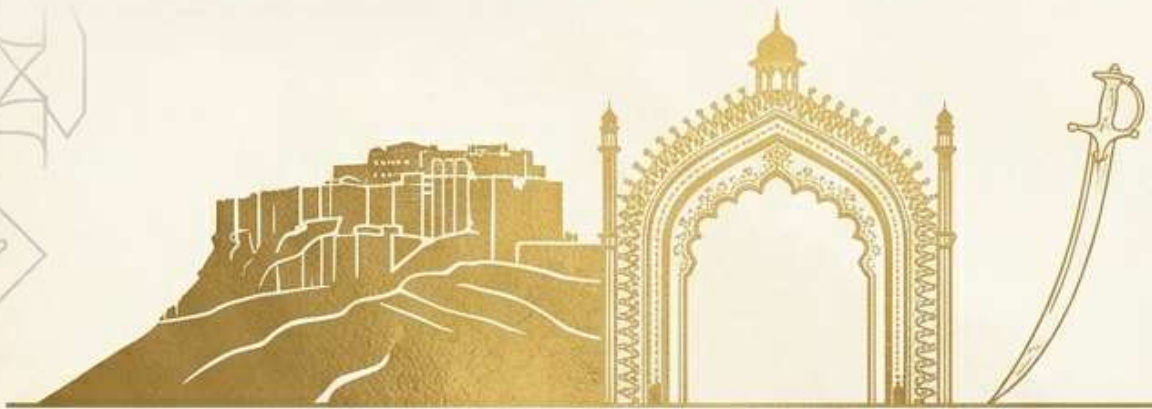


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Maratha Empire — Shivaji to Peshwas

Subtitle: 1646–1818 CE · Shivaji's career · Ashtapradhan · Chauth and Sardeshmukhi · Peshwa expansion · Third Battle of Panipat · decline

● **MEDIUM — 4–6 PYQS (LAST DECADE) — QUESTIONS CLUSTER AROUND THE ASHTAPRADHAN'S EIGHT MINISTERS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS, CHAUTH/SARDESHMUKHI DEFINITIONS, BAJI RAO I'S NORTH INDIAN EXPANSION, AND THE THIRD BATTLE OF PANIPAT (1761)**

WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS

- **PYQ pattern:** Ashtapradhan — which minister had which function (Peshwa vs. Amatya vs. Sachiv; the Senapati vs. Sar-i-Naubat distinction); Chauth = one-fourth of revenue; Sardeshmukhi = additional 10%; coronation date (1674); the Peshwa who was greatest (Baji Rao I); Third Battle of Panipat — combatants (Marathas vs. Ahmad Shah Abdali), year (1761)
- **Recent trend (2023–2026):** Maratha administrative system tested more analytically; Shivaji's navy as the first organised Indian naval force; the Maratha Confederacy's structure (five chiefs) tested; Tarabai's role in sustaining Maratha resistance under Aurangzeb tested as a women's history question
- **Biggest traps:**
 - **Peshwa** was the prime minister in the Ashtapradhan — NOT the head of the army (that was the **Senapati**); the Peshwa later became the de facto ruler but originally was one of eight ministers
 - **Chauth** was collected from territories Shivaji did NOT directly control — it was a tribute/protection payment, NOT a land revenue from his own territories
 - **Third Battle of Panipat (1761):** Marathas vs. **Ahmad Shah Abdali** — NOT the Mughals; the Mughal emperor was a figurehead by 1761; Abdali led an Afghan-Rohilla force
 - **Baji Rao I** (r. 1720–1740) was the greatest Peshwa — NOT Balaji Vishwanath (first effective Peshwa) or Balaji Baji Rao (Nana Saheb, under whom Panipat happened)
 - Shivaji's coronation was in **1674** at Raigad — NOT at Pratapgad or any other fort
- **Strategy:** Shivaji's career as a narrative chain (forts → Afzal Khan → Surat → Purandar → Agra escape → coronation). Ashtapradhan as a locked eight-minister list. Chauth and Sardeshmukhi as a locked pair. Peshwa succession chain with Baji Rao I as the peak. Third Battle of Panipat as the turning point.

