

# THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE: MILITARY STRATEGIES, SOCIOECONOMIC DYNAMICS, AND CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN 17TH- 18TH CENTURY INDIA

**Prof. Rajendra Vitthal Pansare**

SBVP's Loknete Balasaheb Thorat Arts, Commerce and Science College,  
Talegaon Dighe, Ahmednagar

## Abstract

Maharashtra, India's most technologically advanced state, is normally considered as a region with a distinguished political heritage. Maratha history is centred around the legend of warrior-king Shivaji Bhosale, a hero from the seventeenth century, and their part in establishing or destroying regional identity. The emergence of a seemingly consensus construct of Shivaji as a central axis of regional identity was facilitated by historical discourses anchored in diverse perceptions of caste, class, religion, and nation. In 1674, Shivaji was crowned as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, meaning "the sovereign/paramount king." He was the Maratha king who promulgated the Empire of Maratha. He belonged to the Bhosale dynasty. Shivaji aimed his whole existence to emancipating the Marathas from the Bijapur Sultanate and establishing Hindu dominion. In order to successfully defend his kingdom against the Portuguese, British, Abyssians, and Mughals, he established an incredible navy. He developed the prerequisites for the formidable Maratha empire. His empire, which extended from the Indus River in modern-day Pakistan to Orissa in the east and Thanjavur in the south of India, reached a peak under the Peshwas in the 18th century.

**Keywords:** Influential, Dedicated, Tremendous, Effect, Shivaji, Maharashtra, Nationalism, Hindu, Chhatrapati, Ramdas

## Introduction:

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was a Maratha warrior king who founded the Maratha Empire in western India. He was born in 1674 in the hill fort of Shivneri, Maharashtra. Shivaji is remembered for his military prowess, innovative tactics, and strategic vision, which enabled him to build a powerful and independent Maratha kingdom. Shivaji began his military career by challenging the control of the Adil Shahi Sultanate of Bijapur. Over time, he successfully established his own kingdom, which eventually expanded to encompass a large portion of western India. He used guerrilla warfare tactics, innovative military strategies, and a powerful navy to defend his territories and expand his influence. Shivaji's legacy continues to endure, and he is revered as a symbol of courage, valour, and good governance. His forts and architectural marvels, such as the Raigad Fort and the Shivneri Fort, stand as testaments to his reign and continue to attract visitors and historians alike. The stories of his bravery and leadership have become an integral part of Indian folklore and history. It eventually became the beginning of the Maratha Empire. Shivaji Maharaj was not only a skilled military

strategist but also a shrewd administrator. His administrative reforms played a crucial role in the stability and prosperity of the Maratha kingdom. Shivaji established a professional and egalitarian administration after establishing his rule, assisted by a well-trained military and established administrative framework.

### Objectives of the study:

- Examine the political structure and governance system of the Maratha Empire, including the roles of prominent leaders and rulers.
- Understand the strategies employed by the Marathas in consolidating and expanding their political influence.
- Analyse the military tactics, strategies, and innovations employed by the Marathas in various battles and campaigns.
- Explore the impact of military successes and failures on the overall fate of the empire.
- Investigate the socio-economic conditions during the Maratha period, including the agrarian system, trade, and commerce.
- Examine the impact of Maratha rule on the lives of different social groups and communities.
- Explore the cultural and artistic achievements of the Maratha Empire, including literature, architecture, and the promotion of regional languages.
- Understand how the Marathas contributed to the cultural diversity of India.

### Literature Review:

- According to primary sources, N. Jayapalan Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (Shivaji Shahaji Bhosale) was a formidable warrior against the Mughals and other enemies. However, no description of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's management skills is provided. The author simply mentioned Shivaji's legacy of administration. There is a need to investigate the key aspects of Shivaji's management.
- In his book *Rajashiv Chatrapati*, author Babasaheb Purandare highlights Shivaji's devotion to his religious mother, Jijabai Bhosale. This type of atmosphere had a profound impact on Shivaji Maharaj. Shivaji reads the Hindu Ramayana and Mahabharat's Holy History books with great care. The author mentioned Shivaji's entire history.
- Cyrus M. Gonda and Dr. Nitin Parab conducted research for their book, *Leadership Learning from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj*. The author emphasises the importance of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's leadership learning. There is a need to explain why and how you can learn leadership from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Shivaji's ability to execute tactics has made him a successful leader throughout history.

