2. GEOGRAPHICAL MILIEU

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF KONKAN:

Geographically speaking, the present day Maharashtra consists of two major relief divisions: the Plateau, which is a part of the Deccan tableland, and the Konkan coastal strip, abutting on the Arabian Sea. A large area of the state rests on high plateau, historically the main centre of the Maratha Empire which, under the fearless rule of Chhatrapati Shivaji, had successfully defied the might of the Mughals. What mainly distinguishes the Maharashtra Plateau from the Konkan is its higher, general elevation. This plateau, encompassing nearly nine-tenth of the area of the state, is abounding of hills and mountain ranges. This upland has an average height of 900 m above sea-level in the west, and between 330 to 400 m in the centre. It is bound by the Satpura Mountains in the north and the Sahyadri Mountains in the west. It gradually loses its altitude eastwards to the area better known as Desh in Maratha history. It is the Sahyadri range of mountains which literally separates the Plateau from the Konkan low-land.

The Sahyadri, extending along the western edge of the Plateau, with its western face (towards Konkan) showing steep cliff, has also influenced the course of the Maratha history in various ways. In the past, the rulers from various ruling dynasties who commanded this region viz. the Rastrakutas, the Chalukyas, the Bahmanis, the Bijapuris etc., have all constructed a number of hill-forts at strategic locations on the Sahyadri ranges. Such forts bequeathed numerous advantages as they controlled the crucial mountain passes - the artery for all kinds of movements in the higher reaches. The forts, especially those located on the higher reaches, were important not only for defensive purposes but could be tactfully utilized for the purpose of taking offensives, particularly in the form of skirmish or raids, against the enemy in the camp or the plains below. Rarely could a hostile army dominate for long the country within the sphere of influence of such fortresses. A hostile occupation would, in its nature, be temporary - being subject to the fire and descents of the garrisons of the neighbouring forts. In this way the control
of such forts enabled the rulers to extend their strategic command over the surrounding regions successfully. It is no wonder, therefore, to find the genius of Shivaji making full use of these fortifications in the Sahyadri to further his political ambitions. He, in fact, constructed a chain of forts in the Sahyadri mountain ranges so as to provide protection to his nascent Swarajya from the enemies. These forts were also strategically utilized for the purpose of making long range inroads in the enemy territories. The forts have played such a vital role throughout the history of Maharashtra that it would not be an exaggeration to regard the Maratha history as a history of forts. The importance of the forts in the political life of the Maratha Swarajya could well be guessed by considering the following observations made by Ramchandra Pant Amatya. He writes, “the essence of whole Kingdom is fort”, and that “the desire for building new ones should be the aim of the King himself”. Even James Grant Duff, the first comprehensive historian of the Marathas, recorded thus, “in a military point of view, there is probably no stronger country in the world (than Maharashtra)”. Detailed rules were, therefore, laid down regarding the organization, administration and construction of the forts as is evident from the perusal of the Adnapatra.

Like the Deccan upland, the Konkan coastal strip also played a vital role in the history of the Marathas. The Konkan area was known to the outside world since the ancient period, and was of much commercial significance if we believe the references of the various travelers and merchants of the past. The Konkan became the hub of political activities once Shivaji brought a part of it under his control in the 1650s. The genius of Shivaji enabled him to exploit the political and military value of this area too, in addition to the Deccan upland. Once he got a firm foothold in the Konkan, he soon realized that it could give him a safe refuge and temporary respite from the military pressure originated by the Mughals and their allies in the Deccan. He further capitalized on this advantage by shifting the political capital of his Swarajya from Rajgad to Raigad in 1670. This shifting of political centre enabled him to devote more time for the consolidation of the Maratha Swarajya and also concentrate on the Konkan land. Dr. Balkrishna has further elaborated the advantages of the Raigad fort as the capital of Shivaji in these words, “The Raigurh Hill, rising about 3000 feet above sea level, is completely chipped off from the Western Ghauts. Its precipitous rocks make it inaccessible from three sides, while on the
fourth, strong fortification made it impregnable to Shivaji's enemies...This frowning fortress, secluded by encircling hills, is nearly equidistant from Bombay, Poona and Satara, and thus it curiously commands the sea and the land around it. Then, it is only a few miles from Mahad which, in those days, was a busy sea port whence Shivaji could conveniently secure war material and keep up communications with the chain of his sea forts. It was far away from the plains which the vast armies of Aurangzeb could easily desolate. Guarded by the invaluable defenses of Torna and Rajgarh, it could long defy the hostile fortresses. Thus Shivaji, like the Eagle of the hills, with his penetrating eyes could form his eyrie descry his prey in all directions, but no one could approach the Lion’s den. Once he decided to concentrate on the Konkan, Shivaji had to compete for politico-military supremacy even with the Europeans, whom he met here for the first time. It was to meet their challenges and exercise his sovereign control over the coastal waters of the Konkan, that Shivaji laid the foundations of the Maratha navy in the Konkan.

II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND GEOMORPHOLOGY:

The Konkan, as noticed in the beginning of the chapter, refers to a coastal tract which is one of the major geographical divisions of Western India. In simpler terms, Konkan can be described as a narrow strip of land lying between the base of the Sahyadri and the Arabian Sea. In terms of geomorphology, the Konkan is characterized by a coastal plain of variable altitude and width, backed by the escarpment of Western Ghats on the east, and the Arabian Sea with or without a cliff in the west. More precisely, the region is a distinct strip of lowland, interspersed by hills, rising in elevation from the sea level to 150 m and, at places to more than 300 m. This Arabian Sea littoral of Maharashtra stretches from the Damanganga river in the north (north of Bombay), to the Terekhol river in the south. Throughout this stretch it is, on the whole, rugged and difficult country, intersected by numerous creeks, and abounding in isolated peaks and detached range of hills. It is also composed of one or more of the following elements of the landscape: sandy beach, coastal sand dunes or mud flats, alluvial tracts along rivers or lagoons or estuary etc. The distinctive features of the Konkan and its people stand
recognized from ancient times as its classical name ‘Aparanta’ implies. According to tradition, it is the western littoral belt between the rivers Damanganga on the north and the Terekhol in the south that separated the state of Maharastra from Goa. However, apart from the well known Parshuram myth, not much is on records about early settlers.

Historically, this coastal strip, bounded by the Arabian Sea, has had a significant cultural and economic evolution from the ancient times. The Greek historians of the early Christian era have frequently mentioned about the most prosperous and important trading ports on this coast. There were maritime contacts with Egypt and Arabia and through them with the Greeks and the Romans, as noted earlier. These were followed up by economic and later on political relations with the Islamic powers of the Middle East, and then after Vasco-da-Gama’s discovery of the sea route to India - with the seafaring powers of Western Europe. It should be noted here that the European colonial powers established their first foot hold in India through the Konkan itself. It was obvious, therefore, that the first challenge to these foreign powers would come from this area. Indeed, the Zamorins of Calicut and the Kunjali Marakkars did their best to resist the dominance - commercial and otherwise - of the Portuguese who were the first sea power to establish their sovereign authority on the Indian land. But, it was Shivaji, who, for the first time in the Indian history, did much in order to project the authority of the Maratha State on the sea. Not only did he lay the foundation of Maratha Navy, but also utilized the geographical features of the Konkan Coast to his own politico-military advantages as well as for the naval defenses of his Swarajya. Coastal and island forts were built anew at strategic locations and the existing ones were adequately repaired, strengthened and expanded as per a definite naval strategy. After Shivaji, the great Maratha Admirals, coming from the proud house of the Angres’, carried on with the excellent work to keep the Maratha flag flying high on the coastal waters of Konkan. We can understand the Maratha policy towards the sea in its right perspective by undertaking a careful study of the physical features of the Konkan coastline. In the following couple of pages, a general estimate of the geomorphology of the Konkan Coast is attempted.

In a broader picture, the undulating lowland of the Konkan roughly extends for about 330 miles (approximately 550 km) from north to south and has an area approximately 12,500 Sq miles. Between the sea and the Sahyadri wall, which runs
almost parallel and present a steep face to the lowland, this littoral region has a variable width from about 45 km to 75 km. These are the widest near Bombay, in the amphitheatre-like basin of the river Ulhas (or river Kalyan) which has forced the Sahyadri in this part to recede inwards away from the coast. In this region, we indeed come across a flat, alluvial belt along the coast but this is only 4-8 miles wide; behind it lies a series of parallel ridges reaching 1500-2000 ft in which rivers like the Vaitarni, Ulhas and Amba have lower course, more or less parallel to the coast before reaching it transversely. Further, south of Bombay, the pattern of landscape changes and the continuity is interrupted by deeply furrowed land and fast-flowing streams (which are shorter and directly transverse) from the Sahyadris, giving it a crisscrossed appearance with highly eroded remnant ranges and knolls. South again, in the south of Ratnagiri, the great feature is the series of extensive laterite-capped residual plateau. And throughout this length, the Konkan is dominated by the tremendous scrap of Ghats rising sheer a matter of 3000 ft in a mile or two, fretted into wild canyons at the valley heads. In this way the physiographic features Konkan suggest that this area is far from being purely a plain or even-land.

