

***Purusha and Prakriti: An Insight into Shivaji's Interactions with  
Swarajya's Environment***

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**Abstract:***The Indian traditional knowledge affirms that the universe was born of the union of Purush, i.e., the man, and Prakriti, i.e., the nature. While Prakriti is considered to be the basis of human existence, Purush embodies consciousness and energy. As the Purush became stronger, Prakriti was undermined and even destroyed by him. In the search of material bliss, the mankind has showed little regard to the traditional wisdom, and has recklessly exploited the nature. During the medieval period, however, we come across a ruler- Chhatrapati Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha Empire in the seventeenth century, who showed incomprehensible awareness towards the nature. We find him gaining success as an empire builder by making a calculated use of the environment in his warfare and policy matters. This paper examines the making of Chhatrapati Shivaji as a 'real Purush' by attempting to understand various aspects of his interactions with the environment.*

**Keywords:** *Forts, Maratha, Nature, Prakriti, Shivaji, Swarajya, Samkhya etc.*

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**Date of Submission:25.02.2026**

**Date of Acceptance: 05.03.2026**

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**Introduction**

The *Samkhya* philosophy acknowledges the contribution of nature and man behind the creation of this world. The *Samkhya* philosophy further attests to only two truths or realities- *Prakriti* and *Purusha*. The *Purusha* is deemed as *Shuddha Chetana* or the pure, conscious entity. He is *Nirguna*, i.e., without any attributes, and *Nishkriya*, i.e., without action. Additionally, in any function in this universe, *Purusha* is not the cause of any substance or entity, he is just a witness, or *Sakshi*. *Prakriti*, on the other hand, is understood as *Jada*, or insentient, inert matter.<sup>1</sup> It is also regarded as the source of creation. Now, without delving

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deep into the philosophy of theories, in historical perspectives, nature includes qualities that contributed to human evolution and development. It was nature's lap that served as a shelter for early humans. Nature gradually began to provide food, clothing, and housing to human society in a simple, selfless manner. It is no wonder that humans have respected nature since time immemorial. Nature worship has also been an integral part of India's culture since ancient times. The tradition of worshipping all the elements of nature, like trees, rivers, rocks, mountains, and animals, has been prevalent for a long time. The early Indian civilisations ensured that nature and its creations were preserved in the most significant ways. They were associated with divinity, and many of the animals were seen as vehicles for various Gods and Goddesses. We find evidence of this in the earliest literature compiled by them. For example, a Rig Vedic mantra has been dedicated to the forest goddess *Aranyani*, in which she is described as the mother of all forests, the provider of food, the protector of plants and animals, and at the same time glorified as the destroyer of potentially harmful enemies.<sup>2</sup> In the story of the *Ramayana*, the animals and birds are mentioned as part of the power. Lord Rama got the help of Jatayu and the army of monkeys to build a sea-bridge to reach Lanka and fight the demon Ravana. The Buddhist and Jain literature are equally rich in stories depicting the peaceful co-existence of humans and nature.<sup>3</sup> The famous poet Kalidasa of the Gupta period describes the beauty of *Aranyani* and *Tapovan* in his works, while portraying the charm of Shakuntala, the female protagonist of his epic play *Abhijnanashakuntalam*. A careful perusal and contextual analysis of the ancient literature thus helps us understand that nature and the animals created were inextricably linked within the Indian social system.

That by respecting and maintaining a finer balance between nature and its creations—including humans—a society can be made conscious of its duties, can be best understood from the rise of the Maratha nation under the dynamic leadership of Chhatrapati Shivaji. The political history of Maharashtra exemplifies that Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj realized the importance of women and nature in building a state, and ensured that no woman was inappropriately touched or humiliated by Maratha soldiers on the battlefield. Furthermore, strict instructions were issued to protect and preserve nature in the interest of the Maratha *Swarajya*. There is no denying that a country's history can serve as a model, in which its leaders appreciate and understand the value of women and nature. The history of the Marathas is more a story of its leaders, wars, and political incidents. The rise of Shivaji, the assassination of Afzal Khan, the humiliation story of Shaista Khan, the incident of the heroic

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escape of Shivaji from Aurangzeb's confinement in Delhi, etc., can be found in the history books.