- In his book, Jadunath Sarkar described Shivaji. In his book, he described Shivaji. The poet illustrated Shivaji's biographical description. The book's meaning is clear, but there are no details about Shivaji's management skills. On the front lines, there is no brief analysis of Shivaji's strategies. In his novel, Pramod Mande<sup>20</sup> described how Maharashtra's (Shivaji's) swarajya forts helped him use his dominance in battle.

### **Rise of the Marathas**

Sivaji culminated the opposition to the Deshmukh system in his early professional life and was successful in replacing it with a much more stable and secure land tenure arrangement for village farmers. As a result, he gained popularity among the general public. Although the Deshmukhs did not enjoy giving up their rights, they were relieved to be free of their obligations to the Sultans as a result of this loss. Sivaji, on the other hand, had no personal animosity towards the Deshmukh family and had no desire to exact revenge on them. In exchange, he gave them better opportunities and assigned them to positions under him based on their courage and talent. This ignited their interest, and the majority of them joined Hindavi Swarajya, also known as Maharashtra Dharma at the time. Sivaji implemented a comprehensive plan to rebuild the devastated districts that included aid, concessions, and assistance. However, persuasion and endurance were required, and the process was time-consuming and difficult.

The worst effects of the catastrophic "Durgadevicha Duikaja" famine, which occurred between 1630 and 1633, made matters worse. The Muslim leaders retreated to larger cities and delegated their responsibilities to aides. As a result, contact between Muslims and the general public decreased. The Deshmukhs and Sardeshmukhs failed to meet their annual obligations to the Sultans. People fleeing for safety and food abandoned settlements and caused massive casualties, devastating the nation. The famine resulted in hundreds of property title lawsuits over the next ten years. In summary, there was widespread unrest and a lack of state control in the second half of the seventeenth century. Without the Sultans' perpetual backing, no foreign authority could be guaranteed. As a result, by exploiting the very weaknesses and desires that had led to the breaking of the bonds between the ruler and the ruled, Sivaji had the opportunity to increase his own power and strength.

Shivaji was a staunch supporter of personal freedom. He relished being free in both spirit and action. Tyranny and oppression were things he could never stand. He dedicated his life to using administration and warfare to secure freedom for everyone he encountered. Maharashtra experienced significant social and political transformation during the ShivaSahi period, also known as the seventeenth century. The order of the day was to eliminate ignorance and inferiority complexes, followed by the ability to influence public opinion. To instill in them the true national spirit, Shivaji anticipated the situation and made the necessary repairs. He helped to elevate the masses' social status and educated them in the true religious spirit. Maharashtra experienced a period of social and religious renewal in this way.

### Shivaji's Governance

Sivaji took great care in selecting and maintaining the necessary equipment for his administration. Service was solely based on merit. Some later writers claim that Sivaji recognised inherited rights to higher ranks, but this is not supported by current data. His prudence and ability were critical in preventing rivalries among his officers. There was no special treatment or status given to any department or office solely for the purpose of utility or profit. The sustained equity of treatment had the advantage of ensuring expert and undivided attention to the State's tasks; however, keeping such expert and capable machinery under one's thumb necessitates a firm hand and strict discretion.

He ensued a stern and serious life. He firmly believed in abstaining from alcoholic beverages and other intoxicants. He led the life of a saint and despised wasting his energy on sensual pleasures. "Impartial assessors accept that Sivaji possessed attributes that, in an unenlightened Hindoo, may be described as admirable," Martin wrote in his letter. Peril could not deter him, nor could victory entice him, because he was prepared for any situation. He continued to walk freely among the people, inspiring them with his own determined opposition to the Mohamedans, despite his frugal habits, courteous and lovable demeanour, and passionate nature. He set a high standard of sexual morality before his commanders, generals, troops, and the general public. The weaker sex was always respected. If women were taken as prisoners of war, they were not to be executed.