Let us have a few words on the river system of the Konkan, now. The river and drainage system of the area is also peculiar. None of the streams rising from the Sahyadri Mountain drain large area to be called a river. They are short, varying in length from about 50 km to 150 km, and they run mostly parallel to their respective small individual catchment areas. After receiving tidal water at a distance of 12 to 48 km from the sea, they wind along low, mangrove-covered salt marshes and undergo so much change in their character that many of them have two different names, one for the upper course as fresh water streams and the other for their salt-water creeks. Most of these rivers have a steep gradient in the sub-Sahyadrian tract, and are fast flowing and more intensely seasonal in their regime. These fast flowing and the rain-fed rivers of the Sahyadri, towards the coastal side, therefore, could not develop estuaries at their mouths. They, however, formed creeks at their mouths—the ports developed along which obviously did not possess deep harbouring facilities. Moreover, the wide and shallow expanses of their mouths are often marked by sand-bars because of the action of the sea-waves. The Konkan rivers, though important at their mouths for the depth and tidal effects, were
equally disadvantageous and useless further upstream for navigational purposes because of their variable nature of water and steep gradient. These features, as we will discuss in due course of our thesis, prevented the Europeans ships, comparatively bigger in size, to make inroads from the western side in the interior. The Europeans, therefore, clung to some pockets along the coast. Even the small vessels anchoring near the river-ports up the creeks, could not move upstream because of the steep up-stream gradient. The great fluctuation in the water level of the rivers, because of their seasonal nature, was another restricting factor to reckon with. In short, though the river-ports in the Konkan served large tributary areas, there was no free or easy access from the coast towards the interior, which, on the other hand, remained unaffected by the minor developments along the coast. In this way, the Konkan rivers do not permit any easy economic use of them by man.\textsuperscript{22} The Marathas rulers, on the contrary, made a calculated and strategic use of them for political and military (naval) purpose.

As regards the physiography of the seaboard of the Konkan, we will concentrate, for the purpose of our study, only on the (narrow) western strip of coastal land, varying from 12 to 20 km in width, merging with the Arabian Sea. This happens to be the area with numerous creeks and inlets over which the influence of the sea-water is felt in the form of tides. The tides that penetrate deep into the country (because of the inlets) have always favoured the growth of a number of littoral and estuary ports, like the ancient port of Suppara (Sopara), Kallinea (Kalyan), Semylla (Chaul), Byzantium (Vijayadurg) etc, to name a few. The frequency of coming across a creek or a river bay along the coast is too frequent, particularly in the north Konkan, where at every six or eight km we can find safe harbour for native crafts.

Starting from the north, Daman, situated at the tidal mouth of the river Damanganga and controlling the entrance of the Gulf of Cambay, was captured in 1558 by the Portuguese who converted it as their permanent establishment in India. It was one of the finest trading ports situated at the tidal mouth (estuary) of the Damanganga river. The movements of the ships and crafts were properly regulated by the tidal effects of the sea water. Moreover it provided an excellent shelter to the ocean going vessels during the South-West monsoon. It appears from the records that excellent teak wood was available here in abundance, making it an important centre of shipbuilding and repairs during the
15th & 16th Century. Venturing down south, in the present district of Thane, in between the rivers Damanganga and Vaitarna, the width of the littoral is narrowed down by the hilly ranges, which, though detached from the main Sahyadri range, runs parallel to the coast for about 16 km inland. The small streams flowing down westward from these hills have developed several creeks along the coast. Though there were salt marshes and sandy-spits running into muddy shallows which made it difficult for the vessels of higher tonnage to navigate in the coastal waters, the Dahanu and Chinchini creeks afforded some shelter to the vessels. The smaller boats could utilize the incoming tides to enter inside and even move a few miles upstream. Agasi, an important port and town on the mouth of the river Vaitarna, located mere 10 miles north of the Portuguese stronghold of Bassein, was another important centre. In the early part of the 16th Century Agasi was known for its considerable amount of timber and for the fitting of boats of good quality. The Portuguese sacked Agasi twice in 1530 and 1531, taking away as many as 300 Gujarati vessels.

The erstwhile Selsette Island at the mouth of the Ulhas river has undergone considerable changes in the recent past if we flip through the accounts of the 12th century traveler Idrisi. According to him, Thane, in 1153, was a ‘pretty town upon a great gulf where vessels anchor and set sail’. The most favourable conditions as regards shelter and water depth were found in the narrow bay separating Salsette Island from the mainland. The sea going vessels must have navigated through this channel, entering through Vasai or Bassein, in order to reach the other ports on the inner side, and to avoid the fury of the open seas as well. Furthermore, the creek of Bassein, in the 17th Century, was easily navigable as far as Kalyan and Bhiwandi - the former being a port of great repute. Though the strong and well defended coastal fort at Vasai (Bassein) took notice of the movements of the vessels across the Thane Creek, Shivaji, in the face of such a formidable challenge, succeeded in setting afloat the keel of the Maratha Navy in Kalyan and Bhiwandi sometime in 1659.

Moving further down south, we come across the low flat shore furrowed by several creeks, such as Dharamtar, Uran, Panvel and the Pen, Amba, Kundalika and Savitri river creeks etc. Behind the shoreline, stretches the low tract of salt-water marsh. Sand-bars have been formed at the mouths of the creeks. They have sandy and gravelly
beds and lie between low, muddy, mangrove-covered banks of the rivers. Below the tidal-limits, the beds of rivers are muddy, broken by occasional dykes of rocks and the creeks coil between higher banks and lower banks. The passage is difficult and tedious, and the creeks are folded too deep to be forded. Above the tidal-limits, they have cut deep valleys on the rocky beds in which they form huge torrents during the rainy season. But during summer, they cease to flow and form only chains of pools so that they could be easily forded. Here again, the growth of port-towns viz. Panvel, Pen, Nagothana, Roha, Mahad etc., have been facilitated by the tidal activity of the sea. Each one of these ports is located at the tidal limit of the rivers. Few of them served as strong-holds, some as nodal points because of being well connected to the hinterland through highways, and most of them as river-ports, as we shall see in the later half of our discussion.

The strong fort of Kulaba off the Alibag coast, on the mouth of the Roha Creek, occupies an important place in the history of Maratha Navy. The famous ancient port of Semylla or Chaul lies in the vicinity, about 30 miles south of Bombay, on the right bank of river Kundalika on Roha creek. Chaul presents the glimpse of hectic military activities in the 16th and 17th century as per the records of History. The Portuguese first appeared at Chaul in 1505, and it was in Chaul harbour that a naval fight took place between the Portuguese and the Muslims in 1508, in which the former were defeated. In 1516, they established a factory here, and five years later, Chaul was burnt by Bijapur fleet. In 1600, it passed to the Mughals. In 1740, it passed to the Marathas. In addition to the economic benefits derived from the control of these port towns, the region had extensive forest cover with a variety of trees, of which the commonest were teak, mango, khair etc. The Imperial Gazetteer, referring the Forest Administration Report of 1903-04, quotes, “the Kolaba teak and black-wood tracts are quite valuable. The Kolaba teak is considered the best grown in the Konkan, and inferior only to the Malabar. The curved limbs are particularly adapted for the building of small vessels. In the talukas of Pen, Alibag and Roha also, teak is the most widely spread and most valuable tree. Next comes the mango and black-wood”.

