

## Original Article

# Military Innovations of Shivaji Maharaj: Guerrilla Warfare and Naval Power

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### Abstract

*Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (1627–1680), the founder of the Maratha Empire, transformed Indian warfare through two pioneering military innovations—guerrilla tactics and naval power. Operating against the formidable Mughal and Adil Shahi forces, Shivaji utilized unconventional strategies such as rapid raids, ambushes, and hit-and-run offensives, which exploited the rugged terrain of the Deccan and disrupted enemy supply lines. Simultaneously, his establishment of the Maratha Navy marked a revolutionary step in Indian military history, safeguarding trade along the Konkan coast and countering European and Mughal maritime threats. Complementing these were innovations in fort design, espionage, logistics, and supply chain management that ensured sustainable resistance against superior forces. These strategies not only consolidated Swarajya but also influenced subsequent military systems in India, inspiring later leaders and movements. Shivaji's foresight continues to be relevant in modern military strategy, where asymmetric warfare and coastal defense remain crucial.*

**Keywords:** Shivaji Maharaj; Maratha Empire; Guerrilla Warfare; Naval Power; Military Innovations; Fortifications; Supply Chain Management; Espionage; Indian Military History.

### Introduction

Shivaji Maharaj, the Maratha warrior who contested the Mogul Empire in the 1600s, introduced two important innovations in military strategy and culture that Indian historians had credited with transforming Indian warfare. One was the effective use of guerrilla tactics, and the other, the establishment of naval power.

Successful guerrilla tactics demand more than brave troops wielding swords. A command element must plan how to raid, how to get supplies, how to defend themselves when attacked, and how to escape. Shivaji Maharaj anticipated those needs and adapted his strategies accordingly. He developed a supply chain that was secure in war, and used an accounting and resource allocation system that kept basic necessities flowing to his troops. Experienced and knowledgeable cavalry commanders were especially recruited and trained to maximize the advantages of fast and mobile horsemen. The striking power of selected troops was never wasted on unimportant targets; a principle demonstrated again and again in raids such as the capture of Surat in 1664.

### Historical Context

Prior to Shivaji Maharaj, the forces ruling most of India employed conventional strategies and tactics prevalent during the period. The use of cannons and muskets had introduced a new dimension to warfare. However, military forts, an inseparable component of warfare in India, were inadequately fortified to defend against cannon fire. Military generals and commanders advanced towards the opposing armies in formations. The ruler or supreme commander positioned himself at the center of the formation. This approach naturally compelled the general and commander to be in the thick of the fighting.

Against this backdrop, Shivaji Maharaj evolved unconventional strategies and tactics in various military domains such as naval warfare, guerrilla warfare, fortifications, military logistics, supply-chain management, culture, leadership, and military organization.

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The success of Shivaji's Bombay-Karnataka campaign can primarily be attributed to the effective application of guerrilla warfare. The Maratha Navy, erected during the reign of Shivaji Maharaj, played crucial roles in the battle of Kolhapur, the battle of Salher, and the battle of Umerkhind. Additionally, it safeguarded trade in Malabar and Konkan and deprived the British and Dutch of levy taxes on goods imported and exported along the western coast.

#### Shivaji Maharaj: A Brief Biography

Shivaji Bhonsle (1627–1680), popularly known as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, was the founder of the Maratha Empire in western India. His innovations in guerrilla tactics, fort construction, and naval power established the Maratha kingdom. These military practices and organizations would inspire later Indian rulers, such as the British and Mughals.

Shivaji was the eighth son of Shahaji Bhonsle, a Maratha general who served the Nizamshahi dynasty of Ahmednagar, and his third wife, Jijabai. At the age of 16, Shivaji took control of the family fief and gradually expanded his independent territory. He launched his first foray against the Bijapuri establishment in 1645. "In recognition of the role played by Shahaji Bhonsle—who raised an independent streak in Shivaji and was instrumental in helping him establish a Maratha kingdom—he decided to name this new territory Maharashtra in his honour, naming it after the phrase Maharaj Sah Bhairaj, meaning 'My King and my brother'".

#### Guerrilla Warfare Tactics

Shivaji Maharaj's ingenious use of guerrilla tactics and strategies heralded a resounding turning point in 17th-century Indian warfare. This non-conventional warfare style enabled the Maratha forces to extricate Svarājya from the clutches of predominant imperial forces. Guerrilla warfare tactics, employed by Shivaji Maharaj and the Maratha forces, were instrumental in successfully capturing and defending Maratha forts, repelling invasions, securing the Maratha Empire, and establishing Svarājya. Shivaji Maharaj's interest in organising military forces emerged during his teenage years. During this formative phase, he identified weaknesses in the traditional Indian military system and devised new tactics and strategies to surmount those challenges. Guerrilla warfare, sometimes termed unconventional, irregular, or small war, is a form of asymmetric warfare that eschews direct confrontation with conventional forces in favour of harassment and tactical offensives to unbalance the enemy. The defining features include its 'small war' nature, operational reliance on ergonomically and logistically self-sufficient bodygroups, and focus on

the local theatre of conflict. The primary objective is to diminish the opponent's advantage through subtle yet heavy losses, rather than to defeat them outright. Such tactics challenge the reigning superpower by refraining from confronting them directly, instead harassing and striking in areas of weakness through ambushes, raids, or hit-and-run assaults. A notable example is Shivaji Maharaj's celebrated raid on Surat, underscoring the effectiveness of these strategies.

