Shivaji

Shivaji

India's Great Warrior King

Vaibhav Purandare

juggernaut

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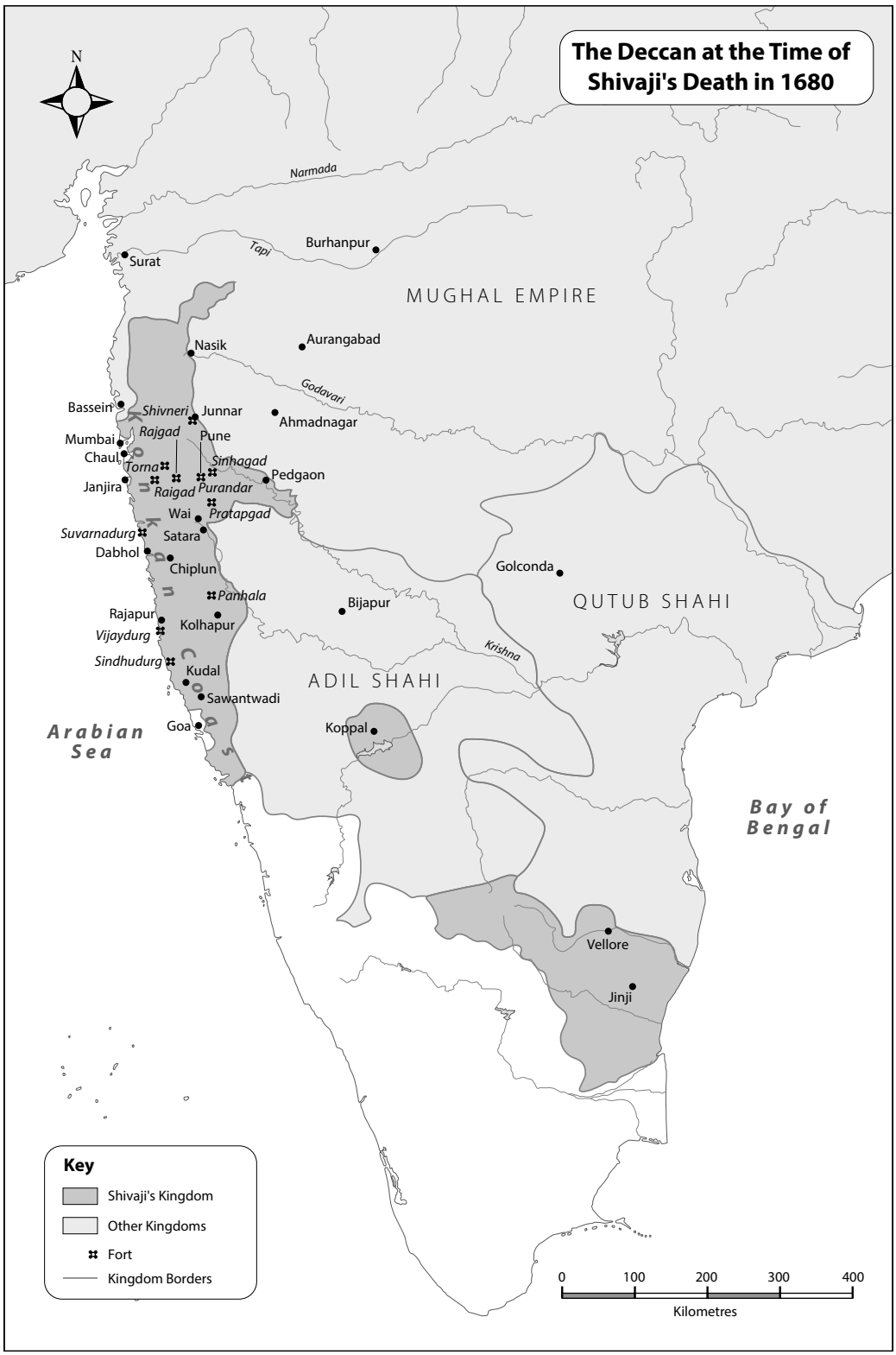
The Deccan at the Time of Shivaji's Death in 1680
N
Narmada
Tapi
Burhanpur
Surat
MUGHAL EMPIRE
Nasik
Aurangabad
Godavari
Bassein
Shivneri
Junnar
Ahmadnagar
Rajgad
Pune
Mumbai
Chaul
Torna
Sinhagad
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Raigad
Purandar
Konkan Coast
Wai
Pratapgad
Suvarnadurg
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Krishna
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Arabian Sea
Goa
Koppal
Bay of Bengal
Vellore
Jinji
Key
Shivaji's Kingdom
Other Kingdoms
Fort
Kingdom Borders
0
100
200
300
400
Kilometres

