6. CONCLUSION

“Human thought and action have their springs not in spatial vacuum,

But in some geographical milieu which defines in various degree -

The character and orbit of human effort.”

- W. G. East: Geography Behind History

There is no doubt about the fact that Shivaji, in his effort to create a political
niche for himself, struck a fine balance between the unique geographical situations of the
Deccan country on the one hand, and the aspirations of the Maratha people on the other.
His creativity and genius is well attested by his political and military exploits which have
earned him a special place in the history of warfare in India. An analysis of the military
activities of Shivaji reveals the working of the mastermind seeking balance between
military force and stratagem, direct fighting and indirect methods of warfare. This is
precisely the reason why many scholars emphasise that the place of Shivaji in Indian
military traditions should be determined by the extent of his contributions to the art of
warfare.

Geographically speaking, the stretch of territory - Shivaji began with as an
independent entity was too hilly and narrow. Given the resources at his disposal, initially,
if it was difficult to expand eastward because of the presence of the mighty Mughals, in
the west, the Arabian Sea hindered any logical expansion of the Maratha territorial base.
Credit must be given to the genius of Shivaji in recognizing the value of a navy for a
country (the Maratha Swarajya) with an extensive coastline (as a result of his brilliant
military successes). It was the foresightedness of this great leader, therefore, that the
foundations of Maratha Navy were laid during his regime. So that the Maratha navy
could achieve its declared objectives and, at the same time, function profitably, a national
(military) strategy encompassing the geographical realities of the Swarajya (both land
and sea) was implemented by Shivaji.

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In terms of terrestrial location, the Maratha Swarajya could be categorised as ‘Maritime location’, i.e., a territory having access to sea and also connected with land. Shivaji, therefore, deployed naval forces not merely for defensive purposes, but also for maritime commerce so that the cost of defense, to some extent, could be successfully met. Though the contemporary literature/documents (which were compiled for specific purposes, and were essentially non-military and non warfare-oriented in nature) may not directly help in making-out the real intent of the thought-process of genius of Shivaji, we can, at least have some practical deductions and reconstruct his appreciation of the situation of that time. For example, as noted in Chapter II, the objectives of the Maratha navy during the reign of Shivaji could be studied under three different headings, viz., (a) Military Objectives - To destroy enemy and its war machine through navy: for example the long drawn struggle (or war of attrition) with the Siddi of Janjira; (b) Political Objectives - To enforce political or associated demands on the adversary: with respect to the Europeans as only they could have significantly contributed towards the improvement of the Maratha navy; and (c) Geographical Objectives - To overthrow the enemy from strategically important areas: could be understood in the light of the fight for Janjira and the occupation of Kamsa and Khanderi-Underi.

