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ROLE OF FORTS IN MARATHA HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Forts played a central role in the political, military, administrative, and strategic development of Maratha power in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century India. Under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, forts became important centres for controlling territory, protecting populations, storing supplies, managing administration, and conducting military operations. Forts such as Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Torna, Sinhagad, and Panhala occupied important positions in the Maratha political and military system. Their locations in the Sahyadri ranges and other strategic areas enabled the Marathas to make effective use of difficult terrain and flexible military strategies.

Forts were not merely defensive structures. They served as administrative centres, treasury locations, military bases, and symbols of political authority. Shivaji Maharaj captured, renovated, and constructed forts as part of the process of establishing and consolidating Swarajya. Their network allowed communication and movement between different parts of the kingdom and helped the Marathas withstand military pressure from the Mughal Empire and the Deccan Sultanates. During the later Maratha period, forts continued to play an important role, although the political and military structure of the Maratha state changed considerably.

This study examines the development, functions, strategic importance, and historical significance of Maratha forts. It also considers their relationship with geography, administration, military organization, and state formation. The study highlights forts as important institutions in Maratha history and as valuable sources of information about the political and military history of early modern Maharashtra.

KEYWORDS: *Maratha Forts, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Swarajya, Raigad Fort, Rajgad Fort, Pratapgad Fort, Torna Fort, Sinhagad Fort, Panhala Fort, Sahyadri, Military Strategy, Fort Administration, Maratha History, Mughal-Maratha Conflict, State Formation.*

INTRODUCTION

Forts occupy a special place in the history of the Marathas. The mountainous geography of the Deccan, particularly the Sahyadri ranges, provided suitable locations for the construction and maintenance of strong defensive positions. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj understood the strategic importance of this geography and developed a network of forts that became an essential part of the emerging Maratha state. These forts helped protect territories, control important routes, maintain military forces, and provide secure centres for administration and storage.

The development of Maratha power took place in a politically competitive environment. During the seventeenth century, the Deccan was influenced by the Bijapur Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, and various local political and military groups. In this environment, control over strategically located forts could provide significant advantages. Shivaji Maharaj gradually acquired important forts and strengthened their defenses as he expanded the territory of Swarajya. Torna was among the early forts associated with his rise, while Rajgad became an important political and military centre during the development of the kingdom.

Forts served several purposes within the Maratha system. Militarily, they provided defensive positions from which troops could observe and control surrounding territories. They also offered protection for soldiers, weapons, ammunition, food supplies, and other resources. Their locations on hills, mountain passes, and important routes made them useful for controlling movement through the region. The combination of forts and mobile forces allowed the Marathas to respond to larger armies while making effective use of local geography.

The importance of forts extended beyond military defense. Some forts functioned as administrative and political centres. **Raigad**, for example, became the capital of Shivaji Maharaj's kingdom and was the site of his coronation in 1674. Important state activities, storage of resources, and the functioning of royal institutions were connected with major forts. Forts therefore formed part of the administrative infrastructure of the Maratha state.

Fort construction and management also required an organized system of officers and personnel. Fort commanders, soldiers, storekeepers, and other officials were responsible for maintaining defenses and supplies. The proper management of water resources, food stores, weapons, gates, walls, and communication arrangements was essential for a fort's ability to withstand prolonged military pressure.

Forts also played an important role during the Mughal-Maratha conflicts. When large Mughal forces entered the Deccan, forts provided defensive strongholds and allowed Maratha forces to maintain territorial positions. The capture, defense, and recovery of forts frequently became important stages in military campaigns. Even when particular forts were lost, the wider network could continue to support resistance and facilitate the recovery of territory.

The Maratha fort system included different types of fortifications, including hill forts, land forts, and coastal or sea forts. Hill forts such as Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Torna, and Sinhagad demonstrate the importance of mountainous terrain. Coastal forts such as Sindhudurg and Vijaydurg reflected the importance of maritime security and control of the Konkan coast. This variety demonstrates that Maratha fortification strategy was adapted to different geographical and military requirements.