Introduction

Imagine an individual ranged against an empire. If that sounds like a grossly unequal situation, imagine that the empire is among the world's biggest and most powerful of its time. You would think the imbalance of power would be too great for even a semblance of a serious contest.

However, the Maratha Shivaji Raje Bhosle, son of Jijabai and Shahaji Raje Bhosle, did not merely put up a fierce fight against the mighty Mughal empire when it was at the height of its glory under its sixth emperor, Aurangzeb, in the seventeenth century. He actually sparked a movement that coursed through the Deccan and sowed the seeds of the empire's fall and destruction. In the process, Shivaji set up his own independent state, anointing himself Chhatrapati – bearer of the *chhatra* or royal umbrella. He fashioned his own template of governance and of political and revenue administration, framed policies of responsible and responsive conduct for the new state's officials, both civilian and military, and gave robust expression – by way of words and actions – to values of religious plurality at a time when Aurangzeb was actively and aggressively distorting those values.

Chhatrapati Shivaji is a singular figure in the early modern history of India because he shaped a political revolution in his native Deccan which had implications for the entire map of the Mughal empire, which included in its sweep Afghanistan in the north-west and Bengal in the east. When he was born in 1630, the western part of the Deccan he came from had three Islamic sultanates: the Nizam Shahi of Ahmadnagar, the Adil Shahi

of Bijapur, and the Qutub Shahi of Golconda. While all three were constantly warring, the Mughals, ever increasing in strength, were pressing in from the north in a bid to conquer the southern parts and wipe out the sultanates. The constant warfare of these four kingdoms caused huge turbulence in the Deccan, unsettling populations and fitfully shifting the contours of its politics. The Marathas of the western Deccan had emerged as highly competent military personnel in the sixteenth century, but they were engaged entirely in serving one or the other of these four powers, either as generals who took and implemented orders or as foot soldiers.

Shivaji's father, Shahaji Raje Bhosle, was a military general of note. He played a stellar role in propping up the Nizam Shahi Sultanate in its last years in the 1630s; he had, besides, important stints with the Adil Shahi rulers of Bijapur and also a short one with the Mughals. Astoundingly, Shivaji launched his rebellion in his teenage years by capturing four hill forts belonging to Bijapur. He later had to backtrack to save his father but continued to swim against the main political current of his times, which was, for the Marathas, to join one or the other well-established kingdoms. He persisted with his rebellious actions, forming a solid, cohesive bond with the ordinary, nameless people and peasants of the hills, and winning friends and comrades who would help him raise the political structure he was seeking to create. His opponents realized that though he was an outlier, the Maratha rebel was a clear and present threat because of his natural charisma – which always disarmed people – his smart strategizing, his military skills and his leadership.

Aurangzeb was on top of the world at the time Shivaji attacked his territories but as a sharp and alert military commander himself, he was not dismissive of Shivaji. Just like Bijapur had done before him, he publicly called Shivaji all sorts of names, describing him as 'a mountain rat',[1] yet immediately directed the full might of the empire against the emerging rebel. Aurangzeb was acutely conscious that Shivaji's greatest strength lay in his hill forts and treacherous terrain and that he was deploying the Maratha guerrilla playbook devastatingly against his opponents. It was a captivating contest between two superbly pitted rivals, Shivaji's insurrection growing in size even as Aurangzeb repeatedly applied an

incredible amount of pressure and the Mughals vastly outnumbered the Marathas.