Further south, on the coast, is situated Murud-Janjira, protected by the island fortress of Janjira, which was believed to be the strongest on the West Coast. Janjira is
bounded on the north by the Kundali or Roha Creek; on the south by Bankot creek in Ratnagiri dist; and on the west by the Arabian Sea. About the middle of the coast-line (some 40 miles long), the Rajapuri Gulf divides Janjira into two main portions - northern and southern. On the coast, the sand-bars at the mouth of every inlet but the Rajapuri creek prevent ingress. The mouth of Rajapuri creek is 45 miles south of Bombay. The chief creeks and backwaters are, beginning from the north: the Mandla-Borlai, Nandgaon, Murud, Rajapuri, Panchaitan or Dive-Borali, and Srivardhan. Though most of the creek entrances are rocky and dangerous, they were vital to the interest of the native war vessels which were small with flat bottoms. During the navigable season (September to June), these could be accessed only by boats of under 1.5 tons burden. And once over the bar, the creeks are mostly of uniform depth throughout their course. The creek ends at the old town of Mhasla, 14 miles south-east of Janjira town. The Rajapuri creek, in particular, was an excellent harbour because of silent water and protected entrance. Not only was there an absence of sand bar at the entrance, the creek had a muddy bottom too. Furthermore, the tidal effects made it more suitable for use as the least depth at low tide was 3.5 fathoms at the entrance of the creek, and 4.5 fathoms inside the entrance in the mid channel. Because of these features the area of Murud-Janjira, adjoining the Rajapuri creek, was a bone of contention between the Marathas and the Siddis for almost eight decades starting from the reign of Shivaji. Further south, Devgad remains a safe and beautiful landlocked harbour, at all times perfectly smooth. The average depth of water is 18 feet. The entrance only three cables in width, lies close to the fort point.

Down south, below the Savitri river, the present district of Ratnagiri begins. The sailors and fishermen from this region were Muslims or Hindus of Bhandari, Koli, and Gabit caste. These people, who had a greater knowledge of seafaring as well as coastal geography, played a crucial role in the formative years of the Maratha navy. Shivaji is said to have appointed one Mai Nayak of Bhandari caste as his admiral. The Ratnagiri coast is generally rocky and rugged in terms of physiography. The entire coastline is indented with small and sandy bays with elevated land mass reaching straight up to the sea. There are a few rocky islands near the coastline which were fortified by the rulers in the past. The coast is intersected by numerous creeks and navigable rivers, flowing between steep and lofty hills. Except for the rivers Savitri, Vaitarna and Shastri, on which
Tidal effects could be experienced deep inland, the other rivers, traversing through narrow, deep-cut ravines, are known for the abruptness of their windings. These rivers have along their banks the chief seaports and almost all fertile land of the district. They are navigable for 20 miles or more and form estuaries affording safe anchorage for coasting crafts. In the medieval period, there were a few prominent ports which attracted the attentions of the political powers. These ports fall under two categories: (1) Coastal ports on sheltered bays and river mouths - for example, Bankot, Harnai, Devgarh, Dabhol, Anjanvel etc; and (2) Inland ports up tidal creeks, generally at the points where navigation ceases; for example, Chiplun, Sangameshwar, Rajapur etc.

The port of Bankot was located at the foot of a rocky headland (fortified by the same name) in the extreme north of Ratnagiri district. The channel is on the south-eastern side of the river entrance, and is narrow. The channel lying about a mile outside the rocky cliffs and two miles south-west of Bankot fort, could have been put to strategic use despite having a sand bar at it mouth. It had a depth of approximately 9 feet at low water; while the rise of the tide was 11 feet at ordinary springs facilitating its strategic and tactical use for naval purpose too. Harnai was another good harbourage for the coasting crafts from the northerly winds. The enemy (naval) depredations to the port could have been easily checked by the island fortress of Suvarnadurg, opposite to the coast. The port town of Dabhol, on the mouth of river Vashishti, used to engage in extensive trade with Persia and Red Sea ports in the medieval period. River Vashishti, which used to be tidal up to 25 miles from its mouth, had another important port Chiplun at that point. The sea port of Anjanwel, on the south bank of river Anjanwel, is situated in a little bay within its entrance. Though the port had a difficult entry because of the presence of sand bar at the mouth, once inside the bar, there was deep water up to 5, 6, and even 9 fathoms. The obvious advantage derived because of a difficult entry, enabled its use for tactical purpose by the native navy. Further down south, was the fortified port of Jaigad, lying at the southern entrance to the Savitri or Sangameshwar river. The harbour formed a bay, 2 miles long and 5 miles broad, with deep water and was well protected against winds and storms. Another inland port, Sangameshwar, was on the extreme tidal reach of the river, about 20 miles from the coast. The channel could be used for other purposes not purely economic or commercial in nature. Since only smaller crafts could have maneuvered the
channel, it was advantageous for Maratha naval purpose as compared to the European or other enemy vessels which were comparatively bigger in size. The Portuguese records mention that Sangameshwar was also used as a building yard for the Maratha ships.42

The history of Ratnagiri is replete with references of continuous struggle between various political powers. At around 1500 AD the whole of the Konkan, south of the river Savitri, came under Bijapur rule. The Portuguese fought for the control of its chief ports which wrought grievous loss to Dabhol and other coastal towns. The decline of the Portuguese power was accompanied by the rise of the Marathas, who, under Shivaji, established themselves at Ratnagiri (1648-80), defeating the Bijapur armies. They also successfully kept at bay the Mughals, and overcame the challenges posed by the Siddi and the Portuguese. After the death of Shivaji, the Siddis held possession of a part of this district. Subsequently, Kanhoji Angre established his supremacy in the early decades of the 18th century. The Angres were finally defeated by the British forces in 1756.43 The Ratnagiri town is open and faces the sea. The Jaitapur creek and seaport, situated approximately 11 miles south-east to the Rajapur port, at the mouth of Rajapur river, used to be one of the chief ports of Konkan providing good shelter (against winds) to the vessels. During earlier period it was also known by the name of ‘Cetapur’ or ‘Sitapur’.44 Rajapur happened to be another significant port located at the head of a tidal creek, some 15 miles from the sea. References of Rajapur having direct interaction with the vessels of Arabian nation during the medieval period are found in abundance.45 This British had their factory at Rajapur which was sacked by Shivaji owing to deteriorating relations between them, particularly because of the formers suspicious role in the Maratha-Siddi conflict.

The Malwan district constitutes the southernmost part of the Maharashtra Konkan. A big change in the coastal physiography could be noticed in this southern part of Konkan - the great feature being the series of laterite-capped residual plateau.46 The present day Malwan starts from the Vijayadurg creek in the north to the Terekhol creek in the south. The entire coastline is not only rocky but dangerous too. The only exception to this general trend was the Devgad port which has been described in the contemporary documents as a fine sea port with a safe land locked harbour. Its entrance, stated to be only three cables in width,47 was closer to the fort point providing extra protection against
enemy crafts. The larger rivers and creeks had deep water for 20-30 miles from the coast and many of the towns, therefore, are located at the farthest navigable point. Hunter observed thus, “it was so rough a country that the rivers formed the best highways of trade”. Because of its physical features, the Malwan was used more for military and strategic purposes rather than purely economic purposes. Vijayadurg (or Gheria) and Malwan were not only strong coastal forts but also served as important dockyards of the Marathas. Once naval bases, Vijayadurg and Sindhudurg bear testimony to Maharashtra’s martial supremacy during Shivaji’s reign. The Malwan bay houses the Malwan harbour and port town. The headland of Rajkot, in fact, offered a secure harbour for the vessels anchored in the Malwan bay. Moreover, the bay was itself blocked by rocky reefs and was difficult to traverse without a pilot. It is interesting to note, however, that the British had other reasons to stay off from Malwan rather than just the difficulties of navigation in the Malwan waters. They dreaded the ‘Malvan pirates’. The construction of the magnanimous island fortress of Sindhudurg off the Malwan port by Shivaji further speaks of the geopolitical importance of the area. Karli, Kolamb and Kalavali creeks were also significant in the greater plan of the defense of Maratha Swarajya. The Karli and the Kalavali were navigable by smaller crafts for about 20 miles, which could have provided safe escape against the enemy.

