The different stages of Maratha policy of expansion and the different opinions within the Maratha polity itself, including the contradictions in the Maratha movement.

**Maratha policy of expansion**

Maratha policy of expansion has been divided into 3 stages:

1) 1680 (after Shivaji’s death) - 1719 whose 1st half was full of question of survival and the second half gradually sees the expansion of the Maratha attempt in the Karnataka, Deccan, in Malwa as well as in other places.
2) 1720-1741 (Peshwa Bajirao’s reign) in this particular stage the entire seed of Maratha imperialism, the entire contradiction in the Maratha movement, the other problems, all came out during this period.

3) 1741-1761 (3rd battle of Panipat)

**Nature of Maratha movement after Shivaji**

The Maratha movement was a very complex one because it started with the socio religious reform movement with some cry for independence and good administration. This was not a very consistent want in that sense and it involved much of religious thought but it sees itself in Shivaji’s policy of Swarajya and in the policy of Hindu Pad Padshahi. But along with this, after the death of Shivaji, the principal problem was the peasants.

Due to the Mughal invasion, the Maharashtra or the Hindu Rajya of Shivaji was almost devastated. After the death of Shivaji, the peasants were neglected and their condition deteriorated. It is in this situation that we see the attempts of the Maratha sardars. During the 1st stage, particularly in the second half of the 1st stage, we see that the Maratha sardars
were making their own individual attempts, without a central leadership to the North Indian possessions, the possessions of the Mughals, the Mughal territories etc.

These Maratha sardars were becoming autonomous. Earlier they were under the rigorous control of Shivaji but now they are autonomous and they do not want to lose their autonomy. These Maratha sardars came from very humble families, some of them without any proper education and they are not concerned with the socio religious reforms or with the peasants, unless it touches their own interest. Therefore there is a contradiction between the dominant element of the Maratha polity, the Maratha sardars and the basic element of the socio religious reforms that particularly inspired Shivaji to his Swarajya.

**Policy of Peshwa Bajirao**

In this situation when Bajirao took over, there was the problem of determining what would be the Maratha policy. There were two persons in the court of the king, 1) the Peshwa Bajirao, 2) the Pratinidhi Sripadrao.
Sripadrao’s point of view was that the Maratha state has been devastated. First the army and the finances should be strengthened, the Mughals should not be provoked and the Nizam should be kept friendly. He suggested that the Sidhis of Janjira should be first conquered as they are advancing from the coast.

Bajirao’s opinion was exactly opposite. He said that the Mughals were totally dependent on the Marathas and is asking help from the Marathas all the time, Nizam will be surrounded if the Marathas got Gujarat and Malwa and he will be cut off from Delhi. He will then have no power. Sidhis of Janjira, could be kept under control with the household troops, they were not serious fighters, particularly in the coast and the only problem was the Karnataka but Karnataka had no money. The money and the riches are in the north of India. So, therefore he has stated that the Maratha policy should be to plunder the rich areas of the north to get the financial strength and ultimately the Marathas will plant their flag on the bank of the Indus.

This was the vision of the Hindu Pad Padshahi. But Bajirao was a very practical man. He knew that this was not practical
at that moment but could be looked into later. Therefore he did not provoke the Nizam to a great extent but Nizam was defeated and agreed to pay the money and Bajirao agreed to that; there was a good case of friendship. In 1727 when the Nizam came back from Delhi, his deputy Mubariz Khan resisted him but with the help of Bajirao the Nizam killed him and got the throne of the Deccan. The friendship started, but it had one problem that both of them (Bajirao and Nizam) wanted to control Karnataka. Therefore, Karnataka remained as the bone of contention between them.

**Mughal stands against Maratha**

Two parties had been formed in the Mughal camp: 1) the war party and 2) the peace party. The war party wanted war with the Marathas and the peace party wanted peace with them. The most prominent in the war party was Nizam-ul-Mulk, Saadat Ali Khan of Awadh, the Wazir Kamaruddin Khan etc. In the peace party they were led by Jai Singh of Jaipur and Khan-i-dauran the mir-bakshi.