Broadly, Shivaji's career had three stages. The first was from his childhood until 1656, the first twenty-six years of his life. It was marked by his early deeds as a rebel. The second phase covered the dramatic decade from 1656 to 1666. The battle of wits and the action during these ten thrilling years, as Shivaji took on both Bijapur and Aurangzeb, were extraordinary. From time to time, Shivaji suffered setbacks as the confrontation raged, and there were points when he found himself staring at an abyss and things looked hopeless for him. The manner in which he picked himself up and hit back at both the Adil Shahi and the Mughals makes this decade one of the most fascinating in the history of early modern India. The third phase – from 1666, when Shivaji was thirty-six, until his death at the age of fifty in 1680 – combined consolidation and expansion even as the conflict between Shivaji and Aurangzeb played out relentlessly, capturing attention across the length and breadth of India.

Shivaji was shrewd enough not to engage in pitched battles with his enemies. This allowed him to calibrate his stand and take the measure of his opponents before he made his responses. He also offered concessions to his opponents and made retreats in order to give himself time to re-equip himself and his forces and to make further gains on the ground. One of his outstanding qualities as a military leader and statesman was that he was as brilliantly adept at holding himself back as he was at launching the most boldly daring and seemingly impossible of attacks.

Among the things that left Shivaji's opponents flummoxed was the steadfast loyalty of his lieutenants and followers, mostly people drawn from ordinary families in the Deccan. One of his closest aides, Baji Prabhu Deshpande, held off a major Bijapuri onslaught in 1660 in a narrow pass in the mountains with a group of just 300 men to enable Shivaji to reach a place of safety; in the process Baji Prabhu laid down his life, becoming a legend in his own right.

In 1674, Shivaji took the momentous decision to crown himself sovereign, a declaration of the establishment of his own independent state, and in heraldic terms, the start of a new era. By giving his rule legal, official status, he robbed Aurangzeb, Bijapur, Golconda – or anybody else for that matter – of the opportunity of accusing him of overstepping the line. From now on, he was going to deal with them all as an equal. He had pulled off something that hardly anyone could match up to.

At the time of his death in 1680, when he was only fifty years old, Shivaji had left for his successors such a wealth of inspiration that despite Aurangzeb's hurried march to the Deccan to recapture lost ground, they succeeded in ensuring that the Mughal emperor stayed in the south and could never go back to the north for a quarter of a century, up until his death in 1707. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the rule of the Marathas reached its apogee as they conquered the major part of the subcontinent, their territory stretching from Attock in the north (in present-day Pakistan) to Bengal in the east before the British came and took over.

One of Shivaji's most remarkable achievements was the building of his own naval fleet. He was alone among his contemporaries in recognizing the importance of the seas and demonstrated a political and strategic vision in this regard that all the other rulers sorely lacked. The foreign powers – the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and the French – were reluctant to share sea power with him. In fact, they often showed open hostility, and Shivaji had to nuance his positions with them, alternating between demonstrating his strength and opening negotiations. Shrewd general-statesman that he was, he was as deeply wary of and sceptical about the *firangs* as he was about all of his other adversaries. He remained constantly alert to their shenanigans, took forceful, uncompromising and retaliatory actions where necessary, and reminded them constantly that they would have to accept things on his terms – a quality that

stands out given the rapaciousness, especially of the British East India Company, that revealed itself later on and proved costly to the people of the subcontinent.

If Shivaji improvised in war, he innovated in peace or whenever he got some respite from warfare. Before he had turned twenty, he had started resettling populations in and around Pune and in the Maval valleys of the Sahyadri mountain ranges. He offered incentives for increase in cultivation and for bringing wastelands under the plough. In the second half of the 1660s and the first half of the 1670s, he carefully reorganized the entire civilian administration in his territories, which had by then grown considerably in size. He took away a great deal of the powers of officials who had hereditary grants to collect revenue and were in the habit of extorting from the local population. This assault on the deeply entrenched vested interests was extraordinary in its boldness because it placed the political reorientation he was effecting at risk of disruption and sabotage at all levels, but it endeared him to the people and showed him to be a fearless pioneer.