III

KONKAN: DISTRIBUTION OF Forts.-

The aim of the foregoing discussion was to bring to light the centers of economic & political activities on the Konkan coast during the 17th century. In the following pages we will try to identify the areas of military value in the coastal surroundings of Konkan. We will discuss about the various coastal and island forts which were occupied, re-strengthened and even newly built by the Maratha rulers to fit into their scheme of the projection of sovereignty over the oceanic water. There is no denying the fact that forts played a very crucial role in Shivaji’s military system and he attached a special value to their defense and equipment. Though the hill forts signified more in terms of political sovereignty and symbols of resistance on land, the coastal and island forts under his
control were equally a medium of projection of the state's authority over the Arabian Sea. A survey of the naval forts held by the Marathas establishes the fact that, like the various hill forts of the Swarajya, the position of natural advantage and strategic value dominated the criterion for selection of the site for the marine forts too. The Konkan coast was dotted with many such fortified locations which had military as well as strategic value. Most of them are found to be surrounding the important ports, or guarding the tidal mouths of the various Konkan rivers or, even sheltering dockyards. Though, the date of construction of each of these forts cannot be determined with precision, it can be inferred nevertheless, taking into account their location, construction and distribution pattern, that fortification of the ports or commercial centers had been an integral part of policy matter of the coastal rulers. The idea of providing protection to the coastal commercial settlements is not of recent origin or area specific. It has been a global phenomenon since ages, and has been proved through the findings of archaeological excavations. Excavations carried along the coast in the Indian Ocean region have brought to light the fact that many of the commercial settlements/ports coexisted with military/political/fortified settlements even during the ancient period. It is pertinent here to mention, in addition, that the coastal powers were also constantly pre-occupied in their endeavour to bring the adjoining off-shore islands etc. under their control. This helped in further securing their interests as we shall try to explore in this thesis. In the Konkan waters there were a few desolate islands (Khanderi and Undheri, for example) off the coast which, though not anyway significant in terms of economic usage or otherwise, attracted the attention of the great Maratha leader Shivaji. He captured and fortified them keeping in mind their geo-political and strategic value. That, his concerns were not misplaced could be judged from the fact that these solitary islands, very soon, engendered an intense military/naval contest which involved the direct participation of the European powers also.

To carry on with our arguments further, let us now undertake a study of the fortified settlements on the coastline, controlled by the Marathas in the 17th and early 18th Century. The purpose of this survey is also to understand the Maratha policy towards the sea, in addition to and the challenges originating from that side in its right perspective.
On the basis of their geographical location, the various forts in the Konkan coastal region may be classified and studied under three broad headings, viz.: -

i) Coastal forts,

ii) Promontories or Fortified headlands, and

iii) The Island forts.

COASTAL FORTS:

Coastal forts, as the nomenclature suggests, were located on the coast or very near to the coastal waters. It can be safely assumed that the economic considerations far outweighed the other considerations behind the construction of such forts. The river-valleys were the main arteries along which the trade moved from the creek-ports to the interior and vice-versa. Protection to this trade and to the movement of the goods was provided by building sea-forts, preferably at the mouths of the creeks, near the ports, and hill forts at suitable points along the trade routes. Narwane, in a painstaking study, shows that a total of 88 forts, which constituted well over 19% of the total number of forts located in Maharashtra, could be clubbed together and studied under the category of coastal forts. It is a different matter altogether that not all of them were important from the naval point of view. It is interesting to note that many of these were constructed by the Portuguese entrepreneurs in the early 16th Century in response to their needs. It is an established fact that the coming of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean considerably altered the method as well as the pattern of trade in the region. They furthered the concept of monopolistic trade backed by the military (naval) might in place of the peaceful trade based on equality. Hence, in the words of Pearson, ‘the Portuguese earned the dubious distinction of being the people who introduced politics into the (Indian) ocean.’ In addition, they were also quick to recognize the various ‘choke points and strategic places’ around the Indian Ocean littoral and guarded them meticulously after acquiring political or armed control over them. As a result, the Portuguese had some fifty forts in Asia by 1600 A.D. These forts had a special value for the Portuguese as they also claimed, as their right, ‘Sovereignty over the Sea’ in the Indian Ocean after they reached Calicut. Their extremely powerful naval fleets helped them to project and subsequently maintain their authority over the coastal sea for more than a century. When Shivaji came to power, he
paid special attention to the defense of the coastal region in view of the challenges he perceived on the oceanic front of his Swarajya. He was accurate in his judgment as the western coast very soon witnessed a keen struggle for mastery in which the coastal forts played major role.

Let us now examine the salient features of the some of the prominent of the numerous coastal forts of Konkan, one by one.

1. **Dahanu**: Dahanu was a seaport town of considerable importance since ancient period. On the northern bank of the Dahanu creek, the Dahanu fort was constructed, probably by the Portuguese, sometime in 1534 when the adjoining areas were acquired by them from the Sultan of Gujarat.\(^5\)\(^8\) The need for the fortification could be understood from the fact that it was an important port with a creek providing natural shelter and safe refuge to the boats against the fury of the ocean. The same advantages must have favoured its selection as a shipbuilding centre in the ancient past as recorded the Nashik inscriptions of 1\(^st\) Century AD.\(^5\)\(^9\)

2. **Tarapur**: Tarapur fort is located on the south bank of the Tarapur creek. The town, in the earlier times, was known by the joint name of Tarapur-Chincini. The surrounding area was taken by the Portuguese from the Sultan of Gujarat in the 1530s. The Portuguese then constructed a sturdy coastal fort which had high walls (up to 30 feet).\(^6\)\(^0\) The fort, occupying an area of approximately 5000 sq feet, faced the open sea from one side where as the three landward sides were given protection by digging ditches near the walls.\(^6\)\(^1\) This fort withstood the attacks by the Mughals, Marathas and the Siddis for a long time. It was finally captured by the Marathas during their campaign (The Bassein Campaign) against the Portuguese in 1738-39.

3. **Mahim/Kelve**: The Mahim or Mahim Kelve fort (different from the Mahim Island of the present day Mumbai dist.) is yet another example of the strategic planning of the Portuguese to defend and strengthen their territory in and around Bassein. The Portuguese, after getting possession of the land from the Sultan of Gujarat, constructed a coastal fort at Mahim with one side of it facing the sea. The fort stands opposite to the
village of Kelve about 2.5 miles south to the Mahim creek. The idea was to keep a tight vigil on the Mahim creek as demonstrated by the gun-holes for the musketry on the walls of the ruined fort. The possession of the fort was considered a must by the great Maratha General Chimaji Appa for his Bassein campaign of 1738-39. The fort subsequently fell to the Marathas.

4. Vasai/Bassein: When the Portuguese arrived in the Indian waters, Bassein was under the rule of Bahadurshah, the Sultan of Gujarat. The island of Bassein seems to have attracted the notice of the Portuguese as the river or strait separating the mainland from the island was a convenient rendezvous for shipping. In 1528, Captain Heytor de Silveira, captured and burnt the city of Bassein. In 1532, the Portuguese attacked Bassein again and after a weak resistance, they entered the smaller fort (which was built by the Sultan to repulse any attack) and destroyed it. Subsequently, the towns of Thane, Bandra, Mahim and Bombay were brought under Portuguese control.

On 23 December 1534, the Sultan of Gujarat, signed a treaty with the Portuguese and ceded Bassein along with some territory around it viz. Salsette, Bombay, Parel, Vadala, Sion, Worli, Mazgaon, Thana, Bandra, Mahim, Karanja. The Portuguese further compelled Bahadur Shah not only to obtain passes for all the Gujarat ships bound for the Red Sea but also to put a stop on the construction/fitting of any war-ship in Gujarat. The horse trade also became the monopoly of the Portuguese from then onwards. Subsequently the Portuguese built a new fortress enclosing a whole town within the fort walls after two years. The fort, surrounded by ditch form three sides and with an opening towards the sea, had 10 bastions which provided it additional strength. It kept a close watch on the movement of the ships and boats passing by. This fort became the northern capital of the Portuguese Empire in India. This fort stands till today with the outer shell and ruins of churches. Though the importance of Bassein was reduced by transfer of neighbouring Bombay Island to the British in 1665, the Portuguese successfully retained the possession of the fort till 1739, after which it fell to the Marathas.
5. **Ghodbandar**: Opposite to the Bassein fort, on the southern bank of the Bassein creek, the Portuguese had constructed another fort, though not very large, for strategic considerations. This fort, named as Ghodbandar fort, was built sometime in the late 16th Century. Its location leaves no doubt that once it must have played an important role in controlling traffic going down the river Ulhas to Bassein creek and on to the sea. It is said that Shivaji attempted to take it by surprise with the help of the Kolis in the vicinity in 1672, but the attack was successfully repulsed by the Portuguese.

6. **Thane**: The fort of Thane was located on the west shore of the Selsette creek. Since it was also a port of considerable economic value, it was subjected to ravages in the early 16th century by the Portuguese and the rulers of Gujarat. In 1533, it was made over to the Portuguese by a treaty. The fort seems to be a later addition to the chain of forts of the Portuguese Bassien which had acquired much importance to them in view of the threat of the Maratha attack on Bassein by Chimaji Appa in 1737.

6. **Hirakot**: Hirakot fort was a coastal fort built opposite to the island fort of Kulaba. It was built by Kanhoji Angre in 1720 well after Kulaba had acquired the fame as the headquarters of the Maratha navy. It had become necessary, in view of the continuous threats of the British and the Siddis to Kulaba, to have a supporting structure nearby on the coast. The advantage of having such fort was two-fold. Such forts not only functioned as a logistic base to the main fort, but also helped in preventing any misadventure from the landward side.

