unrealistic and conservative stand. At Paithan in Maharashtra, Gyaneshvara's parents were ordered death as a penance and even after ending their lives their children were not accepted by that conservative society. So Mastanibai had no chance for her being accepted.

**Naming of the Son:** In 1734, Mastanibaisaheb had a son and she wanted to name him Krishnarao in the Maratha tradition but her desire was overridden the prevailing attitude in Pune. To avoid conflict, she declared that she would name her son Kishan-singh in her father's Rajput tradition but the orthodoxy denied her again. Thus, without any sign of compromise, with her husband's consent, the couple named him Samsher Bahadar (in her mother's tradition).<sup>9</sup> **Note:** Bajirao being a Peshva and so powerful, one reader of the Marathi essay on this subject wrote back to this writer that for him it was not believable that the couple could not name their son per their choice. It is true that Bajirao was indeed powerful at war but not influential or as effective at the social levels dominated by orthodoxy. As a matter of fact, to outcaste Bajirao, the priests were unwilling to perform family rituals, services and events like marriages or thread ceremony. Some such events were done while Bajirao was away on an expedition.

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<sup>8</sup> The menacing aptitude of this pair becomes apparent in Dr. Khobarekar's passages:

(After Bajirao's death, Nanasaheb received an official garb from Chhatrapati Shahu of Satara conferring the Peshwaship to him. However, soon after) Nanasaheb and Chimaji-Appa wrote to the Chhatrapati Sambhaji of Kolhapur stating that even though outwardly they may show our allegiance to Satara, they were with him (in policy matters).

So those who were capable of double-crossing their Lord – Chhatrapati Shahu, were certainly competent in declaring Mastanibaisaheb a dancer than the lawful wife of Bajirao. Thus, this pair is the very likely group in spreading misinformation about her origin.

**Ref:** Khobarekar, Dr. V. G. (a Marathi Text) – *Maharashtra-cha Itihas – Maratha Kalkhand (Bhag 2) 1707 te 1800*. (Publisher) *Maharashtra Rajya aani Sanskruti Mandal, Mumbai* (Publisher) (Pg.149-50)

<sup>9</sup> See **Foot Note 4** above for the source

**Their Death:** Their love of uncommon character was special in spirit for any time and even now it tends to be misunderstood. Their death is equally captivating and dramatic with a sad note. Young Bajirao not only started a novel ideal of bringing forth the concept of *Hindu-pad-padshahi*, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of his Peshwaship, by age 40, he acquired the status of a statesman in Hindustan. Even the Mogul Emperor held him in high esteem for his stance against foreign invaders – mainly Nadirshah of Iran. Bajirao by proclaiming that the Indians should solve their problems without foreign intervention became the voice of India. Beginning about 1737, Nadirshah had become used to raiding India each year until his murder in 1747.

In the early 1740, the news of Nadirshah's invasion became known to the Moguls. Unable to stop him, the latter requested Bajirao's help. He mustered the Maratha force and left Pune for the assistance. By April, he reached the southern bank of the Narmada River. The region immediately north of her is Nimad even today known for intense Sun with deadly sun-strokes. Unfortunately, Bajirao, hit by sun-stroke or the *loo* as the locals call it, took ill and never recovered from it. He passed this realm on April 28, 1740.<sup>10</sup> From December 1739, Mastanibaisaheb was kept under confinement at Pune.<sup>11</sup> Getting the news of Bajirao's illness, she left Pune to join him. She seems to have died at Pabal near Pune. Today, her *kabar* (grave) exists at Pabal in ruins. Upon getting the news of Bajirao's death, she might have ended her life by taking poison and yet another version suggests that she took to *Sati's* path on getting the news.<sup>12</sup>

**Bajirao as a Statesman:** His capacity and intent as a statesman for then India can be witnessed in Grant Duff's account:<sup>13</sup>

. . . Bajee Rao was preparing to avenge his loss (to Ranoji and Raghuji Bhoslay of Berar), when news reached him of the arrival of Nadir Shah, the defeat of the Moghuls, the death of Khan Dowran, the capture of Sadut Khan; and finally, that the victorious Persian was dictating the terms of ransom at the gates of Delhi. These accounts exceedingly alarmed Bajee Rao, but the subsequent intelligence which he received at Nusseerabad, informed him of the imprisonment of the Emperor, the plunder of Delhi, the dreadful massacre of many of its inhabitants, and seemed for a time to overwhelm him. "Our domestic quarrel with Ruglloojee Bhonslay is now insignificant," says the Peishwa, "the war with the Portuguese, is as nought; there is now but one enemy in Hindoostan." He appears to have conceived that Nadir Shah would establish himself as Emperor, but he was not dismayed when he heard reports that a hundred thousand Persians were advancing to the southward. "Hindoos and Mussulmans," says Bajee Rao, "the whole power of the Deccan must assemble, and I shall spread our Mahrattas from the Nerbuddah to the Chumbul." He called on Nasir Jung to arm against the common foe, and Chimnaje Appa was ordered to desist from the Concan warfare, and join him with all speed.