Shivaji cared for his people. He strictly forbade his army from taking anything from the lands and fields of ordinary peasants and farmers. Those of his soldiers who flouted these rules and troubled the peasants and local villagers were punished. Among his more notable written directives was that not a blade of grass should be touched and no grain of food taken by force. If the soldiers did that, he stated, the villagers would think of them as worse than the Mughals, underlining the nature of the subjugation of the people under Mughal rule.

Shivaji was a liberator. He came in as a breath of fresh air for people in the Maratha country, who were not used to being treated with such respect by their rulers. Having said that, it should also be underlined that he was a man of his times. The revolution he achieved was brought about through armed resistance and all the fiercely aggressive warfare methods that were de rigueur in the seventeenth century: violent and debilitating attacks on enemies; capture of embattlements, arms, ammunition and personnel; despoilment of the adversary's critical geographical areas; and

infiltration of enemy territory and plunder. The armed political revolution was in sync with the martial combat techniques of the times.

As British rule in India spawned a new national consciousness in the nineteenth century, leaders of the freedom movement began looking up to Shivaji as a source of inspiration. His determination, his steely resolve, his persistence, his overcoming of deadly difficulties, and his statesmanlike qualities that enabled him to realize his goals were seen as traits to emulate. The movement holding up Shivaji as a national icon for the unity of the Indian people in their fight for political emancipation gained momentum because he appealed both to the educated and the unlettered, the new elite who had imbibed Western ideas of enlightenment and the masses who were deeply traditionalist in thought and action. His rule was seen as reflecting justice, equity and tolerance. Thus it was that among the earliest to hail Shivaji as an exemplar was the Maharashtrian social reformer Gopal Hari Deshmukh, a stern critic of orthodoxy and ritualism. In an article in 1848, Deshmukh hailed Shivaji as a living legend.[2] Deshmukh's contemporary, Jotirao Phule, who eventually got the title 'Mahatma', wrote a *powada* (ballad) in Shivaji's honour in 1869. Phule attacked Brahmins and considered British rule a blessing because he believed it had ended Brahminical orthodoxy. In his *powada*, which he said he was writing for the so-called lower castes such as the Kunbis, Malis, Mahars, Matangs, Phule said Shivaji was a great king because the *rayats* (peasants) were happy with his rule, and he had framed new laws for them and taken care of the ordinary people.[3]

Deshmukh's writings resonated with the educated sections in western India and Phule's with ordinary farmers. Soon there emerged a brilliant national leader who successfully enlisted the support of both the masses and the elite in the name of Shivaji. That leader was Bal Gangadhar Tilak, popularly known as Lokmanya. He launched in 1896 the annual Shivaji festival on the Maratha hero's birth anniversary, and it resonated through the length and breadth of India. Tilak used Shivaji's story to

make his fiery statement: 'Swarajya is my birthright.' In western India, people of different intellectual persuasions were now citing Shivaji's life and work: the scholar, jurist and moderate M.G. Ranade, the radical young revolutionary V.D. Savarkar, and the famous Marathi playwright Ram Ganesh Gadkari.

In Bengal, the Marathas had for long been seen as unwelcome invaders. But Shivaji's image, wedded to the national movement, brought about a drastic revision of perception. This change was sparked off by the writer Bhudev Mukhopadhyay as early as 1857, the year of the great revolt, followed by the depiction of Shivaji by the nationalist R.C. Dutt as a national hero.[4] When Tilak launched a movement to repair Shivaji's memorial at Raigad in 1895, among those present on the dais to address the gathering was Surendranath Banerjea, president of the Indian National Congress and then the most popular leader of Bengal.[5] In 1902, the celebration of the Shivaji festival began in Bengal; two years later, Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem describing Shivaji as 'the King of Kings'; and the fire generated by the 1905 partition of Bengal saw to it that the next year, the Shivaji festival was observed there in a way 'hardly surpassed in Maharashtra itself'.[6] The nationalist leaders Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose, and the revolutionary journal *Jugantar*, among others, interpreted Shivaji's life and ideals for their fellow Bengalis; Aurobindo in particular wrote a ballad for Shivaji's warrior Baji Prabhu Deshpande who had sacrificed his life to protect the Maratha leader, and a poem, 'Bhavani Mandir', where, referring to Shivaji's mother goddess Bhavani (Durga), he wrote, 'Chosen of Shivaji, Bhavani's swords / For you the Gods prepare.'[7] The revolutionary Anushilan Samiti adopted Shivaji's war cry of *'Har Har Mahadev'*. Comparing Shivaji with his contemporaries, Tagore wrote that Shivaji's movement was of greater significance than that of the Sikhs because while the Sikhs, like the Marathas, were full of valour, Shivaji had a well-conceived plan of building up a nation.[8]