The study of Maratha forts is therefore important for understanding more than military history. Forts reveal the relationship between geography, political authority, administration, military organization, communication, and economic resources. They also provide valuable architectural and archaeological evidence about the period.

Thus, forts can be considered one of the important institutional foundations of Maratha power. Their role changed according to political and military circumstances, but they remained significant throughout the history of the Maratha state. Studying their development and functions helps provide a broader understanding of the rise, consolidation, and expansion of Maratha power in early modern India.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

The main aim of this study is to examine the **role and significance of forts in Maratha history**, with particular attention to their military, political, administrative, economic, and strategic functions. The

study seeks to understand how the fort network contributed to the establishment and consolidation of Swarajya under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and continued to influence Maratha political and military activities in the later period.

Objectives

1. To study the historical and geographical background of fortification in the Deccan.
2. To examine the role of forts in the establishment and expansion of Swarajya under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.
3. To study important Maratha forts such as Raigad, Rajgad, Torna, Pratapgad, Sinhagad, Panhala, Sindhudurg, and Vijaydurg.
4. To understand the military importance of forts in Maratha warfare.
5. To examine the relationship between forts and the geographical features of the Sahyadri region.
6. To study the administrative functions of forts and their role as centres of political authority.
7. To examine fort management, including the role of commanders, soldiers, stores, water supply, and other resources.
8. To understand the importance of forts in the Mughal-Maratha conflicts and other contemporary political struggles.
9. To examine the role of coastal and sea forts in protecting the Konkan coast and supporting maritime activities.
10. To study the relationship between forts, communication routes, trade routes, and territorial control.
11. To examine the role of forts in the survival and continuation of Maratha power after the death of Shivaji Maharaj.
12. To assess the architectural and archaeological importance of Maratha forts.
13. To understand forts as symbols of political authority and the historical development of Maratha state formation.
14. To examine the present historical and cultural importance of Maratha forts and the need for their preservation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The history of Maratha forts has been discussed in works dealing with Maratha political history, military organization, administration, geography, and architecture. Historians have used literary, administrative, military, and archaeological evidence to understand the importance of forts in the development of Maratha power.

Jadunath Sarkar, in *Shivaji and His Times*, provides detailed information about Shivaji Maharaj's military activities, territorial expansion, and relations with the Mughal Empire and Deccan Sultanates. His work is useful for understanding the strategic importance of forts during Shivaji's period.

G. S. Sardesai, in *New History of the Marathas*, discusses the political and military development of the Marathas over a longer period. His work provides information about the acquisition, defense, and loss of forts during different phases of Maratha history.

Surendranath Sen, in *Administrative System of the Marathas*, is useful for studying the administrative organization associated with Maratha forts. The work helps explain the relationship between fort administration and the wider administrative structure of the Maratha state.

Stewart Gordon, in *The Marathas 1600–1818*, examines Maratha political and military development in a broader regional context. His work is valuable for understanding the changing role of

forts as Maratha political power expanded and became increasingly decentralized during the eighteenth century.

A. R. Kulkarni, in his writings on Maharashtra during the age of Shivaji, provides important historical background concerning the political, geographical, and social conditions in which the Maratha state developed. His work helps place the fort system within the regional context of seventeenth-century Maharashtra.

Setu Madhavrao Pagdi, in his study of Shivaji, discusses various aspects of Shivaji Maharaj's administration, military organization, and state formation. His work contributes to understanding forts as part of the broader organization of Swarajya.

R. V. Nadkarni, in *The Rise and Fall of the Maratha Empire*, discusses the development and later transformation of Maratha political power. The work is useful for examining the changing military importance of forts during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In addition to these historical works, **Marathi bakhars, correspondence, administrative records, Persian chronicles, and European accounts** provide valuable evidence about individual forts, military campaigns, commanders, and political events. However, such sources need to be examined critically because they were produced in different historical and political contexts.