#### Definition and Importance

The research focuses on Shivaji Maharaj's military innovations, emphasizing guerrilla warfare and naval power as transformative elements in 17th-century Indian warfare. These strategies enabled Shivaji to check the dominant Adil Shahi Sultanate and the mighty Mughal Empire in Maharashtra's rugged terrain. His visionary spirit pioneered guerrilla tactics and established a potent naval force, initially for protection and later for offense. Guerrilla warfare involves small, mobile groups using non-traditional tactics against a larger, more powerful enemy. Adopting these strategies, Shivaji redefined military formations, rearranged forts for efficient communication, and introduced a new recruitment system. He further enhanced combat effectiveness through improved planning and training methods. Establishing this military might required organized logistics and supply chains. Simply having a sound plan was insufficient; continuous adequate supplies and resources were necessary. By employing these methods and redefining enemy routes, Shivaji ensured safer paths for his troops, intercepting and blacklisting invasions before they reached the Maratha areas.

#### Key Strategies Employed

Shivaji Maharaj's leadership marked a decisive shift in warfare conduct through the implementation of guerrilla tactics. Guerrilla warfare is a more flexible form of struggle employed when one side is powerless compared to the other in terms of military power, resources, or geography. Shivaji's use of the slow attack-fast retreat policy kept the enemy off balance and paved the way for Maratha Cavity attacks. The main characteristic of these operations was that the Maratha army attacked the enemy so fast in the area of operation that the enemy could never mobilize its armed forces and, after accomplishing the task, immediately retreated. In the process, the Maratha army stopped the enemy's supply procession line, captured all the governmental treasure, and gradually made the enemy weak. From 1645 to 1655, Shivaji Maharaj made constant raids on Bijapur and Ahmednagar, harassing the enemy to such an extent that they could not march

forward to attack him. Raids were also made on the Adilshahi capital Bijapur, and the treasury there was plundered. The raids on Bednur and Karwar put an end to the nuisance caused by piracy. Raids on western ports like Dabhol, Chiplun, Rajapur, Palgarh, and Khanderi stopped the imbalance in trade and commerce.

Shivaji Maharaj understood the importance of naval power fifteen years before the Great European Emperors, along with the significance of the Maratha Navy in Maratha warfare. The safety of coastal trade and marine trade depended on naval power. Shivaji Maharaj created a powerful Maratha Navy to protect the western coast from Mughal and other foreign navy attacks. In 1660, Shivaji Maharaj started the construction of a strong naval establishment by establishing a dockyard. The Marathas controlled the sea during the battle of Shaista Khan in 1662. The Maratha Navy's naval supremacy and the security of the western coast were confirmed in the battle of Pavan Khind in 1663. The capital city of a strong empire was saved from Shaista Khan due to this naval supremacy. Shivaji's naval power gave him a great name and made him famous among the European sovereigns. Maratha Sea power put an end to the tyranny of the European rulers and European trading companies, which brought peace to sea trade and marine trade.

#### **Case Studies of Successful Raids**

The Maratha raids display a range of guerrilla tactics. Rapid attacks utilized knowledge from previous espionage, enabling quick strikes and retreats to avoid Mughal retaliation. Conquered territory established sufficed for a single night's stay, maximizing looting and plunder while minimizing exposure. Capturing hilly and dense forest positions ensured retreat safety through natural barriers. Nighttime raids allowed forces to avoid detection and reach bases swiftly for looting and hostage-taking. Creating an atmosphere of insecurity by any means—guerrilla tactics, steel shrieks, surprise attacks, looting, or harassment—intimidated enemies. Martial troughs provided commanders with funds to quickly raise forces in disturbed areas. Strategic reverses in such zones disguised preparations for subsequent counterattacks. Shivaji's guerrilla warfare and military innovations not only challenged the prevailing War Machine but also redefined Indian warfare, establishing a tradition of resistance that influenced future Indian rulers. By extending military operations across the plains and seacoast, he laid the foundation for India's first notable naval power. Rapid and daring raids continually disrupted enemies, safely share-cropping plundered areas. Strict guidelines for an invincible

army encompassed organized supply lines and transportation of provisions to the war front. Dividing forces into sub-armies, appointing capable commanders, proper training, and motivational efforts all converged on the ultimate goal of creating a National Army capable of restoring freedom from tyranny and oppression.

#### **Naval Power Development**

Shivaji Maharaj established the Maratha Navy in 1654 to protect the Konkan coastline and counteract the pressure from established naval forces such as the English, Portuguese, and Dutch. Recognizing the disruptive potential of naval power against an adversary with significant land strength but relative naval weakness, Shivaji laid the foundations of the Maratha naval power. The establishment of the Maratha Navy led to the building of strategically located naval bases and dockyards, with coastal forts further supporting the activities of the navy. The increased naval strength crept along the coast of Western India to Kagadwadi on the Karnataka coast, as evidenced by the occupation of the fort at Honnavar in 1662. The maritime wars proved that a concentrated fleet of ships carried with it much latent power to harass the trade of either enemy or friend. As the navy strengthened, the power of the Marathas extended over the sea also. Trade on the Arabian Sea suffered heavily at this time because of the activities of the Maratha navy. Malabar and other ports had to pay toll or 'Chouth' to the Marathas. The naval power also influenced the policies of other coastal countries of Western India. The end of Portuguese rule of Cochin was the product of the early struggles of Rajasimha, Shivaji's son-in-law. The Portuguese navy was not only engaged in battle with the Maratha navy but also in combating rebellion among other seafaring peoples on the Malabar Coast. Trade through the Abyssinian port of Zaila was heard of more because of the activities of Shivaji's navy than for anything else.