The first biography of Shivaji in Urdu was written by a leader from the northern parts, the patriot Lala Lajpat Rai: he wrote his book in 1896, the very year in which Tilak started the Shivaji movement in

Maharashtra.[9] Just as in Bengal, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, a series of writings on Shivaji in Hindi in the United Provinces and in the Assamese language in the north-east made fervent appeals to people to take up the cause of political freedom. At the same time, Shivaji began to figure prominently in more and more specimens of confiscated and proscribed Indian literature, especially in Marathi and Bengali, with the result that he increased in stature in the national imagination until Mahatma Gandhi's idea of non-violence came to dominate public consciousness.

However, such was Shivaji's story and legend that even Gandhi recognized his greatness. In many ways Shivaji was a product of his early modern times, as we have noted, and his work had involved armed hostilities throughout, as well as pillage and sackings. Most apostles of non-violence in the independence movement acknowledged that in the medieval to early modern era there was no other way to fight against unjust rulers than armed resistance. And in post-Independence India, parties of almost every kind of ideological leaning have tried to appropriate Shivaji. They cite his ideas of political, civic and administrative reforms as models worthy of adopting – not literally, because times have changed and monarchies have been replaced by a democracy – but in terms of the foundational concepts of justice and fairness underlining his vision and his actions.

So what kind of state was Shivaji trying to establish? Was it a secular state, as some have asserted, or was it Hindu, as some others have declared? Or was it simply a Maratha empire? The answer I have arrived at is that Shivaji was not out to establish a secular or non-religious kingdom, nor was he bent on founding a Hindu theocratic state. He was establishing a Hindu polity – one that was broadly inclusive, tolerant and all-encompassing and at the same time drank deep of the fountain of Hindu culture and civilization. His deep sense of his own religion and its spirituality

made him regard Hindus and Muslims as equal, and he saw religious discrimination as abhorrent, immoral and unacceptable. Shivaji recruited Muslims in his army, just as he recruited Marathas and other Hindus, and two of his navy admirals, Darya Sarang Ventjee and Daulat Khan, were Muhammadans. One of his bitterest critics, the official Mughal chronicler Khafi Khan, who called him a 'hell-dog', put it in writing that Shivaji had strictly instructed his soldiers to treat with the greatest respect the Muslim holy book, the Quran, if they came across it.

The element of Hindu identity, though, is inescapable in Shivaji's life and courses through his career right from the beginning. Evidently the Islamic conquest of India, and of the Deccan in particular in the late thirteenth century, had ramifications for the lives of the vast majority of the region's population. Shivaji noticed that despite the rise of the Marathas as accomplished soldiers of rank, the highest military ranks were still denied to them. The Adil Shahi, the dominant power in the western Deccan, had been tolerant, even pluralistic, in the sixteenth century, but things had changed in the seventeenth century. And once Aurangzeb sat on the Mughal throne when Shivaji was in his twenties, the empire turned increasingly hostile towards Hindus. From the 1660s onwards, Aurangzeb began a reign of social and economic repression, making Hindus pay customs duties which Muslims were exempted from paying, and ultimately imposing the discriminatory *jaziya* tax on 'unbelievers', in response to which Shivaji wrote his famous letter to the emperor. Renaming of places in the Deccan by the Islamic powers was also rampant during this period; all seals of the state and its officials were issued in Persian in contrast to the earlier tradition of Hindu rajas, including those from the Deccan, to use either Sanskrit or the local languages.[10]