7. **Chaul**: Chaul lies about 30 miles south of Bombay, on the right bank of river Kundalika on the Roha creek. The Bahmani Sultans who ruled from 1347 to 1489, held Chaul as well as other adjoining posts. A period of Portuguese ascendancy established at Chaul preceded the rise of Angres, and was partly contemporaneous with the conquest of the rest of the district by the Mughals and the Marathas. The Portuguese first appeared at Chaul in 1505. It was in Chaul harbour that a naval fight took place between the Portuguese and the Muslims in 1508, in which the Portuguese were defeated. In 1516 they founded a factory. Immediately afterwards the Portuguese governor Albuquerque
recognised the importance of the site for a fortress’ and subsequently a fortress was built there in between 1521-24. It was protected by the sea on the west and the Kundalika creek on the south and by a ditch and a wall in the east. Sambhaji, the Maratha King after Shivaji, tried hard to capture Chaul, but failed in his attempt ‘because of regular European fortifications’. Marathas finally succeeded and the fort was wrested from the Portuguese by Chimaji Appa in the campaign of 1737-1739.

8. Revadanda: As noted earlier, Cahul itself was divided into two parts – the upper Chaul and the lower Chaul. While the old settlement of Chaul is known as the upper Chaul, the lower Chaul is known as Revadanda. Situated at 11 Km from Alibagh, Revadanda was a massive fort with a circumference of about five kilometers commanding the mouth of the Kundalika river. The Portuguese constructed this fort in 1558. It had high walls, a rampart at some places, with several bastions. The fort must have served as a screen to Chaul in addition to serving the more strategic function of a major naval depot and post between the Portuguese stronghold of Goa and Daman. As per the Marathi chronicle Sabhasad Bakhar, the ‘sea-fort’ of Revdanda was a Nizamshahi dominion under the Habshi Commander (Abyssinian or the Siddi of Janjira), and that, Shivaji failed to take it. Sabhasad was probably referring to the adjoining territory to the forts of Rajapuri and Janjira which were held by the Siddis. Revadanda remained invincible till 1740 when Manaji Angre captured it for the Marathas.

9. Korlai: While the occupation of Chaul was being planned by the Portuguese, the nearby location of Korlai (better known as the Cheul Rock by them), on the southern bank of the Roha creek, could not escape their shrewd attention. With a fort on either side of the Kundalika river (the other being the Revadanda fort), the Portuguese could have gained a tactical control over the movements in the Roha creek. What ensued, therefore, was a brief struggle between the Portuguese and the Nizamshahi of Ahmednagar over the occupation of the small fort built by the later. The Portuguese finally emerged victorious, and after occupying the fort they renovated it to suit their military and naval needs. Though it was a comparatively small fort, the added strength to the fort (particularly the artillery) helped it to successfully defy the onslaught of the Maratha King Sambhaji in
1683. The fort was finally captured by the Marathas after the Portuguese lost Bassein in 1739.

10. **Danda-Rajapur**: Situated approximately 10 Kms from Murud, Danda-Rajapur was a *Siddi* possession in the 17th century. *Sabhasad* refers to this fort in context of its nuisance value to the Maratha *Swarajya*. This coastal fort was built on the extreme corner of the Murud coastline before the creek which has to be crossed before going to the stronghold of Janjira. The fort’s crucial location suggests that it could have served two functions: (a) to regulate the traffic and movements in the Rajapuri creek, and (b) to serve as a depot for the island fort of Janjira.

11. **Srivardhan**: This coastal fort was located approximately 32 km south of Murud. Shivaji is credited to have constructed this fort in 1679 AD after wresting it from the Bijapur rulers. Srivardhan was a thriving port and trading centre during that time. The very mention of Srivardhangad by *Sabhasad* as one of the newly constructed forts by Shivaji and its extensive fortification indicate towards the military importance attached to the fort. However, the economic motive, as another guiding principle behind the construction of the fort, cannot be ruled out altogether. It was amongst the 13 forts which were handed over to Kanhoji Angre by Shahu in 1713.

13. **Kanakdurg**: Kanakdurg was a coastal fort located a little south of the island fort of Suvarnadurg. It is amongst the group of coastal forts which were supposed to act as supporting partners of Suvarnadurg. The other forts were Gova and Fatehgad or Fatehgad. The fort of Kanakdurg is a bit isolated from the main coast as it stands on a piece of land which is joined by a causeway with the main coast. In this way the sea protected it from three sides and a wall on the fourth side. The importance of such clusters of forts could be understood in the terminology of military strategy only. Under no circumstances the authority controlling the Suvarnadurg fort could have allowed the adjacent forts, especially Kanakdurg to be taken by the enemy.
14. **Dabhol**: The fame of Dabhol port has been noticed earlier in this chapter. Since it was a flourishing trading centre from ancient times, hence economic considerations could be attributed to the reasons behind its fortifications. From the ruins, it could be estimated that the port, located on the northern bank of Dabhol creek, was provided with adequate protection by the Portuguese who erected a fortification around it. Dabhol witnessed a continuous struggle between the powers for mastery. Shivaji achieved some success in his second attempt though the Portuguese had put up a determined resistance on each occasion. The control of the fort passed on to the Siddi after some times, but was finally taken by Tulaji Angre in the year 1740. Though nothing remains of the fortification now, it can be presumed that the fort might have played a subsidiary and supportive role to the Anjanvel fort, located on the other (southern) bank of the Dabhol creek.

15. **Anjanvel**: The Anjanvel fort was situated on a high and flat hill on the mouth of the Vasisthi or Jog river, as it was called in the ancient period. It thus occupies a commanding position because of its height as well as strategic location on the mouth of the Dabhol creek. The fort was wrested by Shivaji from the Bijapur Sultans in 1660 and its fortifications were strengthened. This seems to be the probable reason why Sabhasad has mentioned the name of Anjanveli as one of the newly constructed forts by Shivaji. The fort was quite large with as many as twelve bastions. It was protected by sea on three sides and by a ditch in the landward side. A portion of the renovation was supposedly carried out by the Maratha King Sambhaji. It had two gates, with the east gate overlooking the small harbour. The Siddi captured this fort in 1699 and added to its fortification by constructing a lower fort, or Padkot. The Angres (Tulaji Angre) got its control in 1744 and renamed it Gopalgad. That it served as an important naval post of the Maratha naval establishment seems is evident from the renovation work done by Shivaji and Sambhaji respectively.

16. **Vijaygad**: Vijaygad was a small coastal fort, built on the northern bank of the Shastri river which opened in the Jaigad creek. The purpose of this fort seems to be of subsidiary nature to the Jaigad fort on the opposite bank of the creek.
17. **Ratnagiri**: Ratnagiri, during the ancient and medieval period, was an important town with a good harbour (though not as important as Cahul or Dabhol). The Ratnagiri fort stands on a rock or headland between two small bays, but they afford neither shelter nor good anchorage, as they are completely exposed and have a rocky bottom. We find a mention of the Ratnagiri fort in the *Sabhasad Bakhar*, as a possession of Shivaji, but no details are given regarding the plan or strength of the fort. The actual location of the fort is on the north-western flank of the Ratnagiri harbour and it has extensive fortifications which include many bastions also. A ditch on the landward side provided it additional protection and made it inaccessible. The landing site was towards the north of the fort. It was difficult to enter or land except during high tides. The Angres, though controlled the fort in the first half of the 18th century, preferred Vijayadurg for obvious reasons.

18. **Purangad**: Purangad was a coastal fort located 12 miles south of Ratnagiri. It was built on a small hillock overlooking the sea on the mouth (northern bank) of the Muchkundi river. It appears to be a minor fort that might have provided safe hide-out for quick raids that the Marathas could have conducted on trading ships of the enemy, to refurbish their treasury from time to time.

19. **Yeshwantgad**: The coastal fort of Yeshwantgad lies a few kilometers north of the stronghold of Vijayadurg on the mouth of a small river called Arjun river. The main purpose of the fort, with seventeen bastions, was to protect the Jaitapur harbour inside the creek. The fort faced the sea from three sides and the fourth or the landward side was protected by digging a ditch. The British records of 1862 mention Yeshwantgad as a strong and well protected fort with 28 old cannons lying within.