CHRONOLOGICAL ANCHOR — MARATHA EMPIRE

- **1627** — Shivaji born at Shivneri fort (near Junnar)
- **1630–32** — Deccan famine; Shahji Bhonsle (Shivaji's father) in Bijapur's service
- **1646** — Shivaji captures **Torna fort** — his first independent military action; age 16
- **1659** — Afzal Khan (Bijapur commander) killed by Shivaji at Pratapgad; Bijapur threat ended
- **1663** — **Shaista Khan** (Mughal commander) humiliated; loses finger in night raid; transferred
- **1664** — First sack of **Surat** (Mughal port); three days of plunder
- **1665** — **Treaty of Purandar:** Shivaji surrenders 23 of 35 forts to Jai Singh; submits nominally
- **1666** — Shivaji visits Agra; **escapes in fruit baskets**; resumes independence
- **1670** — Second sack of Surat; larger plunder than first
- **1674** — **Shivaji crowned Chhatrapati** at Raigad; formal sovereignty declared
- **1676–80** — Southern campaigns into Tanjore, Jinji, Karnataka; Vellore captured

- **1680** — Shivaji dies at Raigad (April 3, 1680)
- **1680–89** — Sambhaji succeeds; captured and executed by Aurangzeb (1689)
- **1700** — Rajaram dies; **Tarabai** (his widow) becomes regent; guerrilla resistance continues
- **1707** — Aurangzeb dies; **Shahu** (Shivaji's grandson) released from Mughal captivity
- **1713** — **Balaji Vishwanath** becomes effective Peshwa; first of the dominant Peshwa line
- **1720** — **Baji Rao I** becomes Peshwa; the greatest Maratha expansion begins
- **1737** — Baji Rao I leads a **raid on Delhi** — demonstrates Maratha reach into the Mughal heartland
- **1740** — Baji Rao I dies; succeeded by **Balaji Baji Rao (Nana Saheb)**
- **1761** — **Third Battle of Panipat**: Marathas defeated by **Ahmad Shah Abdali**; Vishwasrao (heir) and Viswasrao killed; catastrophic Maratha defeat
- **1772** — Madhavrao I dies; decline of Peshwa authority accelerates
- **1775–82** — First Anglo-Maratha War; Treaty of Salbai
- **1803–05** — Second Anglo-Maratha War; Mahadji Shinde's successors defeated
- **1817–18** — Third Anglo-Maratha War; the Maratha Confederacy dismembered; Peshwa Baji Rao II surrenders

1. BACKGROUND — SHIVAJI'S ORIGINS AND EARLY CAREER

1.1 Family and Early Life

Shahji Bhonsle (Shivaji's father) served the Bijapur Sultanate and held a jagir in the Poona (*Pune*) region. Shivaji was born at **Shivneri fort** in 1627 (some sources give 1630 — the exact date is debated). His mother **Jijabai** (daughter of the Sindkher chief Lakhujirao Jadhav) is credited by tradition with instilling in Shivaji a deep sense of martial values and Hindu religious identity.

Dadaji Konddev: Shahji's administrator of the Poona jagir; served as Shivaji's guardian and practical mentor in his childhood years; taught him administration, revenue management, and military organisation before Shivaji's independent military career began

Shivaji's social and religious identity:

The question of Shivaji's Kshatriya (*rajput*) status was politically important at the time of his coronation (1674):

- The Bhonsle family were Marathas — a social community of mixed warrior-cultivator origin; their claim to Kshatriya status was disputed by Brahmin scholars
- For Shivaji's coronation as *Chhatrapati* (sovereign king) to be religiously legitimate, he needed acknowledged Kshatriya status — only a Kshatriya could be consecrated as king by the Hindu ritual
- He hired the Benares scholar **Gaga Bhatt** (Vishweshwar Bhatt) to trace and validate a genealogy connecting the Bhonsle family to the Sisodiya Rajputs of Mewar; the genealogy was accepted and the coronation proceeded

1.2 Early Military Career (1646–1659)

Shivaji's early campaigns were conducted with a small personal force, primarily in the hill territory of the Western Ghats — terrain that enormously favoured his style of warfare over the conventional Bijapur and Mughal armies:

- **Torna fort (1646):** Shivaji's first independent conquest; captured from the Bijapur Sultanate; Shivaji was approximately 16–19 years old; the fort's treasury funded subsequent campaigns
- **Rajgad (1647):** Captured; became his capital before the construction of Raigad
- **Kondana/Sinhagad (1647):** Captured from the Bijapur Sultanate
- By 1655 Shivaji controlled a substantial territory in the Western Ghats and the Konkan coast — large enough to alarm Bijapur

The Bijapur context — why Shivaji could expand:

Shivaji's early career coincided with a period of Bijapur Sultanate weakness that he systematically exploited:

- **Ali Adil Shah II** became Sultan of Bijapur as a child (1656); the Bijapur court was paralysed by regent factionalism and could not mount a coherent military response to Shivaji's early fort-captures
- The Bijapur Sultanate was simultaneously facing Mughal pressure from the north (Aurangzeb's Deccan viceroyalty, 1652–58) and Maratha pressure from within — the two threats pulled Bijapur's military capacity in opposing directions
- Shivaji also had family connections within the Bijapur system (his father Shahji served Bijapur) which gave him intelligence access and a degree of informal protection in his early campaigns
- When Bijapur finally reacted — first with diplomatic pressure, then with Afzal Khan's campaign (1659) — Shivaji was already too well established in the Western Ghats terrain for a conventional army to dislodge

2.1 Afzal Khan Incident (1659)

The Bijapur Sultanate sent **Afzal Khan** — one of its most experienced commanders — with a large army to suppress Shivaji. Afzal Khan was reportedly physically enormous and a veteran of many campaigns.