As a tribute to Bajirao, Grant Duff: The death of Bajee Rao is an event in Maratta Annals, which, on his account alone, deserves a pause.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sardesai, G.S. – *New History of the Marathas*, I Pg.162

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> This writer cannot verify the source for her death. The *Sati* version he has heard from the direct descendants

<sup>13</sup> Duff, James Grant – *History of the Marattas*, Published by Prem Bakliwal, Aavishkar Publishers' Distributors, Jaipur 302 003 (India), First Reprint 1986 (First Published 1863) – Vol 1 Pg 393

**Samadhi:** Bajirao-saheb's *Samadhi* – the memorial at his cremation site is a somber yet a grand monument and beautiful sight at the village of Raver-khedi. This monument was built by the Scindias of Gwalior in the memory of their boss and the one who gave for their management a territory in Malwa of about Rs.75 lakh revenue. This monument is now endangered by the Narmada dam with the water level rising to 535 ft. The monument wall will be submerged about 2 to 2 ½ feet above its base. Even though the *Samadhi* site inside the walled complex is on a 4-foot high raised platform above ground with a single gate, the high waters will bring in mud inside the complex during the peak level in the monsoon. On December 12, 2014, this Writer paid homage to this site with Dada Joshi and Pankaj Mehta, respectively of Mandal Mishra and Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh.



Writer flanked by Dada & Pankaj

– More color-pictures are placed at the end of this essay.

**A Fairytale:** Bajirao-Mastani account is a story of deep complexity filled with profound love that is embellished with valor, mystery, and continuity of struggle in human existence for the Maratha commander of highest order and his exquisite wife, a Bundeli princess. It's a fairytale marred by conservative social order. It was an ordeal for both sides, in which there were no winners and in the end the Marathas lost a general who never lost a battle against the mighty enemies in 20 years of his rule but fell victim to the internal sorcery, which he could not ride out of it. To honor their love and commitment to each other, the gazebo at Kolhapur stands proudly dedicated to them as: **Peshve Bajirao – Mastanibaisaheb Gazibo.**

## Injustice:

### 1. By Medieval Maharashtra –

- a. Initially, Mastanibaisaheb became a victim of the time, when social etiquettes did not permit matrimonial alliance outside one's own social group. Had she been a pure bred Rajput or Maratha, yet, she would not have been accepted by the traditional elements at Pune. This was a significant departure from the one time norm when Brahmin and Kshatriya marriages were readily accepted. For example, Parshurama's grandmother was Vishvamitra's sister<sup>15</sup>, and Sage Agastya married to Lopamudra, a princess<sup>16</sup>. This was the effect of over three hundred years of Islamic rule that had transformed the society to more conservative mode in Maharashtra.

<sup>14</sup> Duff, James Grant – *History of the Marattas*, Published by Prem Bakliwal, Aavishkar Publishers' Distributors, Jaipur 302 003 (India), First Reprint 1986 (First Published 1863) – Vol 1 Pg 403