Shivaji's actions show he was responding to what he was seeing all around him. His father's and mother's own seals were in Persian. But Shivaji, at the age of sixteen itself, chose Sanskrit as the language of his seal, making an unequivocal statement in the Persianate Age. Many Deccani kings who were Hindu – among them Pratapa Rudra and Kapaya Nayaka – had taken, from the time of the Delhi Sultanate's invasions

from the north, the title of Sultan for themselves. Shivaji took the title Chhatrapati after the word '*chhatra*' of Hindu rajas of the past.

Tagore was thus accurate in saying in an article in the *Modern Review* in 1911 that Shivaji had 'in his mind the ideal of setting up a Hindu Empire',[11] as did Tilak and B.C. Pal. Jawaharlal Nehru too accepted in his *Discovery of India* that Shivaji 'was the symbol of a resurgent Hindu nationalism'.[12] But Shivaji's Hindu state was for Hindus and non-Hindus alike and did not conceive of any difference in treatment between the two.

There are, thus, two kinds of people who would not be able to term his state as one after their own heart. One group would be those who believe in discrimination and domination in the name of faith, and would like to overstate Shivaji's role as a protector of the faith. Shivaji did once issue an order to his soldiers saying 'cows and Brahmins' should not be harmed, but it is utterly reductive and misleading, and a case of reading history backwards for the benefit of modern-day religious conservatives, to label him 'protector of cows and Brahmins' for this reason.[13] In his era, the ritualistic and caste-based order was strong, and with cows and Brahmins symbolizing such an order, he was sending out a reassuring message to the larger, tradition-bound society. There's nothing to suggest he attached any special importance to these two categories. All the evidence is that he stood by so-called Brahmins and non-Brahmins alike, as much for the Ramoshis and other tribals who were among the guardians of his forts as for the Marathas, Kayasthas, Kolis, Bhandaris and Muslims like his navy admiral Daulat Khan who fought shoulder to shoulder with him.

The second set of people who cannot claim his state as their own are those who see the affirmation of Indian civilization in the denial of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism'; this group attempts to stall any discussion and dialogue on the likely trauma that Islamic conquest over a period of several centuries caused to Hindu cultural identity, despite the element of syncretism that may have existed parallelly, and also seeks to excuse the undeniable religious dimension of the attacks on Hindu temples by framing them as mere assaults on seats of power.[14]

The term 'Hindawi' was current during Shivaji's times in the Deccan, and it indicated the vast majority of the land's Hindu population, its diverse tribal population, and indeed, all the indigenous peoples.[15] It included, interestingly and increasingly over time, the majority of Deccani Muslims who, having entered over the seas through the western coast centuries ago, had been absorbed as one with the land and had made the land their own – as against those coming in more recently from the northern parts who were seen as being imbued with a different set of values.

What of the 'Maharashtra dharma' then, which has been named in some of the poetic verses of the seventeenth century, particularly those of the Lord Ram-worshipping saint Ramdas, as denoting Shivaji's state? Is it evidence of a Maratha state? Shivaji's state was of course a Maratha state. Deeply and profoundly so. His self-respecting Maratha mother Jijabai gave him spine and spirituality; his father Shahaji and the Bhosle family as a whole, with its military feats, awakened him to his potential; the hardiness and dedication of his fellow Marathas and the resilience of the native Kunbis and other peasants that Phule spoke about were the sinews of his power; and the deeply humanistic philosophy of the Maharashtrian bhakti saint-poets, from Namdeo and Dynaneshwar to Tukaram, lay at the core of his worldview.