20. **Malwan**: The entire stretch of the Malwan coast is quite rocky and equally dangerous because of numerous submerged reefs. Malwan was a famous port by the same name during the preceding years. Opposite to the port of Malwan, there were three rocky islands which Shivaji decided to fortify. The third one which was once the inner
island, now part of the mainland is the present town of Malwan and the other two are better known as Sindhudurg and Padmagad. Since the adjoining area of Malwan could not accommodate the boats of greater tonnage because of the reefs and rocks, it was ideally suited to further the naval interests of the Marathas. The European records, on the contrary, highlight Malvan for its dreaded piratical activities conducted by the ‘Malvan pirates’. 

21. **Rajkot:** When Shivaji undertook the construction of the island fort of Sindhudurg, he planned adequately to strengthen its outer defenses by constructing forts around it on the mainland too. One such fort was Rajkot which stands on a rising ground within the town limits of Malwan, to its north-west coastal corner. It was built on a similar pattern as of the other coastal forts. It was surrounded by the sea from three sides and the landward side was duly strengthened by strong fortifications with bastions as the ruins suggest.

22. **Sarjekot:** In the chain of forts around Sindhudurg, the second mainland fort was Sarjekot, situated 1.5 miles north of Rajkot little beyond the Kolamb Creek in the coastal village of Revandi. The fort might have served as an outpost. The fort is washed on the north by the sea and was once protected on the other three sides by a ditch. It was constructed on a hillock at the mouth of the Kalavali Creek on its south bank, by Shivaji in 1668. The creek, running towards north for a considerable distance, was once navigable. In addition, due to its zigzag nature, the creek was convenient for anchoring or even for building ships. The possible use of the waters could not be ruled out for a safe hide out after quick raids on the enemy ships.

**PROMONTORIES OR FORTIFIED HEADLANDS:**

1. **Bankot/Fort Victoria:** The Bankot fort is situated at the mouth (left bank) of the river Savitri (Sangameshwar river; navigable) with a rocky headland. The fort locally known as Himmatgad, was almost square in shape, protected by the sea on three
sides and by a ditch on the landward side. It was located on the south bank of the Bankot creek approximately 10 miles north-west of the island fort of Suvarnadurg, and hence was ideally placed to control the passage of vessels through the creek and also all maritime operations within its circle of control. The main fort was probably built by the Siddis as the vassal of the Bijapur rulers but the Angres added considerably to its strength as is evident by the different levels of fortifications. These later additions earned for the fort, another name BaavanKot, probably because of Baavan (Fiftytwo) strong points in the fort. Bankot was ceded to the British by the Marathas in exchange for the conquered fortress of Gheria or Vijayadurg in 1756, and it thus became the first British fort on the mainland of Western India. The British thereafter renamed Bankot as Fort Victoria.

2. Jaigad: The fort of Jaigad finds mention in the contemporary Maratha Chronicle Sabhasad Bakhar as one of the fortified strongholds of Shivaji. As noticed earlier in this chapter, Jaigad was an important port and an excellent harbour located in the Jaigad creek on the mouth of the Shastri river. To protect the port and harbour, a raised hillock on the southern bank near the mouth of the creek, was selected to build a fort facing the sea. The site, therefore, was naturally advantageous as it stands on a cliff, 200 feet above the sea, overlooking the confluence of the river and the Arabian Sea. The fort is rather small and occupies an area of 4 acres. It was originally built by the Sultans of Bijapur in the 16th century and it passed on to the Marathas sometime during the reign of Shivaji. The fort was later handed over to Kanhoji Angre in 1713 as a part of the agreement between him and Shahu. The Marathas added extensively to the fort as is evident from two different layers of fortification. The fort, with two gates - one facing the south and the other facing the east - had strong ramparts and bastions. The fort was strategically located and enabled a close watch on the movements in the Jaigad creek which was nearly two miles long and five miles broad.

3. Vijayadurg: The fame of Vijayadurg as a port and trading centre has been well documented by the early writers (Byzantium of Ptolemy). The fort by the same name which is located on the southern bank of the Vijayadurg creek commanding the mouth of
river Vagothana, is quite old and is carved out of rock on the sea side. It was enlarged under the Bijapur Kings; and about the middle of the 17th century it was captured by Shivaji. Though the name of this fort has been mentioned by Sabhasad in the list of the newly constructed forts of Shivaji,109 it probably implies the re-strengthening work done by Shivaji, to whom it owes its triple line of walls, the outermost wall having seventeen towers, and massive interior buildings.110 In about 1698, Kanhoji Angre made it the capital of his fief stretching for about 150 miles along the coast and about 30-60 miles inland.111 The fort, protecting the 'excellent harbour' and a dockyard carved out of the rocks by Kanhoji Angre, was built on a rocky headland some 100 feet above the river112 jutting into the sea. Vijayadurg was the main base of the Maratha navy particularly under the Angers who fitted out and repaired Maratha war vessels in the Vijayadurg dockyard. The sea battered it from three sides, whereas a ditch protected it from the forth sides. This fort was originally known by the name ‘Gheria’ under the Muslim rule, but was renamed Vijayadurg or the ‘Victory Fort’ because, over a period of time, it could successfully withstand the determined attempts of the Siddi and the British (at times joined by the Portuguese) to take it. The fort was finally captured by the British in 1756, but not without the active support of the Maratha Peshwa.

4. Devgad: The Devgad fort presents yet another example of headland fort. The fort is built atop a small hillock with strong defenses, which were mandatory to protect the land locked harbour of the same name. It was a massive fort, occupying an area of about 120 acres, said to have been constructed by the Kanhoji Angre in 1729.113 The motive must have been to facilitate the Maratha control over this stretch of the coast absolute as the stronghold of Vijayadurg was situated just 20 kilometers north-west to it.

ISLAND FORTS:

1. Arnala: Arnala is a small island off the Arnala port on the mouth of the Vaitarna river. It was located approximately 8 miles north of Bassein and has been described in the contemporary records as a strong fort.114 The island is located between
the Agashi port and Bassein. Because of its isolation from land mass, it proved an effective mode of the projection of authority on the sea, and commanded the coastline north of Bombay. The fort was constructed by the Sultan of Gujarat in 1516 AD but he succumbed to the might of the Portuguese naval power, and surrendered it to them in 1536. The fort is built on the north-eastern portion of the island so as to allow it to observe and control shipping and navigation along the western coast. The Portuguese further strengthened and garrisoned the fort to ward off the British who were plying in its vicinity from Surat. The Marathas appreciated the strategic value of the fort and captured it with the help of the locals in March, 1737 as a prelude to the Bassein campaign. From 1737 till 1817 the fort was controlled by the Marathas. The fort surrendered to the might of the British navy in 1817.

2. **Uran/Karanja:** The old offshore island of Karanja, a couple of miles to the south-east of Bombay harbour on the mouth of the Pen river, is a part of the mainland now. Karanja formed a part of Bassein province under the Portuguese, from 1530 to 1740. The island, known for its production of salt, was fortified by the Portuguese with two strongholds - one at Uran and the other on the top of its southern peak. It was square in shape with bastions at four corners. It must also have served as an outpost giving protection to the anchorage at the Thane creek. In 1670 it was plundered by the Marathas. In 1737, the Marathas (Manaji Angre) finally occupied the place, and held it until 1774, when the British took possession.

3. **Khanderi:** Khanderi is actually a small island situated near the southern entrance of Bombay harbour. The name of Khanderi is mentioned in *Sabhasad Bakhar* as one of the forts under Shivaji. It lies 2.25 miles from Kulaba mainland. Shivaji, whom no advantage escaped un-noticed, in 1679, sent 300 soldiers and as many labourers, with arms and materials, to Khanderi, and began to raise breast-work at the landing places. The island had never before been inhabited, and its only produce was fuel, which was use by the British at Bombay. When the British heard of Shivaji's work on Khanderi, they claimed it as a part of Bombay. Two attempts to turn out Marathas failed; and even after a naval battle, the British were not able to prevent the Marathas
strengthening their forces at Khanderi. The Siddi, who was also the Mughal Admiral now, joined the British with a strong fleet; but the British commander found that the Siddi did not mean to give up the island if he took it, and held aloof. The Siddi continued to batter Khanderi and then suddenly fortified Undheri, another desolate island in the vicinity. Daulat Khan, Shivaji’s admiral, tried to stop this, bringing guns on the mainland opposite. But he was defeated and severely wounded, his small open boats not being able to withstand the Siddi’s stronger and larger vessel. For several years after this there were constant struggles between the Siddi and Marathas for the possession of these islands. In 1693, Khafi Khan mentioned Khandari as the strongest of Shivaji’s newly built forts on the sea-shore. Gamelli Careri refers to them as ‘Underin and Canderin’. Khanderi was one of the 10 forts and 16 fortified places of less strength which, in 1713, Kanhoji Angria obtained on siding with Raja Shahu.