At a parley arranged at **Pratapgad**, the two met in a tent:

- Afzal Khan attempted to crush Shivaji in an embrace (according to Maratha accounts); Shivaji, anticipating treachery, was wearing chain mail under his clothing and carried concealed weapons
- Shivaji killed Afzal Khan with **baghnakh** (tiger claws — a weapon of curved steel blades fitted over the fingers) and a short sword (*bichwa*)
- Shivaji's forces, waiting in ambush around the parley tent, immediately attacked the Bijapur army; the army was routed

THE AFZAL KHAN INCIDENT IS THE MOST CONTESTED EVENT IN SHIVAJI HISTORIOGRAPHY. JADUNATH SARKAR (WORKING FROM PERSIAN SOURCES, PRIMARILY THE BIJAPUR CHRONICLES) ARGUED THAT AFZAL KHAN WAS THE VICTIM AND SHIVAJI THE AGGRESSOR — THAT SHIVAJI STRUCK FIRST. G.S. SARDESAI (WORKING FROM MARATHI SOURCES) ARGUED THE OPPOSITE. THE PERSIAN SOURCES HAVE BIJAPUR COURT BIAS; THE MARATHI SOURCES HAVE MARATHA PATRIOTIC BIAS. THE HISTORICAL TRUTH IS IRRECOVERABLE; WHAT IS HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT IS THAT AFTER PRATAPGAD, SHIVAJI'S POWER WAS UNMISTAKABLE.

2.2 Shaista Khan Incident (1663)

Aurangzeb sent his uncle **Shaista Khan** with a massive Mughal force to suppress Shivaji. Shaista Khan occupied Shivaji's own former capital at Poona and established his headquarters in Shivaji's palace (Lal Mahal).

Shivaji led a small force on a night raid directly into the city — exploiting local knowledge and using a wedding procession as cover to enter the city gates without suspicion. They attacked Shaista Khan in his bedroom; Shaista Khan escaped through a window but lost the tips of his fingers to Shivaji's sword. Aurangzeb was humiliated and transferred Shaista Khan to Bengal.

2.3 Sack of Surat (1664 and 1670)

Shivaji sacked **Surat** twice — deliberately targeting the Mughal empire's most important commercial port:

- **1664:** Three-day raid; the Mughal governor fled; the English and Dutch factories were spared (Shivaji reportedly left them untouched, recognising the Europeans' neutrality); the city's wealthy merchants bore the brunt
- **1670:** Second sack, with even larger plunder; explicitly framed as retaliation for Aurangzeb's temple demolitions at Varanasi and Mathura (1669–70)
- The sacks had both economic and psychological impact — they demonstrated that the Mughal state could not protect its commercial heartland from Maratha raids; the psychological damage to Mughal prestige was as significant as the material loss

2.4 Treaty of Purandar (1665)

Aurangzeb sent **Mirza Raja Jai Singh** — a Rajput mansabdar, significantly — to negotiate with Shivaji after the failure of direct military pressure:

- Shivaji agreed to surrender **23 of his 35 forts** and their territories; he retained 12 forts
- He agreed to serve the Mughal empire with 5,000 cavalry and his own personal service
- In return, his son **Sambhaji** was given a mansab of 5,000

This was the low point of Shivaji's career. He had surrendered the bulk of his territorial gains.

2.5 Agra Visit and Escape (1666)

Shivaji came to Aurangzeb's court at Agra to formally present himself as a Mughal vassal. He was placed in the line of *amir*-rank nobles rather than being received with special honour — a calculated insult.

Shivaji protested loudly, was placed under house arrest, and then — in the most famous episode of his career — **escaped concealed in large baskets** (the tradition says fruit or sweetmeat baskets sent out as charitable donations from his residence). He made his way south disguised as a *sadhu* (ascetic), passing through Mathura and eventually rejoining his forces in Maharashtra. Sambhaji was left behind (safely) under the care of a trusted noble.

The escape was a remarkable intelligence and planning achievement. It was also a massive propaganda victory — it made Aurangzeb look foolish and Shivaji look invincible.