Shivaji was also aware of the fact that the hold on the sea would have helped to keep open an alternative line of communication/conveyance for him in case his main base was (political capital/stronghold on land) was cut across by any of the enemies. Hence, as on land, a chain of marine fortresses, both – on the coast and on the off-shore islands, were constructed. During the time of naval fights, the marine forts acted as the most immediate source of supply of war materials and also the place of safe refuge for the fleet in case of adversity. Such places, if properly fortified, and with ample store of water, ammunition and garrison, could very well serve the function of naval bases, and would successfully stand against the attack of any enemy. At the same time, the artillery and guns of the naval forts (on the coast) would keep the creek or bay safe for navigation. They would thus, discourage the enemy ships from entering the sea/channel or the river lane on which they stood.
Boat-building activities were also taken at hand. At a brisk pace, vessels of different specifications and sizes were produced at different dockyards such as Kalyan-Bhiwandi, Jaitapur etc. In a short span of time, the number of vessels under the Maratha naval establishment exceeded more than a couple of hundreds. The logic behind the production of vessels in large numbers could be understood in terms of the overall strategy and tactical considerations, the Marathas followed during their naval wars. As per a pre-conceived strategy to overcome the limitation in terms of fire power, the principle of concentration of force (vessels) in naval warfare was applied (quite opposite to what the Marathas practiced during a war on land). At the point of contact, the enemy vessels (irrespective of their size or fire-power, though usually big) were so overwhelmed by sheer number (of vessels as well as crew/fighters), that it was difficult for the enemy to concentrate and target on the Marathas. The Maratha fighters would then board the enemy vessels and induce physical duel with the enemy crew on board. The Marathas would ultimately emerge winners mainly because of their overwhelming numbers. This was the most daring method, aimed to install fear in the hearts of the enemies so that they should give in to the demands of the Marathas. Another method applied by the Marathas in their naval engagements was the principle of surprise in which geographical (hydrographical) features would also constitute a part of the tactics. The Marathas vessels - having full knowledge of the submerged rocks, sand bars and tidal or wind patterns, would lure the European ships to the vicinity of the coast where water would be on the shallower side. Once the trick worked, with the use of specially built vessels (Ghurabs - towed speedily towards the enemy ship by rowing boats or Galvats), the Marathas would de-capacitate the enemy vessels would have become sluggish by that time for want of wind for the sail. Every thing would be done so swiftly that it would leave little scope for the bigger enemy-ships for maneuvering. If, by any chance, the enemy ship still stood a chance to making even with the attacking vessels, the Marathas (mostly with flat bottomed vessels) would make good their escape to the numerous creeks and coves with shallow water. In such a situation, any chase by the enemy would have been rendered dangerously futile. In other words, the Marathas derived the advantage of choosing the spot for naval engagements as well as disengagements. It should be remembered here,
that the art of disengagement was equally significant as the art of engagement as the Maratha suffered severe constraints in terms of resources.

True, the resources of the Marathas, particularly in the early years of the Swarajya, were too scarce to have allowed them to go for a full-fledged naval establishment, but the foresightedness of the great visionary Shivaji saw the humble beginning and corroborating success of the Maratha Navy. And, with a proper system of naval administration (navy being an independent limb of the state as per Sabhasad Bakhar) in place, Shivaji tried to overcome the resource crunch too. Apart from resource crunch, the limitations faced by Shivaji were too many to have allowed the Maratha navy to grow and flourish in a proper manner. The first and foremost of the limitations was the unavailability of time with him (to be devoted for nurturing the navy in its infancy). He faced the ‘time constraint’ largely on account of his bigger political compulsions. Most of the time he was hard pressed from the eastern side by the Mughals or the Bijapuris or even some recalcitrant elements. The recurrence of the likes of ‘Shaista Khans’, ‘Afzal Khans’, ‘Jai Singhs’, and ‘Khem Sawants’ etc., on the political spectrum of Deccan kept him pre-occupied throughout his political career. The end result was that the naval planning and actions depended on the urgency /outcome of these events. That Shivaji had a keen desire to personally supervise the naval establishment of the Swarajya and take it to newer horizons, has been demonstrated quite early in his political career. The laying of the foundation stone of his naval headquarters at Sindhudurg in 1664, and his participation (in person) in the Basrur Naval Expedition of 1665, speaks more than volumes about the real intents of this military visionary.

Another noticeable limitation Shivaji faced was in terms of technological backwardness. Though this is a strictly comparative terminology, and depends upon a number of factors. But, keeping in mind the facts: (a) that he had raised a naval establishment from scratch; and (b) the complex nature of challenges from the rivals, he was facing (viz. the European companies, backed by a full-fledged naval establishments back home or even the Siddi of Janjira who were always aided by the Europeans and financed by the Mughals); his naval establishment appeared to be too primitive for any of his rivals. He lacked the technology to construct sea-worthy ships which could frequent
the vast expanses of the sea and also put up an effective resistance to the enemy challenges. At best, what Shivaji could manage was a coastal navy or what can be described as the rudiments of a ‘Brown Water Navy’. For that also he had to depend, many a times, on the foreign technical expertise. We have references of few Portuguese shipwrights engaged by Shivaji for the purpose of boat-building.

