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## MARATHA MILITARY LANDSCAPES

### SYLLABUS:

GS 1 > Indian History >> Marathas

### REFERENCE NEWS:

Maratha Military Landscapes of India has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, becoming India's 44th property to receive this recognition. This global accolade celebrates India's enduring cultural legacy, showcasing its diverse traditions of architectural brilliance, regional identity, and historical continuity.

### MARATHA MILITARY LANDSCAPES:

- The Maratha Military Landscapes of India, which developed between 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, represent an extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers.
- This extraordinary network of forts, varying in hierarchies, scales and typological features, is a result of **integrating the landscape, terrain and physiographic characteristics** distinctive to the **Sahyadri mountain ranges, the Konkan Coast, Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats in the Indian Peninsula**.
- There are more than **390 forts in Maharashtra** out of which only 12 forts are selected under the Maratha Military Landscapes of India, of these eight forts are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.
- These are **Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala fort, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg and Gingee fort** whereas **Salher fort, Rajgad, Khanderi fort and Pratapgadh** are protected by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra.
- In the Maratha Military Landscapes of India Salher fort, Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Rajgad and Gingee fort are **hill forts**, Pratapgadh is **hill-forest fort**, Panhala



is **hill-plateau fort**, Vijaydurg is **coastal fort** whereas Khanderi fort, Suvarnadurg and Sindhudurg are **island forts**.

- The inception of the **Maratha Military ideology** dates back to **17<sup>th</sup> Century** during the reign of the Maratha King **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** by the 1670 CE and continued through subsequent rules until Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.

### **ORIGIN & RISE OF THE MARATHAS:**

- The Marathas emerged in the **17th century** in the **Deccan region** (modern Maharashtra).
- **Founder: Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (1630–1680)** who established Hindavi Swarajya by challenging the **Mughals** and the **Bijapur Sultanate**.
- **Geographical Base:** Initially in Maharashtra, later expanding to Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and beyond.
- **Coronation:** Shivaji was crowned as Chhatrapati at **Raigad Fort in 1674**, marking the formal establishment of the Maratha Empire.
- At their peak, Marathas controlled **1/3rd of the Indian subcontinent** (c. 1750s).

### **Shivaji's Administration & Military**

- **Military Strategy:** Guerrilla warfare (Ganimi Kava), a strong navy under **Kanhoji Angre**.
- **Administration:** Ashtapradhan Mandal (Eight Ministers). **Revenue system** similar to Ryotwari, with taxes like **Chauth (25%)** & **Sardeshmukhi (10%)**.
- **Key Battles: Pratapgarh (1659):** Defeated Afzal Khan of Bijapur. **Purandar (1665):** Signed a treaty with Raja Jai Singh of Amber (Mughal envoy). **Escape from Agra (1666):** Outwitted Aurangzeb.

### **Post-Shivaji Era (1680–1707)**

- **Sambhaji Maharaj (1681–1689):** Resisted Mughals but was captured & executed by Aurangzeb.
- **Rajaram (1689–1700):** Continued guerrilla warfare from **Gingee Fort** in Tamil Nadu.
- **Tarabai (1700–1714):** Acted as regent, strongly resisted Mughal advances, expanded influence.
- **Shahu Maharaj (1707–1749):** Released by Aurangzeb's successor, defeated Tarabai in the **Battle of Khed**, and shifted power to the **Peshwas**.

### **Rise of the Peshwa Era (1713–1818)**

- **Balaji Vishwanath (1713–1720):** Secured Shahu's release, established hereditary Peshwaship.
- **Baji Rao I (1720–1740):** Expanded Maratha power in North India, defeated Mughals & Nizam (notable **Battle of Palkhed, 1728**).
- **Balaji Baji Rao (Nana Saheb, 1740–1761):** Led Marathas in **Third Battle of Panipat (1761)** against Ahmad Shah Abdali—huge loss.
- **Madhav Rao I (1761–1772):** Revived Maratha power after Panipat, defeated Hyder Ali.

- **Nana Phadnavis (1761–1800):** Managed diplomacy & internal conflicts, **Treaty of Salbai (1782)** ensured peace with the British.
- **Baji Rao II (1796–1818):** Weak ruler; lost to British in Anglo-Maratha Wars, signed **Treaty of Bassein (1802)**, leading to British dominance.

## Maratha Confederacy

The Maratha Empire evolved into a **confederacy** of semi-autonomous states under the Peshwas:

- **Scindias (Gwalior):** Mahadji Scindia revived Maratha power after Panipat.
- **Holkars (Indore):** Malhar Rao Holkar & Ahilyabai Holkar (renowned for welfare & temple restoration).
- **Gaekwads (Baroda):** Expanded influence in Gujarat.
- **Bhonsles (Nagpur):** Extended Maratha campaigns into Bengal & Odisha.