2.6 Coronation (1674)

On **June 6, 1674**, Shivaji was crowned **Chhatrapati** ("Protector of the Umbrella" — an ancient Indian royal title implying independent sovereignty) at **Raigad fort**:

- The ceremony was conducted by **Gaga Bhatt** of Benares; an elaborate Vedic coronation ritual lasting several days

- Shivaji took the title **Haindava Dharmodharak** ("Protector of Hindu Dharma") in addition to Chhatrapati
- The coronation was politically significant because it was not merely symbolic — it was a formal claim to independent sovereignty outside the Mughal imperial hierarchy; Shivaji was no longer a rebellious Mughal vassal but an independent sovereign

2.7 Southern Campaigns (1676–1680)

In his last active years Shivaji turned south — raiding into the Karnataka, Tanjore, and Jinji regions:

- These campaigns brought him into the territories of his half-brother **Vyankoji Bhonsle** (who had inherited Shahji's Tanjore jagir from Bijapur and ruled independently); Shivaji met him and reached an agreement dividing territory
- He captured **Jinji** (Gingee fort, Tamil Nadu) — a strategically important fort that would become Maratha resistance headquarters under Rajaram after 1689
- He captured **Vellore** and raided as far south as Madurai

Shivaji died at Raigad on April 3, 1680, at approximately 52 years old — possibly from illness (fever and dysentery are recorded); possibly from exhaustion after decades of continuous campaigning.

3. SHIVAJI'S ADMINISTRATION

3.1 The Ashtapradhan — Eight Ministers

Shivaji organised his administration around a council of **eight ministers** — the *Ashtapradhan*. This is the most tested administrative feature of Shivaji's state.

All eight Ashtapradhan ministers and their functions:

TITLE	FUNCTION
Peshwa	Prime minister; general administration; state affairs
Amatya	Finance minister; revenue; accounts
Waqiavis (Mantri)	Court chronicler; palace affairs; record of royal orders
Sachiv (Shuru Nawis)	Correspondence; royal letters; diplomatic communications
Senapati (Sarnaubat)	Commander-in-chief of the army
Pandit Rao	Head of religious affairs; charity; appointments of priests
Nyayadhish	Chief justice; head of the judiciary
Dabir	Foreign affairs; diplomatic correspondence with foreign powers

THE PESHWA WAS THE PRIME MINISTER — NOT THE MILITARY COMMANDER. THE SENAPATI (ALSO CALLED SARNAUBAT) WAS THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. AFTER SHIVAJI'S DEATH, THE PESHWA EVOLVED INTO THE DE FACTO RULER — BUT IN SHIVAJI'S ORIGINAL ASHTAPRADHAN DESIGN, THE PESHWA WAS FIRST AMONG EQUALS IN A COUNCIL, NOT A SUPREME COMMANDER.

Nature of the Ashtapradhan:

- Unlike the Mughal mansabdari system, the Ashtapradhan ministers were paid cash salaries — not revenue assignments (jagirs); Shivaji's deliberate choice to pay in cash was designed to prevent the ministers from developing independent territorial power bases
- In practice the Ashtapradhan functioned as an advisory council; Shivaji retained final authority; no single minister dominated

3.2 Revenue System — Chauth and Sardeshmukhi

Two distinctive revenue levies defined Maratha external taxation:

Chauth ("one-fourth"):

- A levy of **one-fourth (25%)** of a territory's assessed land revenue, collected from areas **outside** Shivaji's direct control
- Paid as protection money — in return for the payment, Shivaji guaranteed that the territory would not be raided; in practice it was tribute extracted under threat of military action
- Initially applied to the Mughal and Bijapur territories bordering Maratha-held areas; later systematised and extended across a much larger region by the Peshwas
- **Key distinction:** Chauth was NOT collected from Shivaji's own territories (where he collected regular land revenue called *mulguzari*); it was the levy on external territories under Maratha military pressure

Sardeshmukhi ("head village officer's share"):

- An additional **10%** levy over and above the regular land revenue
- Shivaji claimed this as the hereditary right of the *Sar Deshmukh* (paramount village headman) of Maharashtra — a traditional entitlement he asserted applied across the whole of the Deccan
- Combined, Chauth (25%) + Sardeshmukhi (10%) = 35% of assessed revenue extracted from subject territories without direct administration

THE CHAUTH AND SARDESHMUKHI SYSTEM WAS ECONOMICALLY SOPHISTICATED — IT ALLOWED THE MARATHA STATE TO EXTRACT REVENUE FROM A VAST TERRITORY WITHOUT BEARING THE ADMINISTRATIVE COST OF ACTUALLY GOVERNING IT. BUT IT WAS ALSO DEEPLY EXTRACTIVE — THE COMBINATION OF 35% EXTRACTION ON TOP OF THE LOCAL RULER'S OWN REVENUE DEMANDS CREATED SERIOUS PEASANT DISTRESS IN REGIONS UNDER MARATHA MILITARY PRESSURE. JADUNATH SARKAR IN HIS ASSESSMENT OF MARATHA RULE EMPHASISED THIS EXTRACTIVE DIMENSION; NATIONALIST HISTORIANS LIKE G.S. SARDESAI EMPHASISED THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT.