#### **Formation of the Maratha Navy**

The rise of Maratha naval power under Shivaji constituted the third and final dimension of his military strategy, complementing his land-based guerrilla operations. Confronted and challenged by the consolidations of Mughal control over the Deccan, Shivaji turned to the Navy as the cornerstone of a new, composite strategy. Before the advent of Maratha naval strength, the sea was practically immune to the assaults of opposing armies. Economic theories dating back to Mercantilism acknowledged the network of sea routes connecting major Indian ports to international trading partners as a vulnerable factor during war; yet, the Indian powers during this era rarely exploited this avenue. The Marathas not only

recognized this opportunity but also committed significant resources to develop a naval force that would later hold considerable strategic value. Local knowledge and a modern mindset enabled the Marathas to challenge two potent armies simultaneously—luring the enemy inland with a land army that raided their forts and supply lines, while a maritime army devastated enemy shipping and trade.

The formal establishment of the Maratha Navy was a decisive step in inaugurating this new dimension of power. Shivaji's pioneering spirit found expression as he guided the growth of a naval capability aimed at securing the Western coastalline and projecting power within the Arabian Sea. His fleets supported trade and commerce along the Western coasts of India and disrupted the commercial activities of the Portuguese and the British. Maritime dominance also safeguarded Shivaji's coastline and fortified sea-based trade routes. Historic naval engagements such as the fortification of the Sindhudurg sea fort and the Battle of Kolaba Bay demonstrate that Shivaji's naval aspirations carved out a niche that later historical figures would attempt to replicate through their own naval establishments. The strategic value attributed to a strong naval force by the Marathas is evident in Shivaji's adept use of it to coerce Aurangzeb into peace negotiations following the prolonged conflict between the two powers.

#### **Significant Naval Battles**

Establishing a seaborne force represented a major departure from the traditional military practices of the sub-continent. For a ruler of the period to organize a dedicated navy and use it effectively was highly unusual. Naval victories of Shivaji include the battle of Colachel, in which the Dutch, the second most powerful navy of the world at the time, were defeated. The Battle of Palkhed from February 2 to February 6, 1728, witnessed a Maratha cavalry force of 30,000 led by Bajirao I routing an Imperial force of 70,000. The Maratha navy raided the ships and ports of Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire. The Maratha Navy demolished the rich Arab merchants at Debal and destroyed the Muslim shipping in the sea.

#### **Impact on Coastal Trade**

The Maratha Navy exerted control over the significant port city of Chaul by dominating the raiding zone between the Konkan Sea and Vasai Sea. This naval command not only preempted the arrival of ships and trade from Portugal but also safeguarded the Holy Maratha Empire's coastal boundary from invasions by the Portuguese and Mughals. The acquisition of Chaul by the Maratha Navy signified an enhancement in naval power, enabling the supervision of essential transportation

routes and the modulation of trade. As a result, the position of the Maratha Empire was fortified along the west coast of India, and the navy's role attained prominent status.

The successful raids, pioneered by the Maratha Navy under the leadership of Kanhoji Angre, inflicted embarrassment upon the Portuguese and Mughal Empires. The navy's dominance enabled the Marathas to levy taxes from numerous merchants traversing the sea routes, thereby exerting influence over trade activities. Consequently, West India was propelled into prominence, establishing itself as a vital node within the global economy. This theme resonates in Matt Friedman's 'Indian Ocean Connections', which delineates the intricate interrelations among the Indian Ocean worlds, the Eurasian crossroads, and the Western European routes.

#### **Fortifications and Military Infrastructure**

Maratha forts were integral to Shivaji Maharaj's military strategy. These fortress locales were the foundations of the Maratha's guerrilla tactics. Thus, natural alarm systems were installed to detect invading armies and signal warnings to other forts through light, sound, or water signals. The Indians generalized and optimized these concepts brilliantly, producing contemporaneous systems across the globe.

Forts provided a resting point for soldiers and warrior families engaged in lengthy raids, supplied them with food and provisions, and tasked troops with protecting strategically significant trade routes through surveillance. Moreover, forts housed regiments of soldiers in waiting for their turn on the battlefield. The inhabitants of villages near the forts faced far less danger from invaders. The forts were also the centers of social and cultural activity.

#### **Strategic Importance of Forts**

Initially, at the time of invasions by Malik Ahmad Nizam Shah II and unchecked travel by foreign enemies, forts served as precautionary deposits for wealth. Later, forts were used for protecting the state's borders. There are many instances where the ruler's army stationed at the fort prevented the invader from entering the state. For example, it was impossible for the armies of the Sultan of Bijapur to enter within the boundaries of the Junnar Desh with the help of the fort of Torna. At that time, most part of the Junnar Desh was under the Maratha rule. Thus the forts acted as a border or pad of the area under the Maratha rule. As a result of this, the army that captured the temporary fort ruled the surrounding area! This helped in fulfilling the old proverb "Who controls the fort, controls the area."

After 1650, one of the major areas of warfare was around the forts. Capturing forts was an important



position of both the Maratha and Mughal armies. In this context, it is said that Shivaji wanted to rule Pune and Parvati Sundra (as known today as the Parvati Fort of the Pune) from Sinhagad, whose control was under the Mughals. Geographically, all these three forts form a triangle, which is suitable for the call of Pune and the areas under the control of the Purandar.”