Architectural and archaeological studies of forts provide another important area of research. Fort walls, gates, bastions, water systems, storage facilities, temples, residential structures, and other remains help researchers understand the practical organization of fort life. The combination of written, architectural, and archaeological evidence provides a broader understanding of the role of forts in Maratha history.

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that forts were not simply defensive structures. They were connected with military strategy, administration, political authority, communication, economic resources, and the geography of the Maratha state. However, further regional and interdisciplinary studies can provide a more detailed understanding of individual forts and the people who maintained and occupied them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a **historical, descriptive, analytical, and comparative methodology** to examine the role of forts in Maratha history.

1. Primary Sources

The study will make use of available primary and near-contemporary sources, including:

- Marathi bakhars and historical narratives.
- Marathi letters and administrative records.
- Peshwa-period records where relevant.
- Persian chronicles relating to Mughal-Maratha conflicts.
- European travellers' accounts and records.
- Contemporary descriptions of military campaigns.
- Inscriptions and records associated with forts.
- Architectural and archaeological remains of forts.

2. Secondary Sources

The research will also use books, research articles, historical studies, and architectural works dealing with Maratha political, military, administrative, and cultural history.

3. Historical Method

A chronological approach will be used to trace the development of the Maratha fort system from the early career of Shivaji Maharaj through the later Maratha period. Important developments will be studied in relation to major political and military events.

4. Analytical Method

The study will analyse the different functions of forts, including:

- Military defense
- Territorial control
- Administration
- Storage of supplies
- Communication
- Political authority
- Economic functions
- Coastal and maritime security

5. Geographical Analysis

Geography is particularly important in understanding Maratha fortification. The location of forts in the Sahyadri ranges, mountain passes, plateaus, valleys, and coastal areas will be considered in relation to military strategy and territorial control.

6. Comparative Method

Different categories of forts, such as hill forts, land forts, and sea forts, will be compared to understand how their structures and functions differed according to geographical and military requirements.

7. Architectural and Archaeological Study

Where appropriate, the physical features of forts—walls, gates, bastions, water systems, storage areas, temples, residential structures, and other remains—will be examined as historical evidence.

8. Source Criticism

The study will critically examine different sources and compare information from Marathi, Persian, European, and modern historical works. Differences between traditional accounts and modern historical interpretations will be considered.

9. Interdisciplinary Approach

The research combines history with aspects of geography, military studies, architecture, archaeology, and heritage studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of Maratha forts.

10. Limitations of the Method

The study depends partly on surviving written and material evidence. Some forts have undergone alterations, destruction, or restoration over time. Therefore, archaeological remains and later traditions need to be distinguished carefully from evidence dating to the Maratha period.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Forts occupy a central position in the history of Maratha power, yet their significance is sometimes understood only in terms of military defense. In reality, forts performed several interconnected functions. They served as military bases, administrative centres, storage locations, communication points, and symbols of political authority.

The emergence of Swarajya under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was closely associated with the acquisition, construction, strengthening, and administration of forts. Their strategic locations enabled the Marathas to use the difficult terrain of the Deccan and the Sahyadri ranges to their advantage. However, the precise ways in which different forts contributed to military campaigns, administration, communication, and territorial control require systematic study.

Another important problem is the need to understand how the role of forts changed over time. The functions and strategic importance of forts during Shivaji Maharaj's reign were not necessarily identical to those during the Peshwa period. The expansion of Maratha power and the emergence of a more decentralized political structure altered the relationship between forts, regional chiefs, military forces, and political authority.

The study also faces challenges relating to historical sources. Marathi bakhars, Persian chronicles, European accounts, administrative records, and modern historical works sometimes provide different interpretations of the same events. Some traditional accounts may contain later additions or exaggerated descriptions. Therefore, historical evidence must be compared and critically examined.