## **Shivaji, Nature and *Swarajya***

If the history of Marathas is seen from a different perspective, such as the geographical environment of Maharashtra, how the new nation emerged, and how Shivaji was able to unite the people of the whole country under his leadership, then a new horizon of Maratha history is likely to be opened. At that time, the Marathas stood up as opponents of the great Mughal power. Under Shivaji's leadership, they dreamt of building *Swarajyaya*.<sup>4</sup> Surprisingly, the nature of Maharashtra helped them fulfil that dream. Shivaji was a true connoisseur of nature. The one who grew up in the grip of nature, the wild tribe, was his walking companion. He used natural elements to come to grips with and prevail upon his enemies. At the same time, being skilful in using the elements of nature, Shivaji was equally devoted to caring for nature as a mother and nurturing it with childlike love. Shivaji Maharaj became a real man by founding his own *Swarajya* and developing a defence system based on natural elements. He followed the ancient tradition in political and military administration.<sup>5</sup> He also tried to protect the forest and natural elements as the bearer of the tradition.

## **Shivaji's growing appreciation of nature**

The stories in the textbook can give us literal knowledge, which is sufficient to familiarise us with the content and its context. However, it requires hands-on experience to get into the essence of literal knowledge. Examining what catalysed Shivaji's spiritual encounter with nature is essential. Jadunath Sarkar mentions in his book *Shivaji* that '...he grew up in the neglect of his father, who was enamoured of Shivaji's stepmother'. Touring the forest, he made a bond with the farmer, the robber, etc., and learned about the country and the people.<sup>6</sup> From the above statement, it is clear that loneliness helps Shivaji connect with nature. Vacationing in the forest and jungle trekking helped him connect closely with the trees and animals. Riding, wrestling, spear-throwing, swordsmanship, swimming through torrential floods, in this and similar sports, Shivaji developed a kind of wild commandship both with men and nature.<sup>7</sup>

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The second reason can be attributed to Shivaji's guardian, Dadaji Kondodev. Dadaji was appointed as the Jagirdar of Pune. However, as a result of persistent famine and the onslaught of Bijapur and Mughal soldiers, there was no habitation in that country, and people were restrained mainly from practising agriculture due to fear of bandits. Under those circumstances, he encouraged the area's farmers to cultivate their land, planted numerous fruit trees throughout the province and ordered the planting of mango, tamarind, pomegranate, and lemon trees in addition to growing crops in the villages.<sup>8</sup> As a result, solitary, rough areas gradually become beautiful when adorned with fruits and flowers. Dadaji built a fruit garden called *Shahji bagh* in Pune. He realized the need to gather trees from the inaccessible, unattractive, hilly land for settlement and to enhance scenic beauty. The guardian's awareness of the plantation of trees, that seed of love for nature, seems to have been sown in the heart of the child Shivaji. Shivaji's passion for nature did not end there; his genuine love for nature was revealed through his friendship with the *Mawle*.<sup>9</sup> Indian society has always been divided based on caste. In sophisticated words, *Mawles* were uncivilized and forest dwellers, therefore, they were untouchables. But Shivaji rose above the caste system and allied with the *Mawle* caste. Through Shivaji's efforts, the forest-dwelling *Mawles* became hard-working, skilled, and educated soldiers. He used to go hunting with his loyal *Mawle* soldiers in the forests of Ghatamatha and Kankan in the narrow passes and hilly areas. In this way, the valleys, the rivers, and the inaccessible places of Maharashtra became well-known to him.<sup>10</sup> Young friends and playmates from the hills around Poona used to travel with Shivaji, share his work among themselves, and were ready to make any sacrifice for his sake. All these young, loyal friends played an essential role in elevating Shivaji's dream of *Swarajya*. Later, all these *Mawle* soldiers showed their courage as foot soldiers during the formation of Shivaji's army. It is natural for the child of the forest to be more interested in feeling nature and knowing it. Shivaji began to believe that these *Mawle* were not uncivilised; they were the true connoisseurs of nature.