One of Shivaji's most treasured possessions was a profound understanding of the oneness of religion. He was a proponent of religious tolerance. His Maratha army encompassed a significant number of Muslim soldiers. To preserve and grow religion, he established a new department under the direction of a new minister named Panditrao, and he recruited great intellectuals like Balam Bhat to supervise his family.

Following his coronation in 1674, Shivaji took the title Chhatrapati and pursued an aggressive expansionist policy. Some of the regions you mentioned were part of his conquest. Shivaji successfully captured parts of Khandesh during his campaigns, expanding his influence in the northern Deccan. Shivaji fought multiple campaigns against the Adil Shahi Sultanate of Bijapur. His conquests in this region weakened Bijapur's control and allowed him to gain territory. Shivaji's military campaigns also targeted Karwar, a coastal town. The Marathas wanted to control strategic coastal areas for economic and defensive reasons. Although Kolhapur was not specifically mentioned, it was a significant region in the Deccan, and Shivaji's influence spread throughout the region. Janjira, an island fortress off the Konkan coast, possessed formidable naval power. While Shivaji was unable to capture it, he did launch several campaigns against it throughout his life. This location is not commonly associated with Shivaji's conquests, and there may be some confusion with other areas or names. Shivaji aimed to increase his control over strategic forts and regions, including Belgaum. The region was part of the larger Deccan landscape, and he aimed to establish Maratha dominance.

Shivaji Maharaj captured forts in Vellore and Gingee, which were previously ruled by Adil Shahi kings. He also reached agreements with several rulers, including his stepbrother Venkoji, to consolidate and secure territories in Tanjavur and Mysore. Shivaji Maharaj's

overarching goal was to create a unified and independent Maratha state in the Deccan, free of external powers like the Mughals and other Muslim rulers. He aimed to advance the interests of the native Hindu population by establishing a strong administration and military to defend the Deccan states. His efforts laid the groundwork for the Maratha Empire, which eventually became the dominant force in the Indian subcontinent. Shivaji Maharaj is remembered as a visionary leader and a symbol of Maharashtra pride and resistance against foreign rule.

Shivaji promoted the use of Marathi and Sanskrit in his court, replacing Persian, which was the prevalent royal language at the time. This was part of his broader efforts to revive and promote local languages. Shivaji renamed several forts under his control with Sanskrit names to reflect his commitment to Hindu traditions and to emphasise the cultural identity of his rule. For example, the fort of Rairi was renamed Raigad, and the fort of Kondana became Sinhagad. Shivaji's promotion of Marathi and Sanskrit was not just linguistic; it was also a way of asserting a distinct cultural identity that aligned with his vision of a Hindu state. He aimed to establish a Swarajya (self-rule) that celebrated Hindu traditions.

Shivaji was a Hindu ruler, but he is best known for encouraging religious tolerance rather than being a devout Hindu. He implemented policies that ensured the safety and fair treatment of people of various religious backgrounds throughout his empire. He respected and appointed people of different faiths to important positions in his administration. While he implemented administrative reforms and was just during his reign, historical records make no explicit mention of his promotion of women's liberty. During his time, women's status was more consistent with prevailing societal norms.

Regarding caste discrimination, Shivaji is frequently credited with challenging the caste system by promoting individuals based on merit rather than caste. He encouraged the inclusion of capable people from various castes in his administration and military. He implemented the Ryotwari system, which eliminated the need for middlemen between farmers and the state and collected revenue directly from manufacturers and producers. Shivaji used the Chauth and Sardeshmukhi systems to finance his military operations. Chauth was a 25% tax on the territory that his forces guarded against external invasions, while Sardeshmukhi was an additional 10% tax on agricultural products. Shivaji separated his kingdom into four provinces: Poona (Pune), Supa, Jinji, and Karnataka. Each province had a mamlatdar in charge of administration and revenue collection. The village was the smallest administrative unit in Shivaji's kingdom. The Deshpande, or head of the Village Panchayat, was an important figure in local governance. Shivaji recognized the importance of a strong military to defend his kingdom. He built and maintained a well-disciplined army, consisting of infantry, cavalry, and a navy.