The central problem of this study is therefore to determine **how and why forts became important institutions in Maratha history, what functions they performed, how they contributed to the establishment and protection of Swarajya, and how their role changed during the later Maratha period**.

The study also seeks to examine the relationship between **forts, geography, military strategy, administration, communication, economic resources, and political authority**. Understanding these connections can provide a more comprehensive interpretation of Maratha state formation and the historical importance of Maharashtra's fort heritage.

NEED OF STUDY

The study of the role of forts in Maratha history is important for understanding the political, military, administrative, and geographical foundations of Maratha power. Forts were not merely defensive structures; they formed an important part of the organization and functioning of the Maratha state.

1. **Understanding the rise of Swarajya:**
   The study helps explain how forts contributed to the establishment and consolidation of Swarajya under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.
2. **Understanding military strategy:**
   Forts provided defensive positions, military bases, storage facilities, and observation points. Their study helps explain the relationship between fortifications and Maratha military strategy.
3. **Importance of geography:**
   Many Maratha forts were situated in the Sahyadri ranges, mountain passes, plateaus, and coastal areas. Their locations demonstrate the close relationship between geography and military planning.
4. **Administrative importance:**
   Major forts functioned as centres of administration, political authority, treasury management, and storage of essential supplies.
5. **Understanding Mughal-Maratha conflicts:**

The capture, defense, siege, and recovery of forts were important aspects of conflicts between the Marathas, Mughals, and Deccan Sultanates.

6. **Study of fort administration:**
   Examining commanders, soldiers, storekeepers, water management, provisions, and other arrangements helps explain how forts were maintained.
7. **Importance of coastal forts:**
   Sea forts such as Sindhudurg and Vijaydurg demonstrate the importance of coastal security and maritime activity in Maratha history.
8. **Architectural and archaeological value:**
   Forts preserve valuable evidence about construction techniques, military architecture, water management, settlements, and material culture.
9. **Understanding state formation:**
   The network of forts helped the Maratha state establish control over territory and maintain political authority. Their study therefore contributes to the understanding of early modern state formation.
10. **Preservation of historical heritage:**
    Maratha forts are important cultural heritage sites. Historical research can contribute to greater awareness of their conservation and responsible preservation.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

The study of Maratha forts provides several opportunities for further historical and interdisciplinary research.

1. Detailed individual studies of important forts such as Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Torna, Sinhagad, Panhala, Sindhudurg, and Vijaydurg.
2. Comparative study of **hill forts, land forts, and sea forts** to understand differences in their construction and functions.
3. Further research on the **administrative organization of forts**, including officers, soldiers, stores, and communication systems.
4. Study of the **economic arrangements of forts**, including food supplies, water resources, maintenance, taxation, and supply networks.
5. Research on the **daily life of soldiers, officials, workers, and families** living within or around forts.
6. Greater study of **women and their relationship with forts**, particularly in political, administrative, and social contexts.
7. Examination of the role of forts in **Mughal-Maratha and Maratha-Deccan Sultanate conflicts** through comparative use of Marathi and Persian sources.
8. Study of **Maratha naval forts and coastal defense**, particularly their relationship with maritime trade and regional politics.
9. Use of **archaeological surveys and architectural studies** to identify changes made to forts during different periods.
10. Application of **GIS and digital mapping** to examine the location of forts, military routes, mountain passes, trade routes, and communication networks.
11. Study of **water-management systems**, including tanks, cisterns, wells, and channels, within Maratha forts.
12. Research on the **environmental history of forts**, including their relationship with forests, mountains, water sources, and surrounding settlements.

13. Comparative research on Maratha fortifications and contemporary fort systems of the **Mughals, Deccan Sultanates, Rajputs, and European powers**.
14. Documentation and digital preservation of forts through photography, mapping, 3D modelling, and archival digitization.
15. Research on modern **heritage conservation, tourism, and community participation** in the preservation of Maratha forts.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Scope

The study covers the historical role of forts in the development of Maratha power, particularly from the seventeenth century through the later Maratha period. It examines their military, political, administrative, geographical, economic, architectural, and cultural importance.