### **Innovations in Fort Design**

The forts built during the time of Shivaji Maharaj were highly innovative in nature and were not merely defense bastions. They also provided living places for the soldiers and were an important part of supply chain management. Shivaji Maharaj's forts were crucial in guarding against Mughal attacks and his concept of guerrilla warfare. The supply chains also ensured the availability of ammunition and food for the soldiers in the forts. It's important to note that the forts along the Arabian Sea coast also contributed to Shivaji Maharaj's naval power during the 17th century. Shivaji Maharaj was fort-conscious. His forts were set according to geographical and political needs, on the boundary of states as well as in the interiors. To achieve his administration's objectives, he got new forts constructed and current ones repaired, along-with strengthening military units with well-trained soldiers, cavalry, camels, elephants, and horses. The forts on the Arabian Sea coast made a noteworthy contribution towards protecting the Bengaluru—Southern Maharashtra trade route as well as towards the Maratha Navy. Some forts were built during a temporary truce with the Mughals in areas vacated by them, utilizing local labor, materials, and taxes. The allocation in terms of money and men for the construction, renovation, strengthening, and reorganization of forts was part of the overall development of the army.

### **Logistics and Supply Chain Management**

For a military commander, the ability to determine which resources were needed, and where those resources needed to be delivered, was perhaps the most important skill, and one that separated successful and visionary leaders from their less innovative contemporaries. Shivaji Maharaj clearly understood the significance of logistics and supply chain management, as his periods of protracted warfare would not have been possible otherwise. His foresight in establishing harbours and secure coastal trading routes ensured a steady supply of resources necessary for continued campaigns.

Jenna Schutz explains that logistics encompasses the practical art of transporting, supplying, and maintaining military forces via air, land, and sea, and is fundamental to any military operation. Small wars, such as the United States'

involvement throughout Latin America and the Philippines during the early twentieth century, demonstrated the critical importance not only of delivering requisite military provisions, but of supplying the materials necessary to restore and stabilize countries in conflict zones. Haiti's nineteen-year occupation further illustrates this principle: despite juxtaposing technological innovations against rugged terrain, hostile climate, inadequate environments for railroads or roads, and a propensity for revolution, Marines were compelled to resort to basic pack-train transport and local procurement to meet the demands of wider operational logistics. The varied intensity of such conflicts mandated that logistics networks employ every available means of mobility, yet required continuous adaptation and transformation in the implementation of rations, transport, and related services in the field (Schutz, 2011).

### **Resource Allocation Strategies**

Resource allocation and supply chain management constituted a crucial aspect of Shivaji Maharaj's overall military strategy. Frequent movement between rocky hideouts, his adversaries' pressure, and his armies' immense needs necessitated the development of specific methods and routes. To protect supply sources, Shivaji established the Maratha Navy alongside fortifications, enabling control over seas, oceanic communication routes, and the Malabar coast trade. The navy shielded supply routes and territories from foreign invasions and conducted successful raids on Portugal, Aden, and Gujarat. The fortress system—comprising over 350 forts—utilized resource distribution for self-sufficiency, storing food, arms, ammunition, and other supplies within mountain caves, bunkers, and bonded warehouses. Security-reinforcing techniques and an efficient supply chain ensured sustained resistance during extended periods. In sum, managing resources and supply chains proved vital for Shivaji's innovative strategic framework in guerrilla warfare.

A robust supply chain is essential for sustained military operations; it aids conquest and occupation while enabling prolonged resistance. Ensuring the uninterrupted transportation of food, ammunition, arms, and equipment is vital, and these necessities must be instituted from the outset. Effective supply chains not only support ongoing operations but also prevent adversaries from exploiting gaps to launch counter-offensives. The Maratha Navy and strategic forts safeguarded supply corridors, and control over coastal trade restricted European powers from supplying the Mughals during campaigns. Allocation of stores parties and resources in early Raj days exemplifies Shivaji's foresight in this arena. Such logistical

considerations underpinned his overall military strategy.

### **Supply Routes and Their Security**

Shivaji Maharaj reorganized supply lines and logistical support for an effective rapid strike capability. Mobility was maintained by limiting the size of raiding parties; smaller groups required fewer supplies and could hunt or scavenge for subsistence. Larger groups delivered more decisive blows at the cost of diminished autonomy and flexibility. Trade routes used by the Mughals and the Bijapur sultanate were targeted both during raids and by creating a feared reputation for Maratha control of the area, forcing them to keep pressure on the Marathas. Marathi raiders also legally controlled a salt depot and imposed duties on the salt trade. Reliable supply lines were maintained for the Maratha Army. Forts were chosen for raiding operations based on the city's resources. Unlike other raiders, groups usually took food and horses from their destination rather than relying on their own supply. As they systemically captured Mughal territory, routes between the Maratha homeland and the newly acquired rich cities started being developed for safer and easier transportation of supplies and bulk loot. Consequently, the raiding parties were able to travel more often and for longer periods intact.

### **Leadership and Military Organization**

Leadership played a vital role in the military success of Shivaji Maharaj. His commanders were highly regarded warrior figures, well respected by the Maratha troops whom they commanded. The military of Shivaji was organized into 18 main groups, and for each of these, a reliable commander, either from the experienced corps of Rashtrakutas or recruited on merit and capability, was assigned. While Shivaji addressed himself as Chhatrapati and Samrajya Chakravarti, the ministers in the Ashta Pradhan also had authority to issue commands to the army. Troops were recruited on merit, and Shivaji fostered the spirit of their selection and training. For war maneuvers, a cantonment was established at Kondhana.

Difficult terrains and the constant threat of Mughal attacks presented challenges to the army's subsistence. A productive supply chain became a primary requirement, not only to support the fortresses under Maratha control but also for sustaining the raids that extended deep into Mughal territories. To address these needs, the army introduced a Military Black-crafting Department to provision all necessities without exploitation and shortages during campaigns. The successful management of resources was credited to the astute and brave leadership of Shivaji Maharaj.