Shivaji constructed numerous forts strategically located in the mountainous terrain of the Western Ghats to secure his kingdom from external threats. These forts served as strongholds and played a crucial role in his military strategies. Shivaji understood the strategic importance



of having control over coastal areas. He established a formidable naval force along the Konkan and Goan coasts, which helped in safeguarding his maritime interests.

### **Shivaji's Military personnel**

I. Shivaji oversaw modernization and advancement, particularly in his military organization and the Navy, which lasted until the end of the Maratha empire. He was a pioneer in commando operations on the water, also known as "Ganimi Kava" warfare. His Mavala army's war cry was 'Har Har Mahadev' (Hail to the Lord Our God). Shivaji oversaw numerous significant changes to his military and naval organizations. These include:

II. Unified Military Command: A standing army and infantry belonging to the state known as page; Shivaji's standing army included 100,000 cavalry, 100,000 infantry, and 12,000 marine fighters.

III. Shiva was an excellent builder of sea fortifications. His sea forts differed from those built by other kings in that they served as static support bases as well as to protect communication lines and critical areas. Shivaji did not fight from his forts, instead keeping his navy mobile on the high seas, except during the rainy season. The command of the Sea Fort was divided between three officers of equal rank.

Havaladar, commander of the sea garrison and key holder. Sabnis, head of Naval Accounts Karchanis, head of the commissariat responsible for general administration at the sea fort. As quartermaster, I was responsible for fleet maintenance, ammunition storage, food supply, and logistics.

IV. The establishment of a Centralised Military Intelligence Department, led by (Bahirjee Naik), was the primary military spy who provided Shivaji with enemy information throughout Shivaji's campaigns. Shivaji identified and corrected numerous systemic flaws in naval and military intelligence. He emphasised proper coordination, a national pool of intelligence, procedures that could focus on flaws and initiate corrective action, and a pyramidal structure of assessment and management.

V. Potent and effective Gauralla Amphibious warfare, including guerrilla tactics, commando actions, and swift flanking attacks, was introduced in both swallow water and high seas. Shivaji used tactics that are now known as guerrilla warfare. He would not attack his opponent directly in the water, but rather at a time and location of his choosing. He would harass the Portuguese Navy at regular intervals and flee into the swallow water and creeks when they approached. Francois Martin, the first governor of the French settlement at Pondicherry, provides an excellent account of Shivaji's operations.

Martin in his Memoirs mentions that: "He [Shivaji] could very well occupy a high place among the great sons of India, though the conquests he made during his lifetime were accomplished rather by intrigue and cunning than by open warfare."

VI. The Marathas used asymmetric warfare on both land and water. Is it really possible to lose the majority of battles while still winning the war? As per the statistical phenomenon known as "Simpson's paradox," Assume two powers go to war: Power X with 100 sailors and Power Y with 40. During every battle between X and Y, the following occurs:

If X loses, it loses 80% of the sailors fighting, whereas Y loses 10% of the sailors fighting.

If X wins, it loses half of the sailors fighting, while Y wins, it loses 10% of the sailors fighting.

So, in the case above, the ratio of (resource drain of X / resource drain of Y) is  $>$  i.e. Greater Than

(initial number of X sailors / initial number of Y sailors). Or

So even if X wins battle more than 50% of the time, they will lose their men and resources faster

and, in the end, will lose the war. All Y has to do is keep the spirits and maintain its steadiness. It reminds us a famous quote - "The strength of an army is not in its numbers"

During his brief reign, Shivaji instituted numerous reforms. For the purposes of discussion, I will categorise them into four groups. Reforms in governance, politics, defence, and social policy. Governance reforms require priority attention. Following the coronation, Shivaji established fully functional governance consisting of Ashta-Pradhan (eight ministers). These eight men were prominent statesmen in their time. They laid the groundwork for formal economic policy, foreign policy, and other aspects of government.

vii One key feature that distinguished Shivaji's governance through ministers from the prevalent "watan and jahagir" style of governance was the division of work based on function rather than geography. In management terms, this was "horizontal decentralisation," with each minister responsible for only one function across the entire empire.