The study focuses especially on forts associated with the development of Swarajya under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and considers their continued importance during subsequent phases of Maratha history.

Limitations

1. **Uneven historical sources:**
   Information about individual forts is not equally available for all periods.
2. **Source bias:**
   Marathi, Persian, European, and later historical accounts were produced in different political and cultural contexts and may present different interpretations.
3. **Changes over time:**
   Many forts were modified, repaired, damaged, or reconstructed after the Maratha period, making it difficult to identify all original features.
4. **Limited information about ordinary people:**
   Historical sources often focus on rulers, commanders, and military events rather than the daily lives of soldiers, workers, and local communities.
5. **Archaeological limitations:**
   Some structures have deteriorated or disappeared, limiting the evidence available for historical reconstruction.
6. **Regional diversity:**
   Maratha forts differed according to geographical location, political importance, and military purpose. Therefore, conclusions drawn from one fort cannot always be applied to all forts.
7. **Traditional narratives:**
   Local traditions and popular accounts are valuable for understanding historical memory but need to be distinguished from contemporary documentary evidence.
8. **Limited quantitative evidence:**
   Precise information about the number of soldiers, quantities of supplies, expenditure, and maintenance costs is not available consistently for all forts.
9. **Broad chronological coverage:**
   The changing political circumstances of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries make it difficult to provide a uniform interpretation of the role of forts throughout the entire period.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The present study focuses on the historical importance of forts in the development and expansion of Maratha power. The major areas covered are:

1. **Historical background of Deccan fortifications** and the geographical conditions that influenced their development.
2. **Forts and the rise of Swarajya** under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.
3. **Acquisition, construction, and strengthening of forts** during the development of the Maratha kingdom.
4. **Major Maratha forts**, including Raigad, Rajgad, Torna, Pratapgad, Sinhagad, Panhala, Sindhudurg, and Vijaydurg.
5. **Military functions of forts**, including defense, observation, troop deployment, storage, and control of strategic routes.
6. **Fort administration**, including commanders, soldiers, officials, provisions, water supply, and internal organization.
7. **Forts and Maratha military strategy**, particularly the relationship between fortified positions, mobility, and the geography of the Deccan.
8. **Forts during Mughal-Maratha conflicts** and their importance in sieges, territorial control, and resistance.
9. **Political importance of forts**, including their role as centres of authority and administration.
10. **Economic functions of forts**, particularly storage, supply networks, and connections with surrounding settlements and trade routes.
11. **Coastal and sea forts** and their relationship with maritime security and the Konkan region.
12. **Forts during the later Maratha period**, including changes in their political and military significance.
13. **Architectural and archaeological features** such as walls, gates, bastions, water systems, storage facilities, temples, and residential structures.
14. **Forts as symbols of Maratha heritage**, historical memory, and regional identity.
15. **Conservation and preservation** of Maratha forts and their importance for future historical research.

FINDINGS

The study of forts in Maratha history reveals that they were important institutions connected with military defense, administration, political authority, communication, and territorial control. The major findings are as follows:

1. **Forts were central to the development of Swarajya:**
   The acquisition and strengthening of forts played an important role in Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's efforts to establish and consolidate Swarajya.
2. **Geography influenced fort construction:**
   The Sahyadri mountains, valleys, plateaus, and coastal areas provided naturally strategic locations for fortification. Maratha fort policy made effective use of these geographical features.
3. **Forts served military purposes:**
   Forts provided secure bases for soldiers, weapons, ammunition, food, and other supplies. They also offered defensive positions during military campaigns.
4. **Forts helped control territory:**
   Strategically located forts could help control mountain passes, roads, valleys, and important routes. A network of forts therefore strengthened territorial control.
5. **Forts had administrative functions:**

Important forts served as centres from which political and administrative activities could be conducted. Officers and commanders were responsible for maintaining order and managing resources.