Artillery was another serious limiting factor with the Maratha warfare - both on land as well as on water. The big guns and canons could be fitted on the marine forts, but they were too clumsy to handle. Their accuracy, range and effectiveness were a matter of speculations. Unlike the forts situated at a height i.e., on the top of the hills/promontories which could even roll down stones/boulders to deter the enemy, the guns/cannons of the coastal forts needed ammunitions and shots, which were not readily available. Shivaji, therefore, had to depend upon the Europeans for the supply of guns, cannons and other ammunitions. To ensure a regular supply of ammunitions, Shivaji used the technique of ‘persuasion and compulsion’ in a right manner. As we have noted in the thesis, Shivaji, as a tool of compulsion, either used his navy or army to threaten the coastal possessions of the European companies, or used to stop the supply of food and other essential to their pockets so as to put pressure on them. At the same time, as a means of persuasion, he, in most of the times, utilized the diplomatic channels to get his demands fulfilled. From the Maratha perspective, no doubt, it was an effective way to overcome the limitations of artillery and ammunitions. Documentary references are aplenty which indicate towards the fact that the Europeans did respond to the Maratha demands of guns and ammunitions. However, it needs to be understood that the guns and ammunitions which were being passed on to the Marathas (by the Europeans) were usually not very effective ones. We have a few explicit references that, in some cases, such guns and cannons which had been discarded by them because of wear and tear or otherwise, were passed on to the Marathas. In such cases, the Marathas could exercise but a little choice.

Shivaji, therefore, always devised superior strategy and tactics in his naval encounters to do away with the need of a pivot weapon. In the first instance, he would avoid a direct confrontation with a superior force; secondly, he would offer a fight only at places/areas selected by him so that he may make the best use of the geographical
elements; thirdly - and more importantly, he would always keep the option of 'disengagement' open, rather than taking casualty in terms of boats or men (i.e., preserve the meager resources under his possession); fourthly, his naval actions (wherever possible) were to be supported by corresponding military actions on land to make it more effective. For example he would enforce a naval blockade of the coastal/island settlements of the enemy (Europeans as well as the Siddi) and try to starve them by preventing the supply of the essentials to those parts. Most of the coastal possessions of the Europeans were surrounded by the Maratha territory; hence, it was easier for him to initiate simultaneous military action originating from land and put double pressure on them. With regards to Siddi's Janjira, a complete naval blockade by surrounding the island fort from all sides was the only possible way to compel the Siddi to come to terms. However, that could not materialize because of the open/clandestine support of the Europeans and other powers from time to time; and fifthly, he would use other means to get his demands fulfilled.

Another, major constraint which Shivaji faced was in terms of the profitability and viability of the naval operations. He had created a separate military establishment which, like any other department of the state, required regular finances so as to enable it to perform its functions. Unlike the land based military forces, which, by fighting wars, could capture territory and directly contribute to the resources of the state, the wars fought by the navies, theoretically speaking, could not provide any such visible advantages (except for the defense of the coastal territory). For the Marathas, who had just laid the foundations of naval force, the pressing question then was - what could be the objective of the naval wars, if they were not 'just for the purpose of coastal defense of the Swarajya'? Shivaji had the solution to this particular situation. He realized the significance of the Konkan in coastal as well as the overseas trade. At the same time, he was also mindful of the extent of coastline his Swarajya possessed. The contemporary European documents bring forth the information that Shivaji 'possessed eight or nine important/famous ports on the Konkan coast'. Hence, like other (European) nations, which supported commercial and other economic activities by providing naval assistance, Shivaji also started giving naval protection to the coastal trade of the Swarajya. We have reference of his 'salt fleets' plying from one point to the other in his coastal domain. The
customs and port duties were streamlined and (probably) regularized so that the state establishment should have a regular flow of income to support the naval establishment. Merchants from various places - including foreign merchants, were invited to settle down on his coast, and were and provided incentives for the same. For, they would bring along commerce which would directly contribute to the meager resources of the Swarajya. Passes of various types, in return for money, were issued to the merchants indicating the facilities or exemptions (as the case may be) granted to them. References, indicative of the involvement of the Maratha state in foreign/overseas trade with the ports of Red Sea are found in good numbers in the contemporary English documents. In other words, Shivaji fixed the attention of his naval establishment towards more pressing and profitable operations and benefited enormously. An important aspect of the Maratha naval administration was that it was encouraged to be self-financing and self-sufficient. The entire naval set-up was conceived in such a manner that the dependency (for finances) on land, i.e., the income generated through the land revenue, was to be done away with. Even Amatya warned against any such policy as it would not only be counter-productive, but, in the long run, would also be detrimental to the interests of the state.