Revenue in Shivaji's own territories — the *Watan* and *Mokasa* system:

Shivaji's directly administered territories operated on a different revenue basis from the Chauth extraction zones:

- **Mulguzari:** The standard land revenue collected from peasants in Shivaji's own territory; assessed at roughly one-third of produce; the primary revenue source for his state's internal budget
- **Watan system:** The hereditary rights (*watan*) of the *deshmukh* (district revenue headman) and *deshpande* (district accountant) — traditional Deccan revenue intermediaries who held heritable claims to a share of the revenue and to their administrative positions; Shivaji attempted to limit their power (he could not eliminate them — they were too deeply embedded in local society) and brought them under state supervision
- **Mokasa:** Revenue assignments given to Maratha military officers (*sarnobats*, *hazaris*) in lieu of cash salary — structurally similar to the Sultanate iqta and the Mughal jagir; Shivaji's mokasa holders were required to maintain cavalry contingents and present at muster, identical to the iqtadar/jagirdar obligation

- **Kulkarni** (village accountant): The lowest level of the revenue hierarchy; hereditary; maintained village records across generations; indispensable for actual tax collection; even when Maratha armies swept through and Mughal governors replaced them, the kulkarni families kept the land records and continued their function

The Chitpavan Brahmin administrative class:

Shivaji himself drew on Maratha military communities for officers but relied on Brahmin administrators — particularly the **Chitpavan Brahmin** (*Konkanastha Brahmin*) community — for revenue assessment, correspondence, and financial management:

- The Chitpavan Brahmins were originally a small community from the Konkan coast; under Shivaji they rose to prominence as administrators; under the Peshwas (themselves Chitpavan Brahmins) they became the empire's dominant administrative and eventually political class
- The Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath, Baji Rao I, Balaji Baji Rao, and all subsequent Peshwas were Chitpavan Brahmins from the Bhatt family — creating a situation where a Brahmin family held hereditary control over the prime ministership of a state originally founded by a Maratha warrior; the caste politics of this arrangement created internal tensions within the Maratha polity throughout the Peshwa period

3.3 Military Organisation

Cavalry (*Bargir* and *Silahadar*):

- **Bargir**: State-supplied cavalry — horse and equipment provided by the state; paid a fixed salary; more reliable for sustained campaigns
- **Silahadar**: Self-equipped cavalry — the horseman provided his own horse and weapons; paid a higher salary to cover equipment costs; used for rapid raiding
- Shivaji favoured the bargir system for his permanent force because it gave the state direct control over the cavalry and prevented individual commanders from becoming independent through ownership of their horses

Infantry (*Paikhamma/Mawali*):

- Shivaji recruited heavily from the **Mawali** hill communities — the indigenous cultivator-warrior communities of the Western Ghats who had intimate knowledge of the terrain
- This gave Shivaji's infantry a critical advantage in the Western Ghats and Konkan hill country — they could operate in terrain where Mughal and Bijapur cavalry could not follow

The Navy — Shivaji's most innovative military institution:

- Shivaji built the first organised Indian naval force since antiquity — a fleet of warships to control the Konkan coast
- Built and maintained **ghurab** (large warships) and **gallivat** (smaller, faster vessels) at several Konkan ports; the most important naval base was at **Murud Janjira** (though he never actually captured the Janjira island fort, which was held by the Sidi — Abyssinian sailors)
- The purpose: controlling the sea-lanes along the Konkan coast to prevent the Mughals and Bijapur from supplying their coastal garrisons and to extract revenue from coastal trade
- Shivaji appointed **Mainak Bhandari** (later Daulat Khan) as his first Admiral (*Darya Sarang*)
- His navy contested Portuguese, Mughal, and Siddi naval power on the Konkan coast
- **Kanhoji Angre** (1669–1729): The greatest Maratha admiral; Shivaji's naval tradition's most capable heir; as *Sarkhel* (Admiral-in-Chief) under the Peshwas, he controlled the entire Konkan

coast; the English, Portuguese, and Dutch all failed to defeat him; he extracted tribute from European and Indian merchant ships alike; described by the British as a "pirate" — from the Maratha perspective, he was enforcing Maratha maritime sovereignty; his death in 1729 marked the beginning of the Maratha navy's decline