## Important Battles

- **Sinhagad (1670):** Marathas recaptured Kondana Fort from Mughals; Tanaji Malusare sacrificed his life.
- **Salher (1672):** First open-field victory against the Mughals.
- **Vasai (1739):** Defeated Portuguese, gaining control over western coast.
- **Third Battle of Panipat (1761):** Marathas vs. Ahmad Shah Abdali → massive loss.
- **Wadgaon (1779):** Rare Maratha victory over British.
- **Anglo-Maratha Wars (1775–1818):** Ended with the British annexing Maratha territories.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF MARATHAS AND MILITARY ARCHITECTURE:

### Political Significance

- **Ended Mughal monopoly on power:** Shivaji's rise in the 17th century **challenged the Mughal-Bijapur hegemony**, paving the way for regional powers. After Aurangzeb's death (1707), the Marathas became **de facto power brokers in North India**, collecting **Chauth & Sardeshmukhi** from Mughal provinces.
- **Maratha Confederacy & Decentralized Polity:** Created a **confederate model** (Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, Bhonsles) balancing regional autonomy with central authority. This influenced later **regional states** and even British policy of indirect rule.

### Military Significance

- **Innovative Warfare: Ganimi Kava (guerrilla tactics)**—swift cavalry raids, surprise attacks—helped defeat superior Mughal armies (Battle of Pratapgadh, 1659).
- **Fort Architecture:** Hill forts like **Raigad, Sinhagad, Pratapgadh**, and coastal forts like **Vijaydurg** served as defensive and administrative hubs.
- **Naval Power:** Kanhoji Angre's navy resisted European powers on the Konkan coast, delaying colonial maritime dominance.

- **Pan-Indian Military Presence:** Expanded into **Malwa, Bundelkhand, Gujarat**, even raiding Delhi (1737). **Battle of Palkhed (1728)** showcased Maratha cavalry superiority over the Nizam of Hyderabad.

### **Check on European Expansion**

- Marathas temporarily **checked British ambitions**, defeating them in **Battle of Wadgaon (1779)** and forcing the **Treaty of Salbai (1782)**.

### **Socio-Cultural Significance**

- Promoted **Hindavi Swarajya**—a regional sense of self-rule rooted in local traditions.
- Ahilyabai Holkar's reign (Indore) is remembered as a **golden era of welfare and temple restoration** (Kashi Vishwanath, Somnath).

### **REASONS FOR FALL OF MARATHAS:**

#### **Weak Leadership after Madhav Rao I**

- After **Madhav Rao I's death (1772)**, rulers like **Baji Rao II (1796–1818)** lacked political acumen and military vision.
- Poor decisions like signing the **Treaty of Bassein (1802)** made the Marathas subordinate to the British.

#### **Internal Rivalries & Decentralized Confederacy**

- The **Maratha Confederacy** (Scindias, Holkars, Gaekwads, Bhonsles) lacked unity and often fought among themselves. **Holkar vs. Scindia conflict** weakened collective defence.
- The **Peshwas** struggled to control semi-autonomous chiefs, resulting in fragmented power.

#### **Military Setbacks & Technological Backwardness**

- **Third Battle of Panipat (1761)** caused massive loss of men, leadership, and prestige.
- Reliance on **traditional cavalry warfare** was ineffective against British **modern artillery and disciplined infantry**.
- Decline of the **Maratha Navy (Kanhoji Angre)** allowed British maritime dominance.

#### **Economic Exhaustion**

- Continuous wars drained the treasury; loss of fertile regions like **Malwa & Gujarat** reduced revenue.
- Excessive taxation led to **local discontent** and rebellions.
- **Third Battle of Panipat (1761):** ~100,000 Maratha soldiers lost, weakening their power base.

#### **Hostile Neighbours & Lack of Stable Alliances**



- Constant wars with **Nizam of Hyderabad, Mysore (Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan), Rohillas**, and the British stretched their resources.
- Failed to build a **broad coalition of support** like the Mughals had.

### **British Supremacy**

- The British had **better military technology, disciplined forces, and a stronger financial system**.
- Exploited Maratha infighting through **subsidiary alliances** and **divide-and-rule tactics**.
- Series of defeats in **Anglo-Maratha Wars (1775–1818)** led to annexation and the exile of **Peshwa Baji Rao II**.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS OF MARATHAS TO INDIAN CULTURE AND TRADITION:**

#### **Political & Social Ideals**

- **Concept of Hindavi Swarajya:** Shivaji promoted *Hindavi Swarajya* (self-rule of native people), which inspired later nationalist movements.
- It emphasized **religious tolerance**, justice, and protection of subjects irrespective of caste or creed.
- **Local Self-Governance:** The Marathas encouraged **village-level administration**, empowering *patils* and *kulkarni* to manage local affairs.