One of the pressing commitments of Shivaji, which also acted as a major hindrance to the development of the Maratha navy, was to deal with the enemy like the Siddi of Janjira on land as well as on water. The Siddi, with a tradition of seafaring and admiralty for the last couple of generations, was quite resourceful in naval matters. He had an effective flotilla, an impregnable sea-castle (which he used as his naval headquarters) and, above all, the political patronage of the Bijapur Sultans and (later on) the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Shivaji understood the importance of Janjira for the survival of the Siddi. He also knew that till the time Janjira was captured, the Siddi challenge could not be terminated. Hence, he, tried various methods & means to reduce Janjira, but failed. It is interesting to note that the genius of Shivaji quickly learnt vital lessons from his struggle with the Siddi. If it was not physically possible to capture Siddi’s Janjira, it was not altogether impossible to have such Janjiras for himself. As a result, Shivaji fortified Kamsa, Kulaba, Suvarnadurg, and Khanderi for the purpose of his naval establishment. The possession of such bases provided strategic naval advantages to the Marathas for years to come.
Shivaji, in a short span of time, had achieved so much for the Swarajya that it was never going to be easy for his immediate successors to imitate his genius. Sambhaji, during his short reign spanning for about a decade, was hard pressed because of the Mughal military offensive pursued by Aurangzeb. Hence, he was left with little time and energy to devote to his naval establishment. However, like his father, Sambhaji too had an understanding of the naval requirements of the Swarajya. In the first instance, he could make out what advantages the occupation of Janjira and such bases like it, would provide to his struggle with the Mughals. He therefore, made a daring attempt to take the island fort of Janjira. Not only was a naval blockade of the Janjira fort undertaken, but simultaneously, an attempt was made to fill-up the channel separating the Danda-Rajapuri coast from the island fort. The outcome, to a great extent, depended on the quality time spent by the Maratha King to direct the entire operation. However, for fear of a Mughal military action elsewhere in the Swarajya, he had to abort the ambitious project of filling-up the channel, and had to shift his troops to other areas. The Janjira campaign thus failed once again: not for want of naval resources but because of bigger political compulsions of Sambhaji. It was, after all, his war of survival with the Mughals.

The second instance when Sambhaji exhibited his logical understanding of the naval requirements was by undertaking an attack on Goa, late in 1683. By that time, he had failed in his attempts to take Underi as well as Janjira from the Siddi. He had also unsuccessfully attempted to fortify the island of Elephanta near Bombay. The Portuguese had rejected his demand for a ‘landing place at Chaul’ which could be fortified later on. However his troops had successfully landed at the island of Karanja with an intention to grab it from the Portuguese and fortify it for the naval use of the Swarajya. Sambhaji wanted to occupy Goa for the same purpose but his attempts to do so were thwarted by the Portuguese as well as the tidal waves. He also apprehended that the Mughal emperor might use Goa as a naval base to compliment his military action against the Marathas. In that eventuality, it would have been impossible for him to continue his struggle against the mighty Mughals. Hence, there is a bigger possibility that Sambhaji’s action on Goa was more because of the geo-strategic (naval) considerations that such places/bases should be occupied before the enemy occupied it. Otherwise, Sambhaji used all the other means – diplomatic and otherwise, with respect to the European powers so that the basic
requirements of his navy (viz. artillery) should be met without any hiccups. The brief stint of Richard Keigwin as the governor of Bombay had brought much hope to both the sides as they were able to make a common cause as regards their common (naval) enemies. However, the most interesting aspect of his reign is that he had even contracted the English (by way of a naval alliance) to deal with the Siddi menace on the Konkan coast, particularly at a time when he was engaged with the Mughals on the land front. This arrangement, though, did not work for a long time owing to the resource crunch faced by him. But, on the whole, Sambhaji during his decade long rule as the Maratha King, tried to keep the Maratha flag high on the Konkan waters. What other proof of his sincerity towards the Maratha naval establishment is required than the fact that after his death, a trusted Maratha official Ramchandrapant Amatya sent the family of Rajaram (Sambhaji’s son and successor to the Maratha throne), by sea from Rajapur to Honaver, and then by land across Carnatic to Jinjee fort. In this way, the naval establishment came to the rescue of the Royal family at the time of grave crisis.