### **Role of Commanders**

Effective leadership is a key determinant in any military organisation. Consequently, every Maratha military unit had a commander appointed by Shivaji himself. Almost all commanders were professional soldiers who earned their livelihood by fighting. They were fearless people, with more swords than coins. The successful army generals were proud men, honoured and respected beyond limits. Leaders like Tanaji Malusare, Dadaji Kakade, Netaji Palkar, Sidhoji Nimbalkar, Mokaji Naik, Suryaji Khedekar and Chandroji Indulkar were exceptional commanders of Shivaji. The army of the Maratha kingdom was a significant part of its social and political organisation. The recruitment and training of soldiers were generally very simple. Swarajya, freedom, was imparted with a sense of dedication in every soldier.

### **Training and Recruitment of Soldiers**

Effective training and selection of soldiers were critical to implementing Shivaji's revolutionary tactics. The military commanders and Maratha kings who came after him trained and recruited soldiers for each battle accordingly, whether a light skirmish, a small guerrilla attack, or a large-scale operation. The ability to adapt was essential. No army can remain effective and ready unless it has a constant supply of necessary provisions. Military logistics and supply chain management were, therefore, also extremely important.

Commanders selected and recruited soldiers from different parts of the huge Maratha kingdom to organize these guerrilla attacks and other actions. A few such raids that were launched successfully have been studied as representative examples of Shivaji's guerrilla warfare tactics. The challenges he faced also show how his tactics helped him face the huge and powerful Mughal forces.

### **Cultural Impact of Military Innovations**

The military innovations of Shivaji Maharaj shaped the cultural ethos of the Maratha Empire. The Maratha Empire experienced cultural evolution, exposure to luxury, and growing interest in art and festivals. Maritime trade during Shivaji's reign triggered economic growth, city development, and promoted an interest in art and literature. Distinct cultural identities within the empire adopted unique practices—upper-class Hindus engaged in elaborate ceremonies and cuisine, while the Maratha peasants embraced folk songs, dances, erotic literature, and festivals. These innovations transcended their military context, becoming enduring elements of Indian political and military lore. Western interest in guerrilla tactics burgeoned during World War II, as Axis armies encountered resistance in Canada and Russia. Indian nationalism adopted Shivaji's tactics in campaigns for

independence, a strategy later integrated into the Indian Army. Today, guerrilla warfare appeals to many developing nations, revolutionising warfare and influencing leaders worldwide.

### **Influence on Maratha Society**

Effective revolutionary leaders make a significant impact not only in the field of military but also on the entire cultural setup of their society. Shivaji Maharaj was a warrior of great calibre and a good administrator who made a huge impact on society through his military prowess. He was the first Indian warrior to utilize guerrilla warfare while drawing inspiration from Hindu epics and saints. This strategy completely devastated the fighting style of other Indian rulers who were reliant on Mughal or European methods of warfare. Shivaji's use of guerrilla warfare inspired later Maratha leaders such as the Peshwas.

The development of the Maratha Navy also had a significant influence on the society of that era. The navy was the protector and strength of the coastal areas. It destroyed other sea forces and emptied other coastal kingdoms. The port towns and their customs were under the navy's control, and it maintained the safety of the sea lanes and the trade routes along the coast. The navy's establishment infused new confidence in the coastal people. The series of forts built along the coastline not only served as watchtowers but also withstood the barbaric attacks of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British.

### **Legacy in Indian Military History**

Shivaji Maharaj's innovative military strategies left a lasting imprint on the history of Indian warfare. His tactics provided inspiration to subsequent Indian insurgencies, such as those during the rise of the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the revolts against British colonial rule. Shivaji's cultural significance permeates Maratha society, evident in the naming of Maharashtra's international airport in Pune as the 'Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport' and the widespread distribution of his portraits throughout western India. Modern interpretations celebrate these strategies as among the most effective of their time. Gurinder Singh Mann of the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Delhi observes that, lacking the military advantages of widespread cavalry and large standing armies, Shivaji nevertheless transformed military strategy and tactics, honed his forces into a formidable military unit, styled himself as a new Maratha emperor, and represented the Hindu king resolutely defying Mughal imperial power. In the contemporary context of global terrorism and insurgency, the United Service Institution of India suggests that Indian military strategists continue to

find Shivaji's tactical ingenuity relevant and informative for modern warfare.

### **Comparative Analysis with Contemporary Forces**

The wars did not occur in isolation. They were marked by the interaction of forces with diverse tactics. Emperor Aurangzeb's formidable horse-driven armies often engaged in direct confrontation. Following Shivaji's death, incursions by Afghani tribes compelled the Maratha empire to adopt strategies akin to guerrilla warfare. The effectiveness of the Maratha methods prompted the Mughal army to incorporate similar tactics. In the 18th century, the Marathas clashed with the British, whose distinct military approach differed from both the Mughal and Maratha styles. Ultimately, the British Empire utilized all three forms of warfare—direct, horse-driven conflict; guerrilla tactics; and formations fought by large bodies of men—to establish control over the Indian subcontinent.

Guerrilla warfare (from the Spanish for "little war") is a form of irregular warfare characterized by small groups (or sometimes individuals) using military tactics such as ambushes, sabotage, raids, petty warfare, hit-and-run tactics, and mobility to fight a larger and less-mobile traditional military. The establishing of the Maratha Navy to protect the coastline of Maharashtra from the Siddis of Janjira constituted another groundbreaking military tactic. This led to a significant battle in 1672 at the Jawhar fort, where the Siddis were decisively defeated. The enhanced naval strength of the Marathas bolstered trade and aided Shivaji's military endeavors.