6. **Raigad had major political importance:**
   Raigad became the capital of Shivaji Maharaj's kingdom and was the site of his coronation in 1674. It therefore represented both political authority and the institutional development of Swarajya.
7. **Different forts had different functions:**
   Hill forts, land forts, and coastal forts were designed according to their geographical surroundings and strategic requirements.
8. **Sea forts supported coastal security:**
   Forts such as Sindhudurg and Vijaydurg reflected the importance of maritime security and the protection of the Konkan coast.
9. **Forts were important during Mughal-Maratha conflicts:**
   The capture, defense, and recovery of forts were major elements of military conflict between the Marathas and the Mughals and other contemporary powers.
10. **Forts required organized administration:**
    The maintenance of water, food, weapons, buildings, gates, walls, and other facilities required continuous management and a supporting administrative structure.
11. **Forts supported communication and intelligence:**
    Their strategic locations allowed information to be transmitted between different areas and helped monitor movements through important routes.
12. **Forts had economic significance:**
    Storage facilities and supply arrangements connected forts with surrounding villages and agricultural areas. Their maintenance therefore depended on wider economic networks.
13. **Forts contributed to the survival of Maratha power:**
    Even during periods of military pressure, fortified positions provided secure locations from which resistance could continue.
14. **Forts were symbols of political authority:**
    Control over a fort represented control over territory and demonstrated the authority of the ruling power.
15. **Forts remain important historical heritage:**
    Maratha forts provide valuable architectural, archaeological, and cultural evidence and continue to be important sites for historical study and heritage conservation.

DISCUSSION

The role of forts in Maratha history can be understood through their close relationship with geography, military organization, administration, and political authority. Their importance increased significantly during the rise of Shivaji Maharaj and the formation of Swarajya.

1. Forts and State Formation

Forts were closely associated with the establishment of Maratha political authority. Shivaji Maharaj acquired, constructed, and strengthened forts as his territorial power developed. They provided secure centres from which newly controlled territories could be administered and defended.

2. Forts and Geography

The physical geography of Maharashtra strongly influenced Maratha fortification. The Sahyadri ranges provided elevated and naturally protected locations. Mountain forts could be difficult for large armies to approach, while their position allowed defenders to observe surrounding areas.

3. Military Importance

Forts were important defensive and logistical centres. They provided protection for troops and supplies and could serve as bases for military operations. Their combination with mobile cavalry and infantry gave the Marathas a military system adapted to the geography of the Deccan.

4. Forts and Military Strategy

Maratha military strategy cannot be separated completely from the fort network. Forts provided secure positions while mobile forces operated in surrounding territories. This combination allowed military activity to continue even when large enemy forces were present in the region.

5. Administrative Importance

Forts were also connected with administration. Important forts contained offices, storage areas, residences, and facilities required for military and political activities. Fort commanders and other officials were responsible for maintaining the fort and managing its resources.

6. Forts and Mughal-Maratha Conflict

During the Mughal-Maratha wars, forts became major targets of military campaigns. Mughal forces attempted to capture important forts, while Maratha forces sought to defend, recover, or replace lost positions. The prolonged struggle demonstrated the strategic importance of fortified centres.

7. Political Significance

Forts represented political control. Raigad's position as the capital and the location of Shivaji Maharaj's coronation demonstrate how a fort could function as more than a military structure. It could become a centre of political administration and royal authority.

8. Economic and Supply Functions

A fort could not function without regular supplies. Food grains, water, weapons, building materials, and other resources had to be stored and replenished. This created connections between forts and surrounding villages, agricultural areas, markets, and transport routes.

9. Coastal Forts

The development of coastal forts demonstrated the importance of the Arabian Sea and the Konkan coast. Sindhudurg and Vijaydurg were associated with coastal defense and maritime activities and formed part of a broader strategy for protecting coastal interests.