After the death of Sambhaji and the subsequent relegation of Rajaram from the political scenario of the Deccan, the onus of keeping the Maratha flag flying high on the Konkan waters fell on Kanhoji Angre. During this period, the Siddi of Janjira emerged as the biggest challenge to the Marathas naval establishment. The Siddi had considerably expanded his political and military base in the Konkan, both - on land as well as on water. Kanhoji Angre’s joining hands with the Peshwa and subsequently coming to the mainstream of Maratha politics, proved to be a boon for the Maratha naval establishment. It should be understood, however, that the limitations faced by Kanhoji Angre were similar to what the founder of the Maratha Swarajya Shivaji once faced. The difficulty level had rather increased in view of the changed nature of the European (especially the English) Trading Companies in India. The English Company had resolved to use force and military action to further their interests in India. Almost 50 years had elapsed since the first keels of the Maratha navy were set afloat. Moreover, for the last couple of decades, it lacked a direction and, more so, a specified objective. Hence, to revitalize the Maratha navy, what Kanhoji Angre needed to do immediately were: (a) to strengthen and modernize the outlook of the Maratha Navy; (b) to secure strategic Coastal Forts; (c) to undertake ship-building activities on a large scale; (d) to work on the enhancement of
fire power of his vessels. As per the arrangement with the Peshwa, who happened to be one of his old acquaintances, Kanhoji Angre was given a free hand in the matters of naval affairs of the Swarajya.

It is interesting to note that Kanhoji Angre, unfazed by the limitations and the nature of challenges his naval establishment faced, was determined to project Maratha authority and sovereignty over the Konkan Waters done by Shivaji in the past. It seems that more than the projection of power, his navy was contesting the authority of the Europeans that Kanhoji was involved in. He seems to have worked on the principle of the natural right of the coastal/local people to exploit the marine/maritime resources. Even in the modern situation, the sovereignty of the coastal countries extend up to 12 nautical miles; hence, to expect Kanhoji to claim ‘right’ over the waters does not sound inconceivable. With this idea in the backdrop, Kanhoji declared it mandatory for everyone plying in the Konkan waters, to obtain his maritime permits/passes (dastaks/kauls). There were certain exceptions to this rule, viz. the European Companies were exempted from buying such passes for the purpose of their official trade (as they were already paying port/custom duties). Kanhoji enforced this rule strictly and started searching the vessels of various nationalities as the Portuguese used to do. His intent was to check the private trade of the Company officials and other illegal activities they involved in (viz. of subletting their cargo space to the Indian merchants), which meant a dent in the share of revenue to the Maratha state.

So that the writ of the Maratha navy should loom large across the Konkan waters, it was necessary to have a good number of sea-worthy vessels. Kanhoji Angre had the dockyards and shipwrights, but timber in a big quantity was not easily available to him. He, therefore, devised a very noble method, that of planting of teak across Bankot region. However, to grow, the teaks required a considerable time (more than a decade), and Kanhoji did not have that much of time to wait for. He, therefore, tried to obtain timber in a forcible manner (as no one would sell them to him). Another limitation he faced was that of practicable artillery. That also was not readily available. In the Konkan, it could have been obtained only from the Europeans. Kanhoji knew that the Europeans wouldn’t usually part with the requisite numbers of guns and ammunitions required by him, as they were fully aware as to what purpose were they going to be used for. To overcome this
limitation, Kanhoji, once again, adopted a daring method — that of seizing European ships on some pretexts and removing guns and cannons from them (so that they could be fitted to the Maratha vessels). As a result his daring actions earned him more enemies than friends. The English at Bombay, in particular became his most avowed enemy.