The reference to 'Maharashtra dharma' by Ramdas, an unstinting admirer of Shivaji, points to a set of ethical, spiritual and cultural values and principles of the Marathi-speaking regions, which were all part of a broader Hindu identity. The stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata which Shivaji's mother told him constituted the same cultural heritage, as did the ochre flag he selected for himself and the Maratha war cry of '*Har Har Mahadev*' in the name of Lord Shiva. The fundamentally Maharashtrian and macro Hindu civilizational identity are not unreconciled here; in fact, they are truly culturally united. If that were not the case, Shivaji would not have asked Chhatrasal, a youngster of the Bundela clan in the north, who approached him seeking to join his army in the early 1670s, to head home instead and set up a state of his own against the Mughals and against Aurangzeb.[16]

In the final phase of his life in the second half of the 1670s, Shivaji's campaign of conquest covered large parts of present-day Telangana, Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. This is yet another sign that his political dream was not restricted to the Marathi-speaking regions, though Maharashtra would always be the nucleus and the heart. The 'what ifs' of history are tantalizing. Shivaji died in 1680, having marched all the way up to the eastern coast. What more lands would he have conquered and administered is something we can only guess. But his successors among the Marathas did not restrict themselves to Maharashtra either; they ventured deep into the northern and eastern parts of Hindustan.

In writing this biography of Shivaji, I had to sift through a vast collection of papers, documents and books in the Marathi language. The majority of the Marathas' own records were burnt during enemy assaults or destroyed by the Marathas themselves after Shivaji's death as their conflict with the Mughals intensified and as the Mughals under Aurangzeb took Raigad and other important forts, where the top official documents were stored. Whatever family papers still survived in the homes of a few Marathas were hidden by them after the end of the Peshwa era in 1818 for fear of the new British rulers cracking down on them on suspicion of an anti-British conspiracy by those still owing their allegiance to the Maratha rulers. The British brazenly confiscated the records they found, not allowing the public any access to them.

But slowly, as national consciousness grew in the late nineteenth century, an archival movement of sorts developed in western India, with its proponents urging families to hand over documents to historians who could preserve and examine them and simultaneously appealing to the British Raj to open up the archives they had concealed. The efforts bore fruit. The pioneering Maratha historian who led the archival movement was V.K. Rajwade. He painstakingly collected, at the turn of the century, twenty-one volumes of documents, chiefly private papers of Maratha

families and official state correspondence in the nature of orders or revenue arrangements. These are indeed priceless for any historian, and so they proved for me in the research, as did the materials put together by generations of scholars of the Bharat Itihas Sanshodhak Mandal of Pune like B.G. Paranjpe, D.B. Parasnis, K.N. Sane, K.V. Purandare, D.V. Apte, D.V. Kale and G.S. Sardesai. Sardesai's eight volumes of *Marathi Riyasat* provide an encyclopaedic view of Maratha history and of the long Maratha–Mughal conflict. During his time – broadly the first half of the twentieth century – not only scholars writing in Marathi such as T.S. Shejwalkar, K.V. Keluskar and V.S. Bendrey but also those writing in English apart from Sardesai himself – such as Jadunath Sarkar, M.G. Ranade, K.T. Telang, Bal Krishna, Surendra Nath Sen, C.V. Vaidya and H.G. Rawlinson – contributed handsomely to exploring Shivaji's life and times. Five modern-day historians stand out as their heirs – G.H. Khare, Setumadhavrao Pagadi, Narhar Kurundkar, A.N. Kulkarni and G.B. Mehendale (who wrote in both English and Marathi) – for their work looked at new discoveries and findings and interpreted them for the present generation. Yet most of their writings remain accessible largely to scholars of history. It is with a deep dept of gratitude that I have referenced them extensively in this book so that they can reach the twenty-first century reader curious to know and learn about Shivaji.

The English works on Shivaji in particular, most of them published in the first half of the twentieth century, suffer from a surfeit of outdated material. Jadunath Sarkar's book *Shivaji and His Times* is a case in point. For decades it was regarded as the standard English work on Shivaji. Sarkar, unfortunately, got several things wrong, most of which Marathi historians subsequently either pointed out or corrected with corroborative evidence. To give an example, Sarkar wrote that Shivaji had renamed the Kondhana fort as Sinhagad after one of his closest lieutenants, Tanaji Malusare, was slain there during a spectacular assault on the Mughal garrison in 1670 and said, '*Gad aala, pan Sinha gela*' (The fort's won, but the lion's dead). The legend made its way into textbooks and in the popular imagination in Maharashtra and has been repeated endlessly,

in ballads, cinema and the theatre. The truth, though, is that Kondhana was always called by its other name of Sinhagad, and there are letters extant from before Tanaji's death that mention the name. It was precisely because it was called Sinhagad that Shivaji used the lion metaphor – and not the other way round. This book looks at this myth and several other stories that have acquired popular and legendary status, but it separates fact from fiction and presents the real Shivaji of history, whose life is so filled with drama that it scarcely requires further embellishment in the form of made-up tales.