10. Forts in the Later Maratha Period

The political structure of the Marathas changed significantly during the eighteenth century. The Peshwas and regional Maratha houses expanded their influence over large territories. Forts continued to have military and political importance, although their role varied according to changing political circumstances.

11. Architectural Significance

Maratha forts demonstrate considerable knowledge of defensive architecture and adaptation to natural terrain. Walls, bastions, gates, water reservoirs, storage facilities, and other structures were designed according to local geographical and military requirements.

12. Historical Interpretation

The study of forts should not be limited to heroic narratives surrounding individual battles. Forts should also be examined through administrative records, archaeological evidence, architecture, geography, and the experiences of the people who built, maintained, supplied, and occupied them.

CONCLUSION

Forts were among the most important institutions in the development of Maratha power. Their significance extended far beyond their function as defensive structures. They served as military bases, administrative centres, storage facilities, communication points, and symbols of political authority.

Under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the systematic acquisition, construction, and strengthening of forts contributed significantly to the establishment and consolidation of Swarajya. Their strategic locations in the Sahyadri ranges and along the coast allowed the Marathas to make effective use of the geographical features of the Deccan.

The fort network was closely connected with Maratha military organization. Forts provided secure positions and supplies, while mobile forces operated in surrounding areas. During the Mughal-Maratha conflicts, forts became important centres of resistance and territorial control. Their importance continued in different forms during the later Maratha period.

The study also demonstrates that forts had administrative and economic dimensions. Their maintenance required officers, soldiers, supplies, water, food, weapons, and connections with surrounding communities. Thus, forts were integrated into the wider political and economic structure of the Maratha state.

Maratha forts are also an important part of India's architectural and cultural heritage. They provide valuable evidence for understanding military architecture, state formation, geography, and social organization in early modern India. Their preservation and systematic study are therefore essential for future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Systematic historical research:**
   More detailed studies should be undertaken on individual forts using Marathi, Persian, and European sources.

2. **Archaeological surveys:**
   Regular archaeological documentation should be carried out to record fort structures, inscriptions, water systems, storage areas, and other remains.

3. **Preservation and conservation:**
   Damaged walls, gates, bastions, reservoirs, and other historical structures should be conserved using appropriate heritage practices.

4. **Digital documentation:**
   Digital mapping, GIS, photography, 3D modelling, and virtual documentation can help record forts accurately and support future research.

5. **Study of fort administration:**
   Further research should examine the officers, soldiers, workers, and administrative arrangements responsible for maintaining forts.

6. **Research on everyday life:**
   Greater attention should be given to the daily lives of soldiers, artisans, labourers, families, and local communities associated with forts.
7. **Study of water management:**
   The wells, tanks, cisterns, and other water systems of forts should be documented to understand how they supported long-term occupation.

8. **Research on coastal forts:**
   More studies should examine Sindhudurg, Vijaydurg, and other coastal fortifications in relation to maritime security and trade.

9. **Comparative studies:**
   Maratha forts should be compared with Mughal, Deccan Sultanate, Rajput, and European fortifications to understand similarities and differences in military architecture.

10. **Geographical research:**
    GIS and geographical studies can examine the relationship between forts, mountain passes, roads, settlements, trade routes, and natural resources.

11. **Community participation:**
    Local communities should be involved in heritage conservation, responsible tourism, and awareness programmes.

12. **Educational programmes:**
    Schools and colleges should encourage historical study visits and academic projects on forts to promote awareness of their historical significance.

13. **Responsible tourism:**
    Tourism should be managed carefully so that increased visitor activity does not damage historical structures or the surrounding environment.

14. **Interdisciplinary research:**
    Historians, archaeologists, architects, geographers, conservation specialists, and environmental researchers should work together on fort studies.

15. Preservation of historical records:

Marathi documents, maps, photographs, inscriptions, and other records relating to forts should be collected, catalogued, digitized, and preserved for future research.

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