We have taken note of the tactical dispositions of Kanhoji Angre’s fleet while it successfully negotiated with the successive and determined attempts of the English and joint Anglo-Portuguese forces to reduce the Maratha navy and its maritime strongholds. It would not be grossly incorrect to say that such ‘determined attempts’ on the Europeans turned futile more by their own follies rather than the virtues of the opponent. To recollect and mention a few of them here would not be out of context. In the first instance, when Vijaydurg was attacked in 1717, the English fire-ships failed to batter the walls of the fort. At the same time a boom across the inner harbour prevented the fire-ships to venture inside and inflict any damage to the ships lying across the cove. The English attempt to scale the walls of the fort also met with failure as their scaling ladders fell short of the height. In the end, when the English had managed to land a few of their contingents ashore so that they could manually set on fire the ships lying in the harbour, they could not reach there as an overflowing marshy land was to be crossed to reach them. The expedition failed as the English could not get past the simple defensive measures adopted by Kanhoji Angre.

In the second instance, when a formidable English fleet set out to storm Khanderi late in the year 1718, no one would have expected that this attempt; directed by governor (of Bombay) Boone in person, was going to meet a fate similar to that of the previous expedition. This time too, the besiegers managed to land their troops though not in a considerable number — owing to the tidal current at the time of landing. But, in the absence of a concerted action to storm the fort, the attack of the English troops failed. They had to retreat in view of the determined counter-offensive form the Maratha garrison of the fort. Boone’s attempt failed also because of the fact that the besieging English fleet failed to enforce a complete naval blockade of the fort of Khanderi. As a result, the garrison of the besieged fort could refurbish the essential supply of ammunitions and shots and initiate a determined counter-offensive. The situation was somewhat similar to that of English attempt on Khanderi when Shivaji had fortified it in
1679. At that time also, the Marathas (small) boats were able to procure and ferry the essential supplies for the besieged garrison. The English, on the other hand could not bring their bigger bombing vessels closer to the fort as they were not sure about the depth of water or even the presence of submerged rocks. In short, in this engagement too, Kanhoji Angre's men kept the things simple, and stuck to the basics of warfare. Taking advantage of the natural (hydrographic) features, they relied on defensive as a better form of war under the given circumstances. The English, on the other hand, simply failed to stick to a concerted plan of action and lost the edge.

In the third instance, when Vijaydurg was threatened once again by the English in the months immediately following the monsoon in the year 1720, Kanhoji’s men showed exemplary grit and courage and foiled the attempt of the attackers. A great deal of preparations and planning had been done by Boone and his council before the commencement of the British naval action on Vijaydurg. Specially designed ships (which were like ‘floating castles’) were constructed on the orders of Boone. It is a different story altogether, though, that these ‘specially built ships’ in the initial phase of the English campaign caused much embarrassment to them rather than winning accolades. This was mainly on account of their ‘faulty designs’, which had to be rectified in the thick of the action. The Marathas, on the other hand, taking lessons from the previous English offensives, appeared to be well stocked and well prepared to frustrate the attempts of any enemy on the fort. Though the English troops, taking advantage of the overwhelming fire showered on the fort, manage to land on the shore, they were pushed back by the defenders of the fort in a daring action. At the same time an explosion occurred accidentally on one of the English ships killing some and wounding many, which had disheartened the attacking troops. Interestingly enough, the Sawant of Wadi, another enemy of Kanhoji Angre, joined hands with the British and opened up another battle front at the coastal fort of Jaigad. But in the absence of a unified plan, could do little to make any impression to the fort. Boone ultimately had to call off this expedition too. In this engagement, though the Maratha troops fought valiantly, and the guns of the fort of Vijaydurg also kept at bay the English ships etc., the failure of the English effort was more due the poor management of their war efforts and the absence of a resolute plan of action. They failed, once again, to enforce a naval blockade which was so vital for the
success of any operation of such nature, that too – against an enemy like Kanhoji Angre. Interestingly, Boone, in his report sent to England, pointed out that ‘Angre’s (smaller) ships were faster and more maneuverable’.