The emperor so long was leaning towards the peace party, and Jai Singh tried to broker a peace between the Mughals
and the Marathas in 1728, but that had failed. Now in 1735 after the debacle of the Nizam, there was some peace and Bajirao himself went to Malwa, his mother had gone on a pilgrimage to north India and Bajirao’s policy was to contact the members of the peace party to speak in their favor.

Bajirao did not want to change the Mughal emperor. It was said that Bajirao’s policy was to plant a Hindu king in the throne of Delhi which was not correct. Bajirao was a very practical man and he understood that although the Marathas speak of the Hindu kingdom but it is impossible to plant a Hindu on the throne of Delhi. Bajirao wanted to use the Mughal emperor to increase his own demands and increase his own prestige. It is to this policy that Bajirao adhered to.

In 1736 he gave the proposal to the Mughal court from Malwa, that Malwa should be given to him and the Mughal court, particularly the Mughal emperor, then leaning towards the peace party agreed. But Bajirao at the last minute then gave a fresh proposal which meant that the Mughals would practically be out of Malwa and Gujarat and they would have to pay a lot of money.
This angered the Mughal emperor and he began to lean towards the war party. Bajirao came back from Malwa, waited there for one year, came back and then started for North India. He reached Agra in 1736, the Mughals sent a huge army and Bajirao bypassed them, reached before the gate of Delhi. He did not want to sack Delhi; he merely wanted to show his power to the emperor. This made the emperor practically a blind supporter of the war party.

Nizam was called and he reached Delhi in 1737. He was immediately appointed governor of Malwa and he decided to drive the Marathas out of Malwa. With 30,000 troops he advanced towards the Chambal River, Bajirao had 80,000 troops and he surrounded the army of Nizam who had very good artillery. Therefore the Marathas could not assault the camp of Nizam and Nizam could not come out of the camp. A famine had started within the camp and the Nizam had to surrender, agree to handover Malwa and pay 50 lakh rupees to Bajirao. He never paid this amount and Bajirao at least for the time being went back.

By the time Bajirao had settled back in Maharashtra, Nadir Shah invaded India. He occupied Delhi, sacked it, took huge
lot of money including the peacock throne and the Kohinoor and took it back to Persia. After the departure of Nadir Shah it was found that Saadat Ali Khan was dead, the wazir Kamaruddin Khan was dead, Khan-i-dauran was dead. The peace party had only had Jai Singh, the most influential leader near Delhi, and in the war party, Nizam but Nizam was then far off. It was at this juncture that Bajirao determined to force the issue but before he could force it, in 1741 he died and the 3rd stage began with Nana Sahib as the peshwa.

**Peshwa Nana Sahib Balaji Bajirao**

Nana sahib was not a general. He did not come from the military rank. He was far more practical in diplomacy but he did not know much of the situation in North India because the last time he visited was in 1748. In 1741 Jai Singh managed to bring a peace treaty between the Mughals and the Marathas. The terms were very simple. Bajirao or the peshwa, then Nana Sahib, would be the governor, the deputy governor under a prince who will never go there and chauth and sardeshmukhi would be levied from Malwa and Gujarat.
Instead of 50 lakh of rupees demanded which they demanded 15 lakh should be given to them and instead of the rest of the money, chauth of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were ceded.

Now, it was one thing to cede the chauth of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa on paper and another thing to collect it. Shahu the king of the Marathas appointed Raghuji Bhosle as the person to collect this amount and the area belonged to him. In 1741, Raghuji Bhosle appeared in Bengal and returned with some money and then again came back annually every year from 1743 onwards, ravaged the areas (Midnapur, particularly, also reached near Murshidabad, and Orissa).