Sarkar and most other English biographers of Shivaji, including the British official Dennis Kincaid, also almost totally neglected two crucial contemporary works on Shivaji's life. These works are by Shivaji's officials and chroniclers Parmanand, who wrote *Shivabharat*, and Sabhasad, who wrote *Sabhasad Bakhar*. Their writings throw considerable light on Shivaji's life. The exact words that a recent biographer of Thomas Cromwell used about his close contemporaries writing about him can be applied to Parmanand and Sabhasad: 'We need to remember that … they were *there*,' and 'we need to respect their observations and comprehend their limitations and concerns.'[17] The overlooking of their texts has seriously hindered writings on Shivaji's life in English, and one of my aims in this book is to reinstate their works in his narrative.

I cannot read Persian, but translations of Persian works and official documents and records of the Mughals, of the Nizam Shahi of Ahmadnagar, of Bijapur and of Golconda by Sarkar, G.H. Khare, Pagadi and so many others helped me to record the point of view of Shivaji's adversaries and to understand how they perceived him and changed their perceptions of him and responses to him over time. Sarkar's translation of documents in the Rajasthan archives helped to illumine elements of Shivaji's visit to Agra, his imprisonment and his escape. The officials of the British East India Company wrote copiously about their activities all across peninsular India in the seventeenth century, and they recorded lots of details about Shivaji and his actions, including his two raids on Surat. I have critically examined their records for those details and for

their sometimes adversarial and sometimes transactional perspective. Similarly, records of the Portuguese rulers of Goa and their officials, translated from the original by the scholar P.S. Pissurlencar, and the diaries of the French official of Pondicherry Francois Martin at the time of Shivaji's southern campaign of the late 1670s provided rare and rarely quoted accounts of Shivaji.

Interestingly, the first foreign biographer of Shivaji was a Portuguese man based in Marmugao in Goa during his lifetime, Cosme da Guarda. Though his biography was published in 1695, that is, fifteen years after Shivaji's death, da Guarda had spoken to many people in the Deccan before writing it, and it provides interesting insights into how Shivaji was seen by the people of the region during that time and of contemporary discussions around his personality, politics and his momentous clash with Aurangzeb. The Italian traveller Niccolao Manucci was part of the Mughal army and had the opportunity to meet Shivaji and have conversations with him. He recorded much material in his diaries which I have consulted and, where relevant, quoted. Other European travellers and officials such as Francois Bernier, Jean de Thevenot and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier also left accounts, in the classic European style of documenting most of what they were observing around them. Their observations came in handy at times where the account was plausible and the evidence supportive; their flights of fancy, as indeed those of all the others, Sabhasad and Parmanand included, I have roundly rejected.

Shivaji Maharaj as Chhatrapati marked a point of serious departure in the politics and military history of early modern India, a point that needs close examination in order to understand the picture that emerged later in the subcontinent. His life was an expression of popular will and an eloquent demonstration of political will. He gave himself up to the task of fusing his people into a nation, with a sense of mission, and thwarted Aurangzeb's ambition of conquering all of Hindustan. The spirit Shivaji was imbued with endured after his death, and his motivations for state-building still constitute a template for Indians in the twenty-first century. This book places him on the stage of the seventeenth century as

the leading actor that he was and charts his journey, at times from truly serious failure to dazzling success, but – to paraphrase what Aurobindo Ghose once wrote about him[18] – always ultimately in the direction of undermining a vast empire and creating a political entity whose values still haven't been extinguished.