In the fourth instance, Kanhoji Angre’s stronghold of Kulaba was on the target of the British in 1721 – this time assisted by the Portuguese. The European strategy, as conceived by Boone, was to carry out a two-pronged attack on Kulaba – one originating from the land side and the other from the sea. However, Kanhoji Angre (who was present at Kulaba at that time), cognisant of the allied plans, had assembled a considerable army inside the fortress. On this occasion, the English were successful in enforcing a naval blockade on Kulaba. On the land side, the Portuguese and British troops had encircled the fort so that it could be stormed. The European plan was to cut-off Kulaba from the rest of the Maratha territory from the sea as well as land. The English plan to batter the fort from the sea-side, however, failed due to the effective fort-guns which successfully kept the English fire-ships at a distance. In this process, one Captain Maine, ‘anxious to bring his guns to bear on the fort, ran his ship – the Shoreham, on the rocks’. After that none of the ships ventured close to the fort. On the other hand, Kanhoji Angre did not use his naval fleet (stationed at Kulaba) in this battle, as he did not want to risk their safety. At the same time Kanhoji also seemed to be confident about the strength of the fortress. In lieu of the navy, the Maratha cavalry took to the field and charged the joint Anglo-Portuguese forces so ferociously that the besiegers lost heart. The Portuguese retreated and signed peace with the Peshwa in January 1722. In this way, lack of a unified command and mutual distrust amongst the allied forces resulted in the collapse of the European mission. The Prompt arrival of the Peshwa with a large military contingent was also one of the determining factors of the outcome of this expedition. The lesson learnt was, cooperation and coordination were key to success to any military action. It is equally important to learn that all these actions involving Kanhoji Angre were fought along the coast, for which medium size or even small vessels were more suitable. It can also be inferred, at the same time, that Kanhoji Angre was aware of his limitations and he exploited them to his advantage by never venturing into the deep seas to give a fight to the Europeans. In other words, it would not be incorrect to assume that Kanhoji Angre owes his success
against the Europeans largely because of his ability to transform their advantages into disadvantages.

The story after the death of Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre is that of the ascendancy of the Peshwas in all the matters relating to the Maratha administration. The Maratha state, under their leadership, had gradually transformed into a land based power. Though, the Support and coordination to the successors of Kanhoji continued, the Peshwas, unfortunately, never could grasp the essence of naval strategy. The Maratha naval establishment, as a result, remained neglected during the Peshwa period. In fact a grand Maratha strategy, taking into account the realities on land as well as sea, could not be conceived because of the pre-occupation of the Peshwas. Moreover, the seeds of dissensions had also taken deep routes in the 1740s in the house of the Angres – the hereditary Sarkhels of the Maratha state. The Peshwa, rather than finding out an amicable solution to this problem, got involved himself in the power struggle. This proved fatal not only to the interests of the Maratha navy, but to the Maratha state alike, in the long run. The situation come to such a pass that Tulaji, the last of the recognized Maratha Admirals of some repute, was left to fend for himself as well as the Maratha naval establishment.

By the time Tulaji Angre came to the fore-front, it was disastrously late for any chances of a positive revival of the Maratha naval establishment. The Peshwas had already succeeded in making the navy subservient to the needs of the army (land forces) as opposed to what Amatya had instructed [Navy – an independent limb of the military organization]. The Maratha navy, as such lacked any definite program. The boat-building organization had not kept pace with the European competitors as regards size, constructional techniques, navigational aids etc. Though the Peshwas had taken initiatives to establish foundries, so as to be at par with the Europeans and other rivals – as far as the armament industry was concerned, the benefits were not passed on to the naval establishment. It was left to Tulaji, hence, to establish his own foundries and bring the fire power of his vessels at par. As per the Portuguese records, Tulaji, it seems, had successfully began casting cannon guns on the model of Portuguese cannons. This was no mean an achievement of Tulaji Angre under the given circumstances. However, an appraisal of the naval wars and tactics during the time of the successors of Kanhoji would take us to the point where it would be very difficult to deny that the Maratha naval
activities, in the absence of a definite vision, were restricted to indecisive (hit and run) actions on the sea. True, the meager financial resources (particularly after the division of the office of the Sarkhel) would not have permitted Tulaji in raising a modern and compatible fleet of that time. However, he could have easily overcome such limitations had he applied other means (viz. diplomatic and otherwise) to stay afloat in contention for the authority over the Konkan waters. We should keep in mind that he still had, under his possession, the coastal and island forts which had, for long, defied the British and European attempts. He, on the other hand, chose to defy the central command and started behaving in such a haughty manner which allowed his detractors (including the Peshwa) to come together.