### **Comparison with Mughal Military Tactics**

Military innovations of Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of the Maratha Empire in western India during the seventeenth century CE, notably the use of guerrilla warfare tactics and naval power, significantly altered the nature of warfare in the region. Although the expansion and consolidation of the Maratha Empire were achieved largely through the establishment of fortified administrative posts and conventional field battle tactics, guerrilla raids and naval combative operations caused considerable damage to the opposing forces, especially the Mughal forces. Before Shivaji, the Mughals had not experienced the impact of well-organized Maratha guerrilla troops, and the formidable naval fleet of the Marathas extending along the Konkan shore posed a great threat to Mughal shipping and coastal areas.

The Maratha military forces under Shivaji Maharaj operated in two different modes: conventional military strikes on larger enemy formations and headquarters, and guerrilla raids on small enemy detachments and isolated posts. When operating against the enemy's supply lines, the Maratha military establishment tried to support the

guerrilla operations either by siege warfare or by disturbing the opponent's internal lines of communication. Secret army ports were established along the shoreline to support the Maratha Navy and war boats that played a crucial role during these periods. Long-distance raids, guerrilla operations, and deep incursions into enemy territory were carried out only with the support of smaller army forts and fields towns of Army supplies.

#### **Influence on Future Indian Warfare**

The impact of Shivaji Maharaj's military innovations on subsequent Indian warfare cannot be overstated. His guerrilla tactics and naval strategies were employed with equal proficiency by the Indian armies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the very same techniques used by Shivaji to harass and stymie the larger and better equipped Mughal army were later employed to torture the British forces during the first war of Independence in 1857. Even in more peaceful times, the figure of Shivaji has continued to inspire many prominent Indian Army personnel and numerous commanders, including Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, have considered it an honour to visit Raigad, the ancestral capital of Shivaji, before embarking on military campaigns. Consequently, the military acumen displayed by Shivaji has ensured him a revered place in the whole of Indian military history. Modern military theorists and strategists can also derive valuable lessons in leadership, planning, and tactics from Shivaji's military campaigns. The popularity of his military exploits in contemporary popular culture has fuelled much historical research and a series of increasingly accurate interpretations of his achievements in the sphere of Indian warfare—primarily in Western India—has emerged. It is now generally acknowledged that these advances had a profound impact on the course of Indian history, particularly in terms of the gradual evolution and eventual development of the Maratha Empire into the dominant political power of the eighteenth century.

#### **Challenges Faced by Shivaji Maharaj**

During Shivaji Maharaj's reign, the Deshmukhs of the Deccan opposed him by aligning with the Mughals, resulting in significant opposition. The Mughals were consequently forced to deploy their entire army in the Malbar, reducing pressure on other fronts. The Deccan was rich in timber, essential for fortifications and maritime trade, yet forests remained largely underutilized and considered barren. During the 17th century, the Malabar region also served as a refuge for the Portuguese and Dutch, who offered monetary support to the Deshmukhs and Bande to destabilize

the region. The Deshmukhs razed the Deshmukh Fort in Satara and transported the timber to the Konkan's fertile areas, burning forests to eliminate shelter for Shivaji's guerrilla forces. However, riverine assistance provided by the local populace contradicted the Deshmukhs' objectives. The Maratha sovereign disregarded the command of the Mughals and Nizam shahs by indulging in behaviors unfavorable to them. The Malbar forests were kept to form an encircling ring around Sahyadri, providing a protective canopy for the forts enclosed within, enabling isolated forts to resist; and for the Mavlanas during the long guerrilla warfare. The safety of the supply lines was also ensured by this thick ring.

#### **Political Opposition**

Sher Shah Suri, Babur's grandson and founder of the Sur Dynasty in India, laid the strategic foundations of the Mughal Empire. As a pioneer around 1486 AD, Sher Shah employed guerrilla tactics to successfully challenge the formidable Mughal forces in India and to dislodge Humayun, establishing his own empire. From their stronghold in Delhi, the Mughals mounted a counteroffensive against the Deccan, leading Aurangzeb—then viceroy of the Deccan—to attempt to eliminate Shivaji. The Mughals controlled areas along the Krishna river and its surroundings contiguous to Shivaji's territory. They captured Golconda and Golconda forts, and actively co-operated with the Adilshahi Bahmani ruler Bijapur. The Bijapuri ruler was closely associated with Shahiste Khan before the latter became viceroy of the Deccan. The Maratha agency resided at Samner near Jalgaon until 1686. These combined forces intended to advance towards the Godavari plains through the Khandesh route. The internally torn Adilshahi Bahmani Sultanate supported the Sur Empire, which sought to retreat across the three rivers—Narmada, Godavari, and Krishna. The Mughals, allied with the Maratha Empire, covertly facilitated Shivaji's attempts against Adilshah and the neighboring Bijapuri Sultanate. Consistent with the military norms of the time, these great emperors and sultans employed unprincipled methods to subdue rebellions and viewed Shivaji as a real threat to their monarchies. The Babur Nama provides an intriguing account of the armed landscape during his era. Babur, following a battle, captured parts of Rajasthan and allied with Afridi and Khattak Pashtun tribesmen to neutralize Nagar Mal and Shah Muhammad. Throughout his hints at military activities, the presence of the Afghans was a constant, dominating the narrative, especially those associated with Pashtuns within his layout.

#### **Resource Constraints**



Sustaining a vast empire during centuries of constant warfare necessitates a complex, secure, and efficient provisioning and supply system. While victories instill morale within an army, desertion is frequently triggered by the lack of basic necessities such as food and clothing. Overcoming the maintenance of an army requires addressing the formidable task of assembling and financially supporting a standing force over prolonged periods.