#### **Religious & Spiritual Patronage**

- **Revival of Temples & Pilgrimage Centres:** Ahilyabai Holkar (Indore) restored **Kashi Vishwanath (Varanasi), Somnath (Gujarat)**, and built *Vishnupad Temple (Gaya)*. She also promoted pilgrim routes and built **ghats** in Nashik, Varanasi, and Maheshwar.
- Ahilyabai Holkar was called “*Philosopher Queen*” by British historian John Keay for her **public welfare & temple restoration**.
- **Support to Saints & Bhakti Tradition:** Patronized **Bhakti saints** like Tukaram and Ramdas, preserving **Marathi devotional literature** and kirtans. Encouraged **Dnyaneshwari** and other literary works in vernacular language.

#### **Art, Architecture & Military Heritage**

- **Fort Architecture:** Built & maintained **Raigad, Sinhagad, Pratapgad** forts in harmony with natural landscapes. Coastal forts like **Vijaydurg** showcased naval defense engineering.
- **Town Planning & Ghats:** Maheshwar (Madhya Pradesh) became a cultural hub under Holkars. Ghats of Nashik and Maheshwar fort are examples of Maratha civic architecture.

#### **Language & Literature**

- Promoted **Marathi language** as a medium of administration and culture.
- Encouraged **Bakhar literature** (chronicles of events), e.g., *Sabhasad Bakhar* narrating Shivaji's deeds.

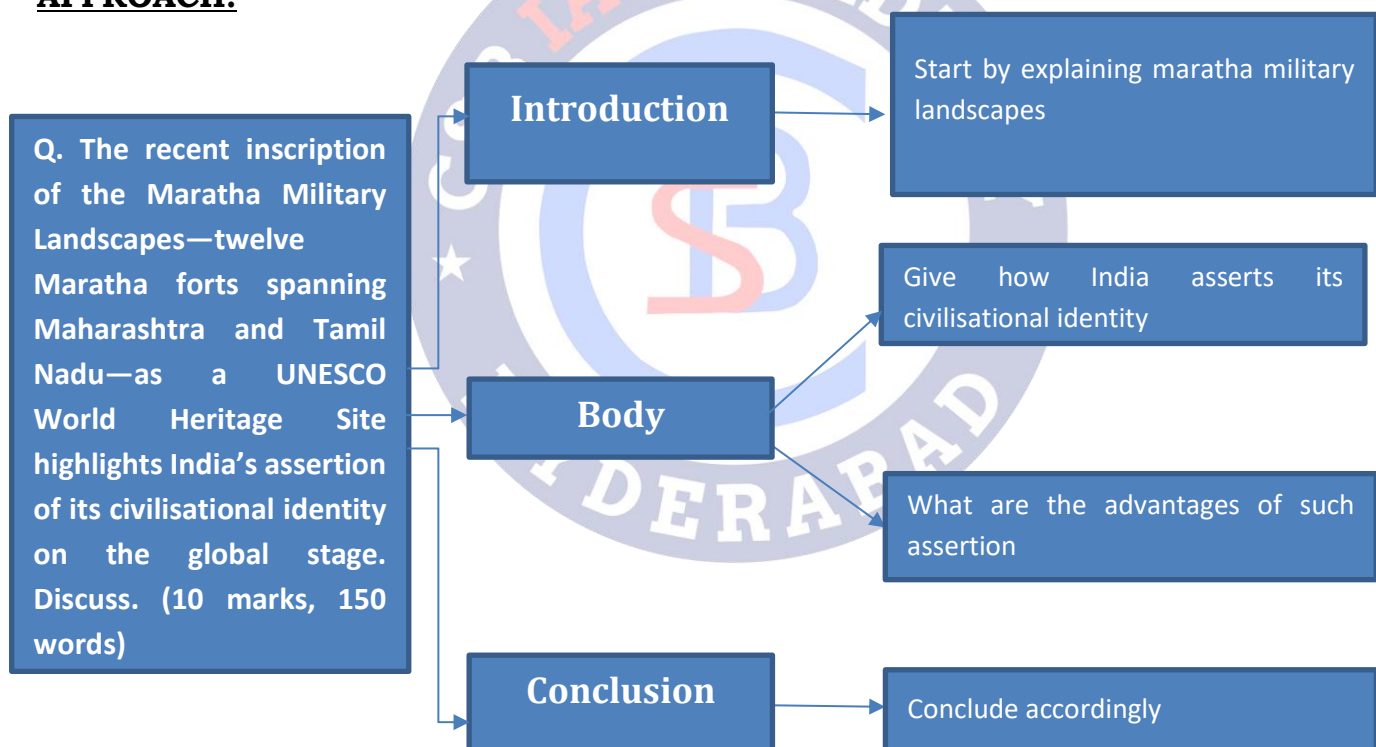
- Revived **Ganesh Utsav** and **Gudi Padwa** as symbols of unity.
- Promoted *warkari* pilgrimages to **Pandharpur**, strengthening cultural identity.
- Lazim is an artform which gained prominence.