The result was disastrous - for not only it spelt doom for Tulaji Angre, but also proved detrimental to the interests and future of the Maratha navy. In the end, it turned out to be a matter of two naval wars in a space of little more than six months that the ‘Keels of the Maratha Navy were turned upside down, without much efforts... for ever’. The British fleet, aided by the Peshwa’s forces, both - on land as well as on the sea, first targeted the Golden Fort or Suvamadurg in 1755. The superior strategy of the British in this engagement is borne out by the fact that they had taken the soundings of the surrounding waters of the fort so that the location of submerged rocks and depth of the bottom could be ascertained and the bombing/fighting vessels could be strategically placed for the purpose of the battering of the fort walls. At the same time the British could successfully enforce a complete naval blockade restricting any chances of reinforcement by Tulaji. From the land side too, a total blockade was enforced by the Peshwa’s forces. After carrying out the necessary bombardment, the troops were landed on the coast so that Tulaji could be forced to fight on two different fronts. The situation for the garrison of the fort was impossible and it capitulated.

It was proved beyond doubt that for a coastal fort, unless the surrounding area on the land was under control, it could not withstand a simultaneous and determined attempt from sea as well as land. The Peshwa’s forces were indeed acting against the interests of Tulaji Angre’s coastal possessions. They had spread across the Ratnagiri area and had entrenched their position. The fort of Vijaydurg, the headquarters of Tulaji was naturally the next target of the ‘allies’. It appeared, from the disposition of the Peshwa’s troops in
the vicinity of the fort, that the entire action to take over the command of this fort from Tulaji Angre was going to be a mere formality. Though Tulaji had tried to rope in the Portuguese for his cause, it did not work owing to the larger stature of the Peshwa in the Deccan affairs. The vulnerability of Tulaji was clearly visible. To compound the matters for him, two men belonging to the British Royal Squadron - Robert Clive and Admiral Watson, (who were destined to change the entire course of Indian history thereafter), had voluntarily joined the naval expedition on Vijaydurg in commanding capacity, early in 1756.

They formulated a superior naval strategy and went ahead with the principle of 'offensive action'. They started with a complete naval blockade of the fort and its harbour. Gradually they closed in to the fort by sheer art of maneuvering of their vessels and reached up to the mouth of the river commanding the harbour. A vigorous bombardment was initiated thereafter in such a manner that 'the artillery fire from the 150 English guns gave little chance to that the defenders of the fort as well as the Angre’s vessels to match them'. In the process of exchange of fire, a chance shot fell on one of Tulaji’s ships in the harbour and it caught fire. The fire spread to the adjoining vessels and within minutes the entire fleet of Tulaji Angre, stationed at his harbour were consumed by fire. This fire, at the same time, also destroyed the prospects of Tulaji and the Maratha navy. Just holding the fort was of no meaning and significance for him. Tulaji, therefore, surrendered and 'spent rest of his life as the prisoner of the Peshwa'. This was the moment of no mean a triumph for the Peshwa as he had 'finally succeeded in destroying the power of a recalcitrant servant of the Maratha state'. At the same time the English also had a reason to rejoice, as this success had removed a big threat (which had bothered them for nearly a century) to their trade on the western coast of India. The Peshwa was too myopic to have realized the larger implications of the fall of Tulaji Angre on the future of Maratha State. The British, as the History suggest, capitalized on this success. They eventually became the political masters of India through a process which was initiated by a naval conquest!