Resource drain of X

The resource drain of Y  $>$  the initial number of X sailors.

Initial Number of Y Sailors

### **Maratha - Mysore conflicts in 1600s**

The troubled relationship between Maratha warriors and Karnataka's rulers' dates back to Shivaji's father, Shahji, in the 17th century. In 1639, Mysore Hindu King Kanthirava Wodeyar is said to have defeated and killed a large number of troops from the Bijapur Sultanate led by Randaulah Khan and Shahji when they attacked Srirangapatna.

(1 Shivaji led numerous attacks on Karnataka's towns and manufacturing areas. His incursions into North Karnataka and the destruction of towns there have been mentioned numerous times in British gazetteers, particularly the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, 1883, which quotes John Fryer, a British doctor who visited India during Shivaji's reign.

(2). According to historian Hayavadana Rao (1943), Shivaji attempted to attack Srirangapatna but was defeated by the Mysore King Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar. Shivaji is said to have looted areas surrounding this location.

(3). When Aurangzeb defeated the Muslim kings of Bijapur in the 1680s, the Mysore Kingdom, led by Chikkadevaraya Wodeyar, formed an alliance with the Mughals. In 1696, when a troop of Maratha soldiers on their way to Ginjee fort in Tamil Nadu decided to try their luck with the Srirangapatna treasury, the Wodeyar defeated them decisively.

In 1799, the British restored the Wodeyar dynasty in Mysore State. As a British ally, the Mysore Maharaja provided resources to the East India Company to fight the Marathas, including the decisive Battle of Assaye, in which Arthur Wellesley defeated the Maratha armies, contributing to the early demise of the Maratha Empire. As the British gained control of the native states, the absence of wars came as a surprise to the ordinary people of these states.

However, the same people soon realised that while the British taxed them and protected them from outside invasions, they also burdened them with the miseries of famines and mass extinctions of both humans and animals.

## References

1. Shripad Shriram Desai ,(2010), Konkancha Itihas ,konkan prakashan,pg86
2. Indu Ramchandani (2000), Students Britanica : India, Popular Prakashan,pg.81
3. VishwasPatil (2005), Sambhaji ,Mehata Publishing House, pg98-102
4. M.R.D. Katak (1993) ,Anglo-Maratha War I, 1773-1783, A Military study of major wars. Popular prakashan,pg181
5. G. K ‘Ruijtzer (2009), Xenophobia in 17th – Century India VOL- III, Amsterdam university, Pg. No. 153-190
6. Girija Kumar (1997), The book of trail: Fundamentalism and censorship in India,Har - Anand Publication, pg.165
7. David Mumford (1993), The Marathas 1600-1818 part II Volume IV, Cambridge University, Pg. No. 71
8. Karline McLain (2009), India’s Immortal Info Books: Gods, Kings, and other Heroes Part VIII , Indiana University Press, Pg. No. 121-124
9. Randolf G.S. Cooper (2003) , Anglo Maratha Campaigns & The Contest for India , Cambridge University Press, pg28
10. Shreepad Dattatray kulkarni ,(1992) , The Struggle for Hindu supremacy, S.B.V.I.S.Mandira publisher,pg.300-307
11. V.S.Naipaul (2011) ,India : A Wounded Civilization , K.D.Publishing Group, pg 98-102
12. William J. Jackson (2005) ,Vijaynagar Voices , Ashgate Publishing, pg.38
13. PradeepJ.Barua (2006) , The state at war in India ,University of Nebraska ,Presspg.13
14. N. Jayapalan (2001) , History of India , Atlantic publisher, pg 211
15. Gajanan Bhaskar Mehendale. ‘Shivaji His Life and Times’. Param Mitra Publications. 2010.



16. Bal Krishna. Balkrishna. 'Shivaji The Great Vol I'. Palala Press. 2016.
17. Sir Jadunath Sarkar. 'Shivaji and His Times'. Longmans, Green and Company, 1920.
18. Dennis Kincaid. 'Shivaji: The Grand Rebel'. Rupa Publications India. 2015.
19. Cyrus Gonda and Nitin Parab. 'Leadership Learning from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj'. Embassy Books. 2008