### **The development of a military security system using nature as a weapon**

Before discussing how Shivaji utilised nature to secure his military organisation, it is essential to examine the geographical boundaries of Maharashtra and its natural resources. The geographical environment created a spirit of independence among the people of

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Maharashtra. Looking at the map of this country, it is seen that most places are covered with rugged rocks. Satpura and Vindhya giri spread in the East-West direction, and the Sahyadri standing in the north-south direction have become the walls of the nation. High and low rocks have made the country unbalanced. Small gorges on it have made it more inaccessible. India does not have such inaccessible places.<sup>11</sup>

The British Historian Captain James Grand Duff wrote that judging from the strategic point of view, there seems to be no such protected place in the world.<sup>12</sup> By using every element of the forested nature in such mountainous areas, where it was challenging to live, whether it was stones or thorny bushes, no matter how small and insignificant, Shivaji proved that the formation of *Swarajya* required natural resources and the support of the local people. Maratha forts were a part of Shivaji's military system. There were different types of forts. One of them is the mountain forts. *Giri* is a Sanskrit word meaning Mountain. These forts were built on top of the mountains using Maharashtra's geographical environment. The hills of Maharashtra offered him excellent sites for them. Not a pass was left undefeated, not a peak was left unfortified, and every taluka was provided with one or more strongholds, and a network of forts secured the whole country.<sup>13</sup>

There were two main reasons behind the construction of such hill forts: firstly, to make the forts impregnable to the enemy, and secondly, to take necessary measures so that the enemy attack could be easily perceived from these high forts. Even ordinary people were given shelter in the fort during surprise attacks. S. N. Sen described in his *Military System of the Marathas* that the 'hillside was rendered more inaccessible by the usual bush of thorny opuntia cactus that forms the common feature of the country'. The fort was fenced using cactus bushes to protect it from the enemy and prevent wild animals from attacking it. This is a unique and significant method, and every abandoned element of nature has also become a part of Shivaji's security system.

When Shivaji traversed, along with his *Mawle* friends, to the remote forested areas of the hills, he perfectly observed the abundance of natural resources and their activities. A type of animal found in hilly regions is called Gorpada in Marathi.<sup>14</sup> It is a giant mountainous lizard capable of climbing at ease to high places. During wars, these mountain lizards were tied with ropes around their body and sent to the steep mountain. The lizards, in turn attached themselves to holes in the hillside, and held them steady with their claws, allowing the Maratha soldiers to climb up quickly using a swinging rope. It was because of such unique features the mountain lizards that Shivaji used them in his wars. Tanhaji Malsure, a valiant

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Maratha commander, is said to have made an effective use of these lizards during the military campaign to recapture the famed stronghold of Simhagad from the Mughals.<sup>15</sup>

Shivaji had the means at his fingertips to make purposeful use of the natural elements. This is reflected in the comments of the contemporary traveller Fryer- He saw 'on the tops of the mountains, several fortresses of *Seva Gis* only defensible by nature needing no other artillery but stones, which they tumble down upon their foes, carrying as certain destruction as bullets where they alight'.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, the stones were used to block the narrow paths in the mountain passes, so that the enemy could be misled. It is worth mentioning here that these stones were enough to counter the enemy's attack. Sometimes, they were ambushed by throwing stones down the slope of the hill to prevent an attack by an enemy.<sup>17</sup>

### **Planting trees, conservation of forests, and strengthening of fort defence**

One of the most essential additions to Shivaji's military organization was the construction of the forest forts. He emphasized the creation of forests for the protection of forest forts. The forest's density acted as a natural hindrance in the enemy movement, and helped to fight them better. We get extremely crucial information from the text *Adnyapatra*, written by Shivaji's contemporary Ramchandra Pant Amatya. The *Adnyapatra* was completed shortly after the death of Shivaji, during the reign of Sambhaji II.<sup>18</sup> The subject of one of the chapters of the text is Principles of Construction and Organisation of Forts. In this chapter we come across a detailed description of forts, be it their construction style, or information on the fort organization, and above all, how the fortifications were to be protected with the help of natural elements. The *Adnyapatra* mentions the name of the Kalargi tree. It recommends that for the defence of the forts, jungles of *Kalargi* trees should be created around in such a manner that the gunners and foot soldiers deployed outside the forts can easily hide behind the trees in the deep jungles if the enemy attacks. The standing order that -the area under Kalargi forest should be increased in whatever possible way, and not a single branch of it should be cut, was believed to be issued so that there should be no sudden confrontation with the enemy.<sup>19</sup>