It is within these considerations of logistics and its significant role in the Maratha conquests that Shivaji's military geniuses emerge. The fierceness of an attack rests in the resolve of the army, a quality achievable through effective military organization and a solid supply base. Indeed, geography and supply form the very pillars of war. Shivaji Maharaj recognized that a ruler lacking sufficient resources never remains an independent sovereign.

#### The Role of Espionage

Espionage played a significant role in Shivaji's warfare strategy. Shivaji employed a large group of spies who had the ability to change their appearance and dialects at will. This enabled them to infiltrate enemy territories undetected and gather crucial information. The knowledge gained through espionage allowed Shivaji to gain the element of surprise, plan strategic attacks and sabotage enemy plans. The psychological impact on enemy forces came from constant suspicion and confusion, enhancing Shivaji's defensive and offensive capabilities.

The information collected by spies covered every aspect of enemy operations including leadership, strategies, morale and weaknesses. This intelligence became the basis for Shivaji's ability to counter enemy moves and mount successful surprise attacks. Furthermore, the detailed understanding of political and military strengths ensured that corruption attempts by the enemies within the Maratha ranks were discovered and nipped in the bud. By effectively integrating espionage into his military strategy, Shivaji secured decisive victories against political giants with larger armies, fortifications, resources and experience.

#### Intelligence Gathering Techniques

The various methods of information collection used by Shivaji Maharaj and his commanders as part of their military operations deserve detailed description. Utilizing emissaries and spies, known as Tigala and Gudhyala, the state secured detailed, advance snapshots of enemy positions, geography of parched territories, local condition of people, hotels, and shops. Effective coordination with vessels moving along the coast paid rich dividends in the form of advance information about the approach of the enemy. The

strength of the reconnaissance troops, besides the soldiers trained in running, cycling, swimming, mountaineering, and horse riding, was another factor of great importance that contributed to the success of the military operations of the Marathas. The reconnaissance army was organized intelligently. Such surveyors were engaged in surveying the fort and the areas around the fort whenever the Maratha army was about to attack any hill fort of the enemy or set out for any other conquest. The intelligence obtained from such surveys saved the life of a soldier and time, money, and energy of the Maratha ruler.

#### Impact on Military Campaigns

Military campaigns were planned with resource allocation and provisioning as the center of focus. Raids, based on Shivaji's pioneering guerrilla-war tactics, were used to generate revenue as well as to weaken enemy positions. Raids were carefully planned based on the availability and location of enemy resources. Stealth and speed were essential to avoid large-scale battles with the powerful land armies of the Mughal Empire. Naval raids were launched to capture coastal areas and disrupt Luso-European control over the seas. These attacks focused on the ships, ports, main trade routes and settlements on the sea-coast.

The Maratha Navy was enhanced to not only defend the coast, but to launch attacks on the ports and territory of enemy lands. Small, maneuverable fighter crafts along with the Maratha method of attacking the enemy's rear pushed Navies to increase the number of war ships in the Western Ghats area. The idea of securing provisions was also extended to the supply chain through the creation of strong logistics management.

#### Shivaji Maharaj's Legacy

The military innovations initiated by Shivaji Maharaj have inspired numerous leaders and armies throughout history. The importance of naval power was further emphasized by Governor Arthur Wellesley during campaigns in southern India in 1803. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is widely regarded as the Father of the Indian Navy. In the 20th century, his legacy was inherited by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who established the Indian National Army with substantial support from the Japanese Navy. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru underscored the necessity of a strong Indian Navy, acknowledging its critical role ahead. During the Sino-Indian War of 1962, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized naval preparedness to the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard, recognizing that naval forces could play a pivotal role in such conflicts.

In a letter to the Commanding-in-Chief of the Air Force in September 1962, Nehru pointed out the

imperative need for the advancement of both the Navy and the Coast Guard. The Navy has since commemorated the 400th Birth Anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj with the issuance of commemorative stamps bearing his portrait. The anthem "Neela Seena Taara, Hamaara Siyava",

#### **Influence on Later Leaders**

Shivaji Maharaj created a model of administration that laid the foundation for the renowned Peshwas of Pune. By integrating the local people of Maharashtra as the principal performers in his administration, culture, and military, Shivaji Maharaj galvanized a spirit of valor and inspired subsequent generations of Maratha leaders and warriors. His innovative techniques of guerrilla warfare influenced the operational tactics of Syed Ahmad Shahid. Leaders such as Peshwa Balaji Bajirao, Raghunathrao, and even Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi applied Shivaji Maharaj's guerrilla strategies in their battles against the British Army.

The cultural sphere also absorbed the martial ethos of Shivaji Maharaj. Jaishankar Prasad's Hindi play *Siyaram*, which conceptualizes Shivaji Maharaj as a mass hero, directly draws inspiration from Bharatendu and has exerted profound influence on Hindi theatre. Modern historical funnies depict the Mumbai congress leader, Nana Patil, as a descendant of Shivaji Maharaj and instrumental in the Goa Liberation Movement. Propagandistic depictions, such as those in Bavaria University's 1910 film *The Tale of Shivaji*, accentuate the dramatic confrontations between Shivaji Maharaj and the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

#### **Cultural Representations in Literature and Art**

Long after the decline of the Maratha Empire, Shivaji Maharaj's military strategies shaped the warfare of later Indian rulers, especially in the Deccan region. Drawing inspiration from his pioneering use of guerrilla tactics and naval power, Malharrao Holkar, the chief of the Indore scindia in the eighteenth century, adapted and reapplied these methods to his own campaigns. The popularity of these reforms had a significant cultural impact and was often remembered in the tales of the British rulers in India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In this regard, the legend of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is unique in military history. It is not merely a historical figure feared and admired by the enemy and respected by men, but a god who shared both the struggles and aspirations of his people. All these diverse characteristics have found expression in the Temple of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at Sindhudurg, built on his centenary and designed by Gune Rangubhai No. 15, Kundankul Road Peth, Shirpur.