<sup>15</sup> Ref Valmiki Ramayan

<sup>16</sup> Shripad Shri Vallabha Charitra

- b. Such a conservative society with growing greed, Peshvai – the Peshva Rule - had punished one of their own along with his sinless and innocent wife. It was not so because this individual was an outsider but the passion for power and greed dominated Pune court showed menace to Sadashivrao aka Bhausahab, one of them – the son of Bajirao’s brother and pure bred *Koknasttha Brahmin*. As a losing commander of the Maratha forces at the Third Battle of Panipat (Jan 14, 1761), he was detained in Khandesh (from Nov 1761 until his arrest in Feb 1765) and not allowed to return to Pune. Crafty administrators at Pune under Gopikabai at the helm created Bhausahab’s imposter and set forth in motion a big time misinformation campaign to confuse the masses. They succeeded. Bhausahab and his wife remained separated for 21-22 years (from Nov 1761 till her death on Aug 16, 1783). If they could do this to one of their own, Mastanibaisahab was an outsider.
2. By Sanjay Leela Bhansali – By producing and releasing a film “Bajirao-Mastani,” Bhansali failed to produce an accurate depiction of history.
- a. When challenged in court for the historical authenticity of the events displayed, Bhansali hid behind the disclaimer, something to the effect that the film is not based on historical facts. The fact that the film is named after the historical and not fictitious characters cannot be coincidental and the disclaimer by Bhansali cannot release him from being liable for the character-defamation. Also,
  - b. The film suggests being made based on N. S. Inamdar’s novel ‘*Rau*,’ the nickname for Bajirao. Starting with Bajirao, *Rau* for Raosaheb became a customary address for the Peshva or his eldest son. This novel ‘*Rau*,’ refers to Mastanibaisahab as a dancer only and never as a prince. Thus, Bhansali’s use of the novel ‘*Rau*’ is a failure to be objective in his presentation.
  - c. The film acknowledges late Ninad Bedekar as a consultant to the movie. Bedekar was well liked and multitalented individual on the Maratha history and Pune traditions. Yet, in the opinion of this Writer, Ninad had his own fixed notions about history and was unwilling to consider or look at the new research based ideas afresh. As such, Ninad as an advisor raises questions for his selection as an expert on the subject matter. History has many facets – over the last two-hundred years, there is not a single historian one can find whose opinions have not been revised in the subsequent times. Despite that, the works of the old timers has been a significant help as one does not have to reinvent the basic wheel and they help the current research work in fine-tuning historical details.
  - d. The sets created to depict Shanivarwada and the Chhatrapati Shahu’s palace at Satara are utterly unrealistic. Marathas never had such glamorous palaces in Maharashtra – we are simple and poor people with limited resources and all our palaces were made of lava-rock with some fine woodwork for interior.
  - e. Finally, this Writer admits that although the film Bhansali has produced is a very well-made production, it could have been made with a truly historical flavor but it is not so. The Bollywood dramas in the film seem to be inevitable for a commercial success that the authenticity of the events got twisted.
  - f. This Writer would like to congratulate Sanjay Bhansali for the move but he missed an opportunity to produce classics, like, *Gone with the Wind*, *Benhur*, *The Ten Commandments* or the Indian classic serials like *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*.
  - g. It is unfortunate that the psyche of the Indian masses including the so called intellectuals has no aptitude to look at their grand history along with

weaknesses and if the producers were to give them the realistic picture, financially, they will be doomed eternally. Sanjay – Congratulations, once again.

- h. **Request to Sanjay Bhansali** - Can you please help restore the following two monuments dedicated to Bajirao-Mastanibaisaheb? That will be your contribution in your success with 'Bajirao-Mastani' depiction:
- i. Restore Bajirao's *Samadhi* at Raver-khedi to a higher elevation
  - ii. Restore Mastanibaisaheb's *kabar* at Pabal near Pune, which is in ruins
  - iii. This Writer will contribute Rs. 5 lakh and others may join if you take the lead
- i. Additionally, this Writer would like to the Government of India to participate in this matter stated in Item 'g' above and also request Hon. Modisaheb, PM (India) to take the lead.
- j. Madya Pradesh Government will also benefit from saving the Bajirao *Samadhi* at Raver-khedi by moving it to a higher elevation as it is and can be made into a travel attraction for visitors; thus, promoting tourism. This is al the way a WIN-WIN situstion.

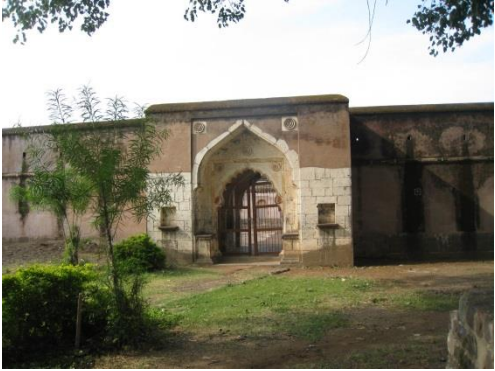
**A Sincere Request and Appeal:** Those who have access to Bhansali, Hon. Modisaheb, and the CM of MP are requested to make this essay available to these individuals. – Thank you.



**Peshve Bajirao-Mastanibaisaheb Gazebo**



**Bajirao in Brief**



**Entrance to Bajirao Samadhi at Raver**



**Inscription on the Chhatri – the Canopy**



**Shiva's Daughter – the Nrmada**



**Samadhi Sthal**



**Shalunkha – Shiv Lingam at the Chhatri**



**Designed as a Shiva Lingam**



**The River from a Window**



**Chhatri from a Gothic Arch**



**With Dada Joshi**