Ganimi Kava — the tactical doctrine:

Shivaji's warfare was guided by a distinctive tactical philosophy known as *Ganimi Kava* ("enemy's tactics" — i.e., using the enemy's own weakness against him):

- Avoid pitched battles against superior forces on flat terrain; draw the enemy into hill country where numbers count for less than mobility and terrain knowledge
- Attack supply lines and communications rather than fortified positions directly
- Strike fast, withdraw before the enemy can concentrate; never allow the enemy to fix your position
- Use local knowledge and local loyalty as a force multiplier — Maratha soldiers knew every pass, every ravine, every water source in the Western Ghats
- This doctrine explains why Mughal numerical superiority never translated into the decisive victories that should have been achievable — Aurangzeb's 25-year Deccan campaign (1682–1707) ended in strategic failure despite his overwhelming resources, because the Marathas refused to fight on Mughal terms

Fort system:

Shivaji inherited a tradition of hill-fort (*garh*) construction in Maharashtra and extended it systematically:

- At his death he reportedly controlled **250+ forts** — though many were small hill positions rather than large fortifications
- The fort system served as refuge, treasury, arsenal, and administrative base
- **Raigad** (capital fort): Built on an isolated plateau; the most secure of his forts; his coronation was held here; he died here
- **Pratapgad**: The fort above which the Afzal Khan parley occurred; its strategic position in the Western Ghats made it the western anchor of Maratha power
- **Sinhagad** (Kondana): Recaptured from the Mughals in 1670 by Tanaji Malusare (Shivaji's commander, who died in the assault — the most celebrated individual act of bravery in Maratha tradition)

4. POST-SHIVAJI — STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL (1680–1707)

4.1 Sambhaji (1680–1689)

Sambhaji (Shivaji's elder son) was personally brave but politically erratic — he executed several experienced officials and alienated key supporters. However, his nine-year reign kept the Maratha state alive against Aurangzeb's overwhelming pressure:

- Provided refuge to **Prince Akbar** (Aurangzeb's rebel son) in 1681 — a bold political gesture that enraged Aurangzeb
- Defeated several Mughal commanders; kept the guerrilla war alive in the Western Ghats
- **Captured and executed by Aurangzeb (1689)**: Betrayed to Mughal forces by members of his own court; subjected to torture for refusing to convert to Islam; executed at Tulapur (near Pune) on

March 11, 1689; his brutal death made him a Maratha martyr

4.2 Rajaram and Tarabai (1689–1707)

After Sambhaji's capture, the Marathas enthroned Sambhaji's younger brother **Rajaram** at Raigad; when the Mughals closed in, Rajaram escaped to **Jinji fort** (Tamil Nadu) — the fort Shivaji had captured in his southern campaigns — which became the Maratha headquarters in exile for eleven years (1689–1700):

- Aurangzeb besieged Jinji for eight years (1690–98) without taking it — a remarkable defensive achievement
- After Jinji fell, Rajaram moved to Maharashtra; died in 1700 at Sinhagad

Tarabai (Rajaram's widow) assumed the regency for her infant son Shivaji II and continued the Maratha resistance for seven more years until Aurangzeb's death (1707):

- Organised guerrilla warfare on multiple fronts simultaneously; the Mughal army controlled forts but could not hold the countryside
- Her military and administrative management during the most desperate period of Maratha history represents one of the most remarkable instances of female political leadership in Indian history

4.3 Shahu and the Peshwa Arrangement (1707–1749)

Shahu (Sambhaji's son, who had been taken prisoner by Aurangzeb at age 7 in 1689 and held captive for 18 years) was released by Aurangzeb's successor Bahadur Shah I in 1707 as part of a policy of conciliating the Marathas:

- Shahu's release triggered a civil war between himself and Tarabai; Shahu eventually prevailed (1714) and established himself at **Satara** as the legitimate Chhatrapati
- Tarabai continued resistance from Kolhapur; the Maratha state split into the Satara and Kolhapur branches — a division that persisted

The Peshwa arrangement:

Shahu was a skilled politician who recognised that effective administration required delegating power to capable ministers. He appointed **Balaji Vishwanath Bhonsle** (a Chitpavan Brahmin) as Peshwa in 1713:

- This began the hereditary Peshwa dynasty — each Peshwa nominated his son as successor; the Chhatrapati's role became ceremonial while the Peshwa exercised real power
- The capital effectively shifted from **Satara** (the Chhatrapati's seat) to **Pune** (the Peshwa's seat)