The Marathas were more than just a military power—they were **custodians of Indian traditions, vernacular culture, and spiritual heritage**. Through **temple restoration, patronage of Bhakti saints, Marathi literature, fort architecture, and village self-governance**, they shaped a distinct socio-cultural identity that bridged **Mughal decline and colonial modernity**.

**PRACTICE QUESTION:**

**Q. The recent inscription of the Maratha Military Landscapes—twelve Maratha forts spanning Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu—as a UNESCO World Heritage Site highlights India’s assertion of its civilisational identity on the global stage. Discuss. (10 marks, 150 words)**

**APPROACH:**



**MODEL ANSWER:**

The **Maratha Military Landscape** refers to a network of **twelve strategically located forts**—including Raigad, Pratapgad, Vijaydurg, and Gingee—exemplifying the Marathas’ mastery over **hill, coastal, and forest fortification techniques**. Built between the 17th and 18th centuries, these forts symbolized **Hindavi Swarajya**, blending indigenous military architecture with local geography to resist Mughal and European imperial forces.

**India’s Assertion of Civilisational Identity:** In recent years, India has consciously projected its **civilisational heritage globally**:

- **Maratha Naval Supremacy Revived in Memory:** Kanhoji Angre's formidable naval power along the Konkan coast delayed European colonial expansion. This legacy inspired **India's new naval ensign (2022)**, which removed colonial St. George's Cross and adopted a design reflecting the **Maratha naval tradition of self-reliance**.
- **UNESCO Recognition:** By inscribing the Maratha forts, India reclaims narratives beyond Mughal or colonial heritage, showcasing a **regional yet pan-Indian resistance tradition** rooted in native governance and military strategy.
- It aligns with India's larger efforts to project itself as a **civilisational state**, as seen in the promotion of **Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, Somnath temple rejuvenation**, and inclusion of diverse heritage sites in the global discourse.
- **Assertion Through Maratha Military Landscapes:** These forts signify **indigenous knowledge systems, naval preparedness (Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg)**, and **guerrilla warfare ethos**, reinforcing that India's identity was shaped not just by empires but by **grassroots resistance and maritime power**.

### **Advantages for India on such assertion:**

#### **Strengthening National Identity & Unity**

- **Cultural Pride & Confidence:** Highlighting indigenous heroes (e.g., Shivaji Maharaj, Kanhoji Angre) fosters a sense of pride in native traditions, countering colonial historical narratives.
- **Unity in Diversity:** By celebrating multiple regional legacies—Maratha, Chola, Ahom, etc.—India strengthens its plural civilisational ethos beyond a single imperial lens.

#### **Enhancing Global Soft Power**

- **Cultural Diplomacy:** UNESCO heritage recognitions (e.g., Maratha Military Landscapes) project India as a civilisational state with deep historical roots, enhancing global respect.
- **Tourism & Branding:** Showcasing unique heritage sites boosts heritage tourism, local livelihoods, and India's global cultural image.

#### **Reviving Indigenous Knowledge & Maritime Legacy**

- **Strategic Narratives:** Highlighting Maratha naval supremacy validates India's maritime heritage, complementing its current focus on Indian Ocean diplomacy.
- **Policy Inspiration:** Civilisational icons inspire self-reliance initiatives (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and Indianised symbols like the new Indian Navy Ensign (2022).

#### **De-Colonising History**

- **Correcting Colonial Bias:** Moves beyond Mughal-British-centric narratives to include regional powers and resistance movements.
- **Civilisational Continuity:** Reinforces the idea that India is not just a modern nation-state but an ancient civilisation with unbroken traditions.

- **Heritage Economy:** Improved conservation leads to job creation in heritage management, tourism, and cultural industries.
- **Regional Development:** Recognition of forts like Vijaydurg & Gingee brings investment and infrastructure to rural heritage areas.

### **Strategic & Geopolitical Value**

- Positions India as a custodian of Asian civilisation, enhancing its moral authority in forums like G20, SCO, and UNESCO.

Counters global cultural homogenisation by asserting distinct indigenous narratives.

Thus, the recognition of the Maratha Military Landscapes is more than heritage conservation—it is an **international acknowledgment of India's plural civilisational history**, asserting its narrative of **resilience, maritime legacy, and self-rule** on the global stage.