The British regarded the Khanderi fort as ‘the dagger pointed at the heart of Bombay’. Protecting that heart was Fort St George, bastion of the East India Company. In October 1718, the British tried to take Khanderi but failed. This failure is said to be because of the treachery of one Rama Kamati who held a confidential post under Governor Boone; while a year later a Portuguese captain, who lay off one quarter of it with war vessels to hinder the coming of relief, betrayed his trust, and let some boats pass in the night with provision and ammunition which the island greatly needed. About 1740 it was settled between the Siddi and the British that if the island was captured it should be delivered, with all guns, to the British. Khanderi was finally acquired by the British in 1818.

4. **Underi**: Underi was the second and less prominent of the two islands offshore the Alibag coast. It was located towards the north-east of Khanderi some distance away. The contemporary records refer to the islands of Khanderi and Underi as ‘Hendry-Kendry’. A narrow channel separates the two islands but owing to the rocky nature of the islands, it is difficult to navigate the channel with ease. The Underi island measures 2 X 2.5 furlongs excluding its submerged outer rocky ring. Its highest point is 34 feet. As noticed in the foregoing passage, Underi was occupied by the Siddis when the combined efforts of the British and the Siddis failed to wrest the island of Khanderi from Shivaji.

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Siddi might have wanted to utilize this advantageous position, as a result of the occupation of the island, for future bargains with the Marathas.

5. **Kulaba**: Kulaba fort is always associated with the great Maratha admiral Kanhoji Angre who had made it his headquarters. Kanhoji retained his control over this fort and was granted another twelve forts when, in 1713, he joined the service of Raja Shahu after throwing allegiance of the dowager Queen Tarabai. This fort, standing on a small rocky island, about one-eighth of a mile from the shore off the coast of Alibag[^126], was probably built by Shivaji in the concluding years of his life. The proximity of the site from Bombay, the mainstay of the British enterprise in India, further added to its strategic value. The fort, therefore, was built quite strong with massive ramparts including seventeen bastions, where heavy guns were deployed to ward off the enemy[^127]. One of the gates opened towards the coast side which was well out of reach during high tides. The other gate (towards south) opened in the sea and had a fixed landing stage. To the south of the fort was a ship-dock measuring 80 X 38 paces[^128]. At low tide, the breastwork of the dock could be seen. It can be inferred from the construction of the dock that the tidal water could be utilized to facilitate the movement of the ships/boats due for repairs or even fitting of new ships. The coastal fort of Alibag, also known as Hirakot, situated on the opposite coast, must have been used as the supply depot to this island fort.

5. **Kamsa/Padmadurg**: Shivaji was quite intelligent to appreciate and utilize the geographical factors for the military needs of his Swarajya. The Siddis were the perpetual source of menace to the Mratha territories in and around Murud. The main source of strength of the Siddi was the island fort of Janjira. When Shivaji failed to subdue Janjira by every means, he thought of raising a bulwark aimed against Janjira. He selected an offshore island - some 2 kilometers from the Murud coast and approximately 8 kilometers north of the Janjira fort - and began its fortification. One must appreciate the Herculean efforts and Shivaji's determination to get the fort constructed amidst the sea with all their meager resources and technology at his disposal. It is said that Shivaji started the construction of this fort and it was completed by his son Sambhaji.[^130] The fort however failed to make any considerable impact on the Siddi depredations in the sea or
even on land. This fort, because of its architectural designs is also known as the Padamdurg or the Lotus Fort.

6. **Janjira**: The coast line of Janjira, bounded on the north by the Kundalika or Roha Creek; on the east by the Roha; on the south by Bankot creek; and on the west by the Arabian Sea, is divided by the Rajapuri Gulf into two main portions, northern and southern. The mouth of Rajapuri creek, some 45 miles south of Bombay, is closely guarded by the famous Janjira fort located approximately half a mile from the mainland on the east and a mile from the mainland in the west, perhaps the strongest fort along the west coast of India, as far as history suggests.

The history of the construction of the fort is not precisely known, but it seems that the island of Janjira was a known landmark in the ancient period too. Its close proximity to the coast and secluded location might have pressed the native rulers to fortify it. In the late 15th century, it was an Abyssinian minister under the Ahmednagar Sultan, who founded the Janjira fort on the island. The island afterward became the dominion of the ruler of Bijapur. Janjira fort had a number of towers and turrets where huge guns and cannons were kept in perpetual readiness to ward off enemies. The ramparts are about 50 feet high, battlemented and loop holed. Moreover, to add strength to the wall, lead was also mixed with the mortar. The fort is almost entirely intact even today, despite the ravages of wind and tide - a testimony to the marvels of ancient engineering. Moreover, repeated attempts of Shivaji, Sambhaji, the Portuguese and the British to capture the fort failed, and it remained invincible. A contemporary document on the fort of Janjira testifies about its strength. It records, “...This place is doubtless of great concern, almost invincible, if not blocked up by sea. It has 572 pieces of ordinance in it...and may be kept (maintained) with a small force...” Guns and cannons could still be found abandoned amidst the ruins of the fort. Shivaji tried to rival Janjira by personally supervising the construction of Sindhudurg immediately after his first-hand (unsuccessful) experience at Janjira. The Siddi, however, was also quick to realize the coming danger from the Marathas and requested for military help from the Adil Shah of Bijapur. Later on, the Siddi got enrolled in the services of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb as his Admiral. In return he agreed to help and escort Mughal ships bound to Mecca for the Haj pilgrimage.
7. **Suvarnadurg**: Also known as Harnai, this island fort is 13 Km from Dapoli. The fort is built on a rocky island quite close to the coast and the village Harnai. The Suvarnadurg fort is perhaps the most striking of all the forts in the Ratnagiri. Though not as extensive as Vijaydurg, this fort was cut from rock. For its construction, huge blocks of rock, instead of Mortars, were used to build the rampart. It was well protected by strong ramparts and bastions. The gate was located well above the high tide mark. It appears that Shivaji added to the existing structure rather than building it anew, as claimed by Sabhasad which lists the fort as one of the new forts constructed by Raje i.e. Shivaji. It was with the Angres during the reign of Shahu. The Peshwa assisted the British to capture it from the Angres in 1755. It served as one of the main naval bases of the Angres.

8. **Sindhudurg**: Sindhudurg or the Ocean Fortress off Malvan is undoubtedly the most formidable of Shivaji’s constructions on the sea coast. It was the need to have a stronghold for his navy on the lines of the invincible Siddi of Janjira that prompted Shivaji to lay foundations of this ‘Ocean Fortress’. After much research, he selected the largest of the three outer islands in the bay almost blocked by rocky reefs, actually about half a mile from the Malwan shore for this purpose. The local name of the selected low mass of rock was Kurte. The fort is very extensive - covering an area of about forty-eight acres with a little less than two miles round the ramparts. The walls are low, ranging from 29 to 30 feet. They are on an average 12 feet thick and have about 32 towers from 40 to 130 yards apart. The towers are generally outstanding semi-circles with fine embrasures for cannon, with in most a flat seat on the parapet, and stones projecting inwards drilled with flag staff holes. Here and there narrow staircases lead from the inside to the top of the walls. The entrance is at the north-east corner.

The construction started on November 25, 1664, and after three years of round the clock endeavour - by over six thousand skilled hands of masons, blacksmiths and architects, the massive & miraculous fort of Sindhudurga came into being. As per the contemporary records over 200 khandis i.e. 4000 mounds of irons was used for casting the necessary implements and the solid foundation stones were laid down firmly in
molten lead. Though it is generally believed that Portuguese experts were employed to provide technical assistance in the construction work, but there is no contemporary Portuguese document to corroborate this argument. The lack of evidence may be attributed to the Portuguese concern to maintain equilibrium as far as their relations with the other powers viz. the Mughals and the Siddis is concerned.

The foresightedness and intentions of Shivaji could be verified from the fact that Sindhudurg was provided extra security by the construction a chain of forts around it. The outer defenses of Sindhudurga were strengthened by fortifying the neighbouring small island of Padmagad and building the fort of Rajkot and Sarjekot on the mainland. The ruined fort of Padmagad, about a quarter of a mile from the shore, almost gets connected to it at low ebb by the narrow neck of sand. Padmagad mainly served as the centre for building ships for Shivaji’s navy. The fort Rajkot stands on a rising ground within the town limits of Malvan, to its north-west coastal corner. On three sides it is surrounded by sea. Today, it is just an enclosure of dry stones open towards the bay, and flanked at the three corners by traces of ruinous towers.