5. THE PESHWA PERIOD (1713–1818)

5.1 Balaji Vishwanath (1713–1720) — The First Effective Peshwa

Balaji Vishwanath was the first Peshwa to establish hereditary control over the office:

- Negotiated the **1719 Mughal agreement** directly with the Sayyid brothers (the Mughal kingmakers); extracted a *farman* from the Mughal emperor recognising Maratha rights to collect

Chauth and Sardeshmukhi from the six Deccan provinces — a formal imperial sanction for Maratha revenue extraction across the Deccan

- This agreement was the formal acknowledgement that Mughal authority in the Deccan was nominal; the Marathas were the effective power south of the Vindhyas

5.2 Bajji Rao I (1720–1740) — The Greatest Peshwa

Bajji Rao I is universally regarded as the greatest Peshwa and one of the most brilliant generals in Indian history. He reportedly never lost a battle in his 20-year career as Peshwa.

Strategic vision:

Bajji Rao argued explicitly that the Mughals were finished as a power — the Marathas should project north, not consolidate south:

"Let us strike at the trunk of the withering tree, and the branches will fall of themselves." — attributed to Bajji Rao I

Major campaigns and expansion:

Malwa (1723–28): Repeated campaigns established Maratha dominance over Malwa (central India); defeated Mughal-appointed governors; Maratha revenue extraction from Malwa began

Battle of Palkhed (February 28, 1728) — Bajji Rao I's tactical masterpiece:

- The Nizam of Hyderabad (Nizam-ul-Mulk) marched north with a large army to reassert Mughal authority over Malwa and drive out the Marathas
- Rather than confronting the Nizam's army directly, Bajji Rao I executed a strategic manoeuvre: he marched his cavalry **around** the Nizam's force and directly toward Hyderabad — threatening the Nizam's own capital
- The Nizam was forced to abandon his offensive and rush south to protect Hyderabad; Bajji Rao I intercepted him at **Palkhed** near Aurangabad; with the Nizam's army exhausted and cut off from supplies, the Treaty of Palkhed was signed
- The Nizam acknowledged Maratha rights to Malwa and the Deccan Chauth; this was a non-battle victory — Bajji Rao I won by controlling geography, not by winning a pitched engagement

Bundela alliance and Chhatrasal (1728–29):

- Raja **Chhatrasal** of Bundelkhand (central India) had fought the Mughals for decades; when the Mughal-allied commander Muhammad Khan Bangash besieged him in 1728, Chhatrasal sent an appeal to Bajji Rao I in verse
- Bajji Rao I marched north rapidly and rescued Chhatrasal; Muhammad Khan Bangash was forced to withdraw
- In gratitude, Chhatrasal gave Bajji Rao I one-third of his kingdom (including the diamond-rich territory around Panna), his daughter **Mastani** in marriage, and access to Bundelkhand as a base for northern operations — the strategic significance far exceeded the personal relationship that has dominated popular memory of this episode

Gujarat (1730): Established Maratha presence in Gujarat against the Mughal viceroy; the Gaekwads were installed as Maratha representatives, eventually becoming the Gaekwad dynasty of Baroda

Chimaji Appa's Portuguese campaign — capture of Vasai/Bassein (1739):

- Bajji Rao I's younger brother **Chimaji Appa** commanded the Maratha campaign against Portuguese coastal positions in the Konkan

- The capture of **Vasai (Bassein) fort** (February 1739) was the most significant Maratha military achievement against a European power — a well-fortified Portuguese position held since 1534, taken after a prolonged siege
- Vasai's capture gave the Marathas direct control of the northern Konkan coast; it was a major blow to Portuguese commercial and military power in western India; it also demonstrated that Maratha military capacity extended to European-style fort-reduction, not just guerrilla warfare
- Chimaji Appa reportedly showed respect for the Portuguese churches at Vasai after the conquest — an episode cited by nationalist historians as evidence of Maratha religious tolerance

Raid on Delhi (1737): Bajji Rao I led a lightning cavalry raid and **reached the outskirts of Delhi** — demonstrating the Mughal capital's military indefensibility; the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah was powerless to resist

Battle of Bhopal (1737): Defeated a large Mughal army at Bhopal; extracted the **Treaty of Durai Sarai** by which the Mughals formally ceded Malwa to the Marathas

Deccan (ongoing): Consistently pressured the Nizam of Hyderabad; the Nizam was the most powerful non-Maratha Deccan power

Personal life:

Baji Rao controversially took a second wife — **Mastani** (daughter of the Bundelkhand Raja Chhatrasal and reportedly a Muslim woman); his Brahmin family and the Peshwa establishment strongly opposed this union; the social-religious controversy around Mastani became a famous episode in Maratha cultural history

Baji Rao I died of fever in April 1740 at age 39 — at the peak of his power, leaving an empire that stretched from the Deccan to the Gangetic plain.