Further, instructions were been given to plant Nirgudi and other trees in the houses that used to be inside the fort at a low density so that if any enemy comes into the house's courtyard, it can be easily noticed from inside the home. Accordingly, the army can be alerted about the enemy's attack.<sup>20</sup> The *Adnyapatra* also elaborates upon the practice and process of storing gunpowder in the forts. It cautions that, to prevent any explosion, adequate measures

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should be taken to surround the area in the dense forest. Here, too, emphasis is placed on planting Nirgudi, and other trees around the storage structure.<sup>21</sup>

Shivaji also ensured that the trees inside the fort were protected and preserved. Particular attention was given to the care of thickly-studded trees such as jackfruit tree, tamarind tree, banana tree, and banyan tree. Official instructions were also issued to take care of other big and small trees, such as lemon trees, orange trees, small flower trees, creeping plants, and other essential or non-essential trees and plants within the fort premises from the viewpoint of the fort's security and strength.<sup>22</sup> Understandably, there was a genuine need to take care of the giant fruit trees within the fort premises, but the question is: what is the logic behind saving the creepy plants? They could be used as fuel or may be used for making herbal medicines.

The most important addition to the military organisation during Shivaji's reign was the formation of a naval force. However, as Shivaji was aware of the importance of nature, so cutting trees to build war boats was not unchecked. Shivaji issued orders in this regard-With royal permission, parts of teak and other wood can be stored. Also, if more trees are needed, they can be purchased from different areas. Although mango trees, jackfruit trees, and other trees grown in the area of others are effective in making boats, it is not advisable to touch them. Because these plants cannot grow in a year or two, they require childlike care and maintenance to reach their full size.<sup>23</sup> The statement reflects Shivaji's proactive attitude towards nature and the environment. The spiritual pull toward trees is evident when he says that trees are like children; they should not be harmed. Imagining the trees as children without deep love and respect for nature is impossible.

### **Providing a clean environment to the *Swarajya***

The *Adnyapatra* does not merely provide inputs for the effective use of nature's bounty for the creation and consolidation of *Swarajya*, but also addresses the ways and means to maintain the transparency of *Swarajya's* environment. Regulations were made to prevent throwing dirt or waste onto the fort's walls, the market, or the road.<sup>24</sup> The *Adnyapatra* also recommends that there should be a vegetable garden behind every house in the fort. The use of organic fertilizers to increase the production of all these vegetables was also encouraged. It was recommended that the garbage should be collected, burnt, and the ashes be used as

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manure to grow vegetables in the backyard of every house.<sup>25</sup> It is, however, really a sad state of affairs that, despite living in modern India, where we promote the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, we have yet to learn from the practices of the past. In particular, we have a ready reference in the manner in which Shivaji loved his *Swarajya* and wanted it to be beautiful, clean, and garbage-free.

### **The ability to understand human nature: the glorious journey of the *Swarajya***

Another critical step towards protecting the *Swarajya* was the purposeful inclusion of forest and tribal communities, such as the Ramoshi, Bhils, and Kolis, in the state apparatus. It is worth noting that Shivaji could have had night watchmen, as the mighty Mughals did, who were well-trained. But Shivaji entrusted the responsibility for protecting his forts and the passages leading to them to these so-called uncivilised forest dwellers. Firstly, the unlimited knowledge of all these indigenous people about the forests was a natural advantage compared to the trained guards, who were largely unfamiliar with the forest surroundings and could have taken time to adjust. In contrast, it was easier for these forest dwellers to guard these areas. Secondly, most forest dwellers are nocturnal. Since they lived in the forest, there was quickly a fear of wild animals ambushing them in the dark. Therefore, each day's struggle in the night vigil made them courageous and strong, so it was not difficult for them to guard carefully during the night. According to S. N. Sen, Ramoshis, as watchmen of his fortresses, seemed to have performed their duty with loyalty and zeal.<sup>26</sup>

Above all, Shivaji preferred loyalty over trained soldiers. He had spent time with the forest people and knew that they were honest and could be loyal too. Hence, Shivaji did not consider caste when devising means to secure his *Swarajya* effectively. Therefore, the untouchable status of these forest dwellers did not come in the way of their induction into his fold, and they set about strengthening the military defences of the Maratha State.