9. **Padmagad**: (sometimes also called Padmadurg or even Ramgad): The fort is located on a small island off the rocky coast of Malvan with Sindhudurg towards its south-west with shallow water around it. It is doubtful whether the Padmagad mentioned in the contemporary chronicle *Sabhasad Bakhar*, refers to this island fort. It appears that Shivaji was against the idea of leaving an island, so close to the main fort, unprotected. It has, therefore, a great tactical value. The ruins suggest the fort being used as a ship building or repair center as it had a natural, narrow dry dock. Shivaji’s idea of using a narrow cleft in the rocks as a dry dock shows his ingenuity in naval matters. At high tide a small ship could have been guided in the opening and secured. At low tide when the water receded, the ship’s bottom was exposed for cleaning and carrying out repairs. It is doubtful if this novel idea was used anywhere on the coast.
1 Deshpande, C. D., Geography of Maharashtra, p. 14.

2 Ibid, p.15.

3 Kamalpur, J. N. The Deccan Forts, p. 10

4 Called Ghats in Maharashtra.

5 Sabhasad Bakhar of Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad (hereafter Sabhasad Bakhar), (ed.) Pathan, U. M. Sabhasad mentions a list of 240 forts under different headings, viz., strongholds of the Swarajya (total – 49); newly constructed forts (total – 111); forts in the Carnatic province (total – 80); pp. 114-18.


11 Spate and Learmonth, India and Pakistan – A General and Regional Geography, p. 654.


14 The story of Zamorin’s resistance has been well presented in Krishnaswami Aiyar’s Zamorins of Calicut; whereas the details of the resistance of Kunjali Marakkar are to be found in O. K. Namibiar’s Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut.

15 At present, there are four districts, in addition to that of Mumbai or Bombay, namely Thane, Raigarh, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg which cover the Konkan coast from north to south in the state of Maharasstra.


26 Al Idrisi’s *Nuzhatu-l-Mulk*, refers Thane as ‘Bana’; [ in Elliot and Dowson, Vol. I, p. 89].

27 Both Pen and Panvel were well connected with highway, Hunter, W. W., *op. cit.*, Vol. XI, pp. 51-52 and 131-32.


30 *Imperial Gazetteer*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

31 *Sabhasad Bakhar*, p. 84, 87. *Sabhasad* classifies Revadanda and Rajapuri as sea fortresses which were under Nizamshahi naval dominions, held by *Habshi* (Abssynian) commander.

32 *Imperial Gazetteer*, *op. cit.* pp, 488-89.


35 *Sabhasad Bakhar*, p. 87.

36 *Imperial Gazetteer*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 143-45; see also Hunter, W. W., *op. cit.* Vol. XII, pp. 5-6
Pissurlencar, S. S., *Portuguez-Marate Sambandha*, p. 41 (vide footnote no. 10). The Portuguese called the ships built by Shivaji *sanguiceis* because such ships were built on Sangameshwar river.

**Imperial Gazetteer, op. cit.,** Vol. II, p. 147; see also *Hunter, W. W., op. cit.*, Vol. XII, p. 6.


46 *Spate and Learmonth, op. cit.,* p. 654.


50 The Malvan pirates have been frequently mentioned in the British accounts. For more information see *Pirates of Malabar* by Biddulph John.

51 Recently, Wing Commander (Retd.), Dr. M. S. Narwane has come up with a valuable publication on the Coastal Forts, titled *The Heritage Sites of Maritime Maharashtra*.

52 *Ray, H. P., op. cit.,* p. 17.

53 *Narwane, M. S., Forts of Maharashtra,* p. 270.

54 *Pearson, M. N., The Portuguese in India,* p. 29


59 Quoted by Narwane, M. S., *Heritage Sites...*, p. 53.

60 Ibid., pp. 57-58.

61 Kamalpur, J. N., *op. cit.*, p. 120.


63 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 190.

64 The ceded territory was estimated to bring in 30,000 Sterling-Pound annually, as revenue. See, Whiteway, R. S., *op. cit.*, p. 236.

65 Ibid.


69 The Portuguese records show that the then Portuguese General of Bassein, Don Luiz Botelo, started the construction of the fort in March, 1733, when Peshwa Bajirao was busy with the campaign against the Siddi. See, Pissurlencar, P. S., *op. cit.*, p. 154.

70 Narwane, M. S., *Heritage Sites...*, p. 93.


75 Narwane, M. S., *Forts of Maharastra*, p. 130.
An inscription above a doorway on the highest part of the fort records the year of construction of the fort in 1646. See, Narwane, M. S., *Heritage Sites*, p. 101.

Narwane, M. S., *Heritage Sites*, p. 142; see also, Narwane’s *Heritage Sites*, p. 126.

Narwane, M. S., *Heritage Sites*, p. 130; See also Duff, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 130. Duff, however, mentions that Shivaji took Dabhol by defeating Rustam Zaman, a Bijapuri noble of considerable fame.

Sabhasad Bakhar, p. 115.


Ibid.


Sabhasad Bakhar, p. 115.


For more information on this topic, see Biddulph John, *Pirates of Malabar*. 

Ibid.


102 Narwane, M. S., *Heritage Sites*, p. 117.


104 *Sabhasad Bakhar*, p. 114.


109 *Sabhasad Bakhar*, p. 115.


112 Ibid.


119 *Sabhasad Bakhar*, p. 115.

Shivaji, after failing to take the Siddi stronghold of Janjira, another island fortress, had embarked upon the policy of construction of similar island forts beginning with the Sindhudurg fort. He had also put the strengthening of the coastal defenses on high priority thereafter.


GBP, Vol. XI, p. 11.


Sabhasad Bakhar, p. 115; See also Duff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 137. Duff, however, suggests that the fort was repaired and reconstructed by Shivaji; Duff writes, “He (Shivaji) built Sindeedroog or Malwan... He rebuilt and strengthened Kolabah; repaired Severndroog and Viziadroog and prepared vessel at all these places...”

Kamalpur, J. N., op. cit., p. 121; The discarded big guns with wheeled carriages could still be seen inside the fort.

Apte, B. K., op. cit., p. 20.

Narwane, M. S., Forts of Maharastra, p. 126; cf. Heritage Sites, (p. 109), by the same author.


It had been a policy, initiated by Bahmani rulers, to settle the Abyssinians on the western coast of India. They were brought as slaves by the rulers and nobles many of them rose to prominence because of their courage, loyalty and above all, their knowledge of sea.


Narwane, M. S. Heritage Sites..., pp. 103-05.

Foster, William, English Factories in India [in 13 Volumes; hereafter EF] (1668-69), Bombay letter (to Surat) dated 16 October, 1669.
137 Hunter, W. W., op. cit., Vol. XII, p. 3.

138 The total area of the fort was approximately 8 acres. See Kamalpur, J. N., op. cit., p. 121; See also, Narwane, M. S., Heritage Sites, pp. 125-26.

139 Sabhasad Bakhar, p. 115; even Sardesai tries to establish that the fort was built anew by Shivaji, see, Sardesai, G. S., New History of Marathas, Vol. I, p. 129. But the Imperial Gazetteer (Vol. II, pp. 157-58) mentions that the ‘Golden Fortress’ was built in the 15th century by the Bijapur Sultans and was strengthened by Shivaji in 1660. It passed on to Kanhoji Angre after the death of Sidhoji Gujar, the Maratha Admiral in 1698.

140 Even Sabhasad mentions that after the fight with the Siddi, Shivaji not only constructed new forts and strongholds at various places, but also fitted out navy with different nomenclatures of boats. Sabhasad Bakhar, p. 86-87, 115.


142 Kamalpur, J. N., op. cit., p. 121; see also Narwane, M. S., Heritage Sites..., pp. 163-64.


144 Pissurlenkar, P. S., op. cit., p. 54; Pissurlencar, however, maintains that the employment of the Portuguese workmen for building castles and forts was not unusual. The rulers of Bijapur had employed them for construction works on more than one occasion.

145 Kamalpur, J. N., op. cit., p. 121.

146 Narwane, M. S., Forts of Maharashtra, p. 189.

147 Sabhasad Bakhar, p. 115. Though the name Padmagad is mentioned by Sabhasad, it is not prefixed by the word Janjira, which stands for any water/island fort.

148 Narwane, M. S., Heritage Sites..., p. 166; See also, Narwane’s Forts of Maharashtra, p. 189.
MAP OF KONKAN

ARABIAN SEA

RATNAGIRI

To Rajapur