5.3 Balaji Baji Rao (Nana Saheb) (1740–1761)

Baji Rao I's son continued the expansion:

- **Conquest of Orissa (1751)**: The Marathas captured Orissa; the Mughal emperor ceded formal rights; the Maratha empire reached the Bay of Bengal
- **Bengal raid (1742)**: The Maratha cavalry raided deep into Bengal under Raghuji Bhonsle; the terror of these raids (*Maratha ditch* in Calcutta was built partly to protect against them) created lasting fear of Maratha power in eastern India
- **Punjab (1758)**: A Maratha force under Raghunathrao briefly captured Lahore and Peshawar from Ahmad Shah Abdali — the maximum northern extent of Maratha power, and the overreach that provoked the final confrontation

Third Battle of Panipat (January 14, 1761):

Ahmad Shah Abdali (Afghan ruler, also called Ahmad Shah Durrani) had been repeatedly invited by Rohilla Afghan chiefs and the Nawab of Awadh to counter Maratha expansion in north India.

The Maratha army under **Viswasrao** (Balaji Baji Rao's son and heir) and **Sadashivrao Bhau** (Vishwasrao's uncle and the chief commander) marched north with an enormous force including artillery and a large non-combatant train:

Why the Marathas lost:

- **Supply failure**: The Maratha force was far from its base; Abdali controlled all supply routes to the north; the Maratha army was effectively starving for weeks before the battle

- **Afghan cavalry superiority:** Abdali's Afghan horsemen were better suited to the north Indian plains; the Maratha cavalry's strength was in guerrilla warfare and rapid raiding, not in set-piece battle on flat terrain
- **Artillery mismanagement:** Despite having significant artillery, the Marathas' guns were immobilised when the battle opened; their artillery commander **Ibrahim Khan Gardi** (a Muslim) was killed early in the fighting
- **Encirclement:** Abdali used his cavalry to encircle the Maratha flanks; the centre was then destroyed in detail

The casualties: Both **Vishwasrao** and **Sadashivrao Bhau** were killed; an estimated 28,000 Maratha soldiers died; the non-combatant train (which had included courtiers, merchants, and pilgrims) was massacred

Balaji Baji Rao received the news at Pune and reportedly never recovered; he died in June 1761, three months after Panipat.

THE THIRD BATTLE OF PANIPAT IS THE CLEAREST EXAMPLE IN INDIAN HISTORY OF STRATEGIC OVEREXTENSION — THE MARATHAS HAD EXPANDED TOO FAR, TOO FAST, WITH SUPPLY LINES TOO THIN TO SUSTAIN A MAJOR PITCHED BATTLE IN THE FAR NORTH AGAINST A SUPERIOR CAVALRY FORCE. JADUNATH SARKAR CALLED IT THE GREATEST MILITARY DISASTER IN MARATHA HISTORY. WHAT IT DID NOT DO, CONTRARY TO POPULAR PERCEPTION, WAS END MARATHA POWER PERMANENTLY — THE MARATHAS RECOVERED REMARKABLY QUICKLY AND REMAINED A MAJOR POWER FOR ANOTHER 57 YEARS.

6. THE MARATHA CONFEDERACY AND DECLINE (1761–1818)

6.1 Recovery and the Confederacy

After Panipat, effective Maratha power passed to the five great chiefs (*sardars*) of the Maratha Confederacy:

- **Peshwa** (Pune): Nominal head; but weakened after Panipat; internal succession disputes
- **Gaekwads** (Baroda): Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan
- **Holkars** (Indore): Central India; Malwa; Madhya Pradesh
- **Scindias/Shindes** (Gwalior): Northern India; Gwalior; Rajasthan; the most powerful chief after Panipat
- **Bhonsles** (Nagpur): Eastern India; Orissa; Bengal march

Madhavrao I (1761–1772) — the recovery Peshwa:

Despite being only 16 at Panipat, Madhavrao I proved the most capable administrator of the Peshwa dynasty:

- Reorganised Maratha revenue administration after the devastation of Panipat; reduced the debt accumulated by the Deccan campaigns and the cost of raising a new army
- Reasserted Maratha authority over the Nizam of Hyderabad (Battle of Rakshabhuvana, 1763) within two years of Panipat — demonstrating remarkable military recovery
- Extended Maratha influence back into northern India; Mahadji Scindia was rebuilding Maratha power in the north under Madhavrao's direction
- Died at age 27 of tuberculosis (1772); his early death is considered the true turning point — had he lived, the Maratha Confederacy might have survived the British challenge in a different form