Finally in 1751, Alivardi Khan after desperate resistance decided to call a halt to these wasteful programs and then signed a treaty with Raghuji Bhosle that an annual chauth of 12000 rupees would be given to him each year and in Orissa there would be a Maratha governor appointed by Raghuji who would practically control the entire Orissa. Orissa was ceded to the Marathas under hand.

But this was not the only thing that Nana Sahib did. There was the question of the Deccan because Nizam died in 1748,
and after the death of Nizam, the French general Boise became the controller of Hyderabad with his French troops. The Marathas now demanded chauth, Boise resisted, he was defeated and in 1751 he was forced to cede a part of the Hyderabad area including Khandesh to the Marathas along with the right to levy chauth.

These were the two principal gains of the Marathas during this stage after 1741. But the Marathas were looking towards North India because that is where the prospect of plunder lies.

**Movement towards North India**

In the 1741 treaty there was a clause that the Marathas would not cross the Chambal River and would not come to North India. So, the Marathas continued to maintain that but in the meanwhile an opportunity came before them to intervene in the North.

The princes of Rajasthan instead of uniting them against the Marathas began to fight among themselves and even within the princely families there were succession problems. Earlier
the Mughal Emperor used to decide such cases. There were cases even during the time of Aurangzeb, when the state was taken over by the Mughals for the time being.

Now, the Marathas instead of the Mughals became the supreme power by deciding these cases. With their force they decided the cases in favor of one or the other and then they began to settle down there taking their chauth and sardeshmukhi etc. in violation of the treaty of 1741.

At one point of time it was becoming a case of clear oppression because the people of Rajasthan particularly the peasants were not rich, it was a very deficit state, most of the Rajput princes and the nobles had their jagirs elsewhere outside from where their income came. Most of the peasants, if they could, joined the Mughals in the army to fight. But in case of the Marathas they did not need the Rajput fighters, they have their own army which was also mercenary and they had to be paid. But their own, recruited in the Deccan and in Maharashtra and they now began their oppression on a very large scale.
The inevitable result was that in 1751 there was a revolt in Rajasthan against the Marathas for which Sindhia and the Holkar should be made totally responsible, not the peshwa or the king, because they did this kind of oppression, tried to get the money by force. On one day the citizens of Jaipur rose in revolt and killed all the Marathas who were there including the Maratha general and the Maratha representative. It heralded the revolt in the countryside, and any Maratha found anywhere was killed. This was the biggest blow to the Marathas in North India, not their defeat so far but the massacre of their citizens and their armies.

Up to 1752 they could not take any decision. Nana Sahib as a peshwa was a very cultured man. During his time he brought the Brahmins and the merchants from outside to settle in Pune, erected excellent buildings in Pune itself, made it a cultural centre of Maharashtra. But he was a very poor general and the problem for him was that he wanted not to fight in Northern India because that would involve money. The finances would be in disarray. New investment had to be made because most of the Maratha soldiers had to be paid.
But the Maratha sardars did not want to remain idle and wanted their autonomy and their plunder both at the same time. Therefore there was a pressure from below one might say of the Maratha sardars on the peshwa and there was a pressure from the higher up, finances, army organizations, viability of the state to keep this status quo and not to go in for very deep fighting. A small plunder here and there was alright, but a detailed involvement in the fighting, Nana wanted to avoid.

But after 1752 when the Durranis came to India to invade he was unable to control his Maratha sardars. Bajirao during the time of Nadir Shah was ordered by Shahu to join the Mughals. Bajirao stated that unless he had a very huge force, he wouldn’t go. His force was then besieging the western coast of Basin from the Portuguese. Nana followed that kind of a policy that without a huge force this cannot be done but there is no money to pay for the huge force so therefore this cannot be done.

But then circumstances led him to do exactly what he wanted to avoid, and in the battle of Panipat, one third of the Maratha
power lay on the field with Maharashtra polity totally disseminated.