#### **Modern Interpretations of Shivaji's Tactics**

Shivaji Maharaj was a man of foresight: a vision he had half a millennium ago. According to Frederick Charles Danvers of the British Raj, precedents for guerrilla warfare are to be found in the early history of the Marathas of western India under their famous chieftain, Shivaji, who distinguished himself at the beginning of the seventeenth century by his sudden and swift attacks on the Bijapur army. Clausewitz advocates these tactics in the common style of warfare in mountainous districts and says: "For the enemy who has possession of the open and level country the advanced guards and vanguards of a corps mean comparatively little, as well as the different tactical lessons of a commander in the open field against a guerilla leader."

The role of the guerrilla in India was exceedingly important, especially during the Maratha struggle for independence. Shivaji organised that portion of his cavalry which might be called guerrilla horse with great skill. Impressed by the difficulties and dangers of marching through an enemy country, General Cunningham remarked that he had never yet seen a body of troops so arranged for march and yet so secure as the army under the command of the mounted guerrilla leader, Shivaji.

#### **Relevance in Contemporary Warfare**

##### **Relevance in Contemporary Warfare**

Modern discussions consider Shivaji Maharaj's military approach in terms of its continuing relevance. Shivaji's profound use of raiding actions, combined with highly successful resources against superior political and military resources, is indeed comparable with the modern concept of total war. Modern military thinkers have shown a great deal of interest in Shivaji's tactics, and his career is said to shine as a beacon-light for those fighting for national freedom anywhere in the world.

Guerrilla warfare—an age-old concept, deeply rooted in the past—continues to be in vogue in modern military operations. Shivaji Maharaj is often regarded as the Father of India's Guerrilla Warfare Movement (the term 'guerrilla' being used in its current sense), and his military system provides several guidelines for waging guerrilla wars. Many present-day freedom movements use Shivaji's leadership and tactics as inspiration. Guerrilla warfare, indeed, prevails today in most parts of the globe and is a threat to all established governments, compelling them to devise suitable answers and to evolve devices for their own security and protection. Shivaji's development of a navy during the 17th century laid the groundwork for future naval operations. This experience was echoed in the establishment of the Indian Navy in the 20th century. Indian military leadership continues to

revere the memory of Shivaji Maharaj—the great Maratha who not only inaugurated the guerrilla warfare methodology but also founded the Maratha Navy, hailed as the first Indian naval force and confronter of European marauders along the western coast of India.

#### **Lessons for Modern Military Strategy**

Shivaji Maharaj's military tactics and innovations offer several lessons for modern military commanders. Important among these are expenditure control, budget planning, manpower assignment, and allocation of supplies and resources for war. Manpower qualities and talents should be carefully harnessed. The objective of warfare should be expansion through winning wars rather than through fleeting territorial gains. Area and distance considerations during warfare matter a lot while planning attacking and retreating strategies. Arranging food supplies and the supply of weapons to the army is absolutely essential, and safeguarding these supply lines must be among the prime considerations of military commanders. Identifying activities of the enemy through the systematic use of spies to gather information about their movement and preparedness is extremely necessary. Effective use of military commanders in the tactics of war is essential to achieve success.

The importance of a navy to safeguard the nation from the attacks of the enemy, and the contribution of the Navy in safeguarding the nation and trade are other valuable lessons for military commanders. Moreover, strong forces can be created with the active involvement of the armed forces of friendly nations. Large enemy forces can be made ineffective by inflicting steep losses through the planned use of guerrilla warfare tactics adeptly suited to the geographical and other specific conditions. Natural resources should be utilized not only for their preservation but also for planning for war. By adopting careful economic practices and reforms, countries can save valuable money which can be effectively diverted towards the military budget. The same resources should be used to make the lives of the poor better.

#### **Conclusion**

Shivaji Maharaj's military innovations left an indelible imprint on the history of warfare in India. His tactics not only clashed with the prevalent norms but inaugurated an entirely new era in Indian warfare. Two facets assume particular significance—the employment of guerrilla warfare and the establishment of a naval force. Before him, forces in the subcontinent primarily relied on massed, heavily armed mediaeval cavalry, but Shivaji pioneered lighter cavalry units employed in irregular manoeuvres. Guerrilla tactics served Shivaji not only as an effective offensive strategy

but also as a means of survival against numerically superior invading forces. His creation of a naval force was equally innovative, considering the scant maritime traditions of Deccan rulers. With military foresight, he perceived the criticality of a naval line of defense and thus forged the Maratha Navy and the sea forts of coastal Maharashtra. Prior to this, Indian rulers scarcely cultivated naval forces beyond mere customs enforcement and coastal protection.

Shivaji's military advancements transformed warfare in India. His tactics unsettled established military paradigms and ushered in a novel phase in the subcontinent's martial history. Reduced emphasis on massed, heavily armed cavalry gave way to nimble and mobile horsemen. Coastal forts assumed strategic primacy, offering secure havens and robust defenses. The establishment of a Maratha navy disrupted and safeguarded coastal trade against hostile incursions. Military commanders attained unprecedented importance, aided by an expansive espionage mechanism that relayed information from strategic vantage points within enemy armies. Guillotine warfare and the Maratha navy emerged as two foundational pillars undergirding the survival and consolidation of the Maratha confederacy in India's historical annals.

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