When Shivaji wandered in the forest as a child, he came into contact with people of different races, forming an idea of their efficiency. That makes his journey towards the construction of *Swarajya* relatively easy. For example, when Shivaji took the initiative to strengthen the navy, he enlisted the help of the Koli and Bhandari castes. The Koli people, primarily engaged in fishing and seafaring, had absolute knowledge of the bottom of the sea, the nature of tides, wind patterns, etc., which were prerequisites for safe navigation. Using this knowledge, small boats were built for the Maratha army.

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On the other hand, the Bhandari caste was appointed by Shivaji because they were also coastal people who could climb palm trees effortlessly. So, when the navy sailed, the Bhandari people, climbing the ship masts, helped determine the far side of the route, the wind or weather patterns, and the approach of enemy vessels, etc. Their expertise in climbing up and down the mast very quickly was a real advantage for the Maratha naval wars.

## **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is clear that Shivaji was conscious of the nature as he made purposeful use of natural elements in the creation and consolidation of the Maratha state. In particular, the military campaigns and the defence architecture, which were the mainstay of the Maratha *Swarajya*, were consciously planned with a perfect blend of man and nature. It was the people of the hill and the wild tribes of the adjoining forests who were drafted to take on the mighty Mughals in the battlefields. Elements of nature always served as the first line of defence of the *Swarajya*, as the location of the hill, forest, sea and coastal forts were in alignment with the topography of the surroundings. Being the first Indian ruler to realise the importance of sea power, Shivaji is said to have followed the ancient tradition of meditating on the sea,<sup>27</sup> as Lord Ramachandra did, according to the Ramayana. His reverence for the holy rivers was evident in the way he named the granaries within the Purandhar fort after three important rivers of India: Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati. It was in the belief that as the waters of these holy rivers would not dry up, the granaries would also prove to be inexhaustible in the time of need.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Shivaji attributed divinity to nature as mother, and tendered it like a child. He made careful use of natural resources towards *Swarajya's* defences, but never resorted to its overexploitation or destruction. Hence, it could be concluded that Shivaji, the Purusha, or the conscious man, roped in the mother nature, or Prakriti and achieved his mission as a conscious man.

## **Notes and References**

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<sup>1</sup>Kottakara, Santosh Kumar, "Concept of *Prakriti* and *Purusha* in Ayurveda and Sankhya Philosophy", *Pharma Science Monitor an International Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences*, Pharma Science Monitor Vol. 10, Issue.1, Jan-Mar 2019, pp. 29-33.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, Rimjhim. 'Environment in Popular Culture and Ancient Indian Literature', *Summerhill: IIAS Review*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, Nov 2021, pp. 25-30.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>4</sup>*Swarajya* means the own rule, not only by imposing political hegemony but spreading it through the means of language and culture.

<sup>5</sup>To run political and administrative machinery, he used the old text called *Sukra Nitisara* composed by Sukracharya. See, Sen, S.N., *Administrative System of the Marathas*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged), 1925, p. 488.

<sup>6</sup>Sarkar, Jadunath, *Shivaji*, Calcutta: Orient Longman Limited, 1929(First edition), p.18.

<sup>7</sup>Sardesai, G.S., *New History of the Marathas, Vol I; Shivaji & His Line [1600-1707]*, Bombay: Phoenix Publication, First Impression 1946, p. 89.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.* p. 96.

<sup>9</sup>Mawle- The vast stretch of land along the Sahyadri mountain in the Puna district is called Maval. In the Marathi language, it means land of sunset. See, Sarkar, Jadunath, *Shivaji*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>Roy, Sharat Kumar, *Shivaji O Maratha Jati*, Kolkata: Metcalf Printing Workers, 1316 (B.), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Sen, S.N., *Military System of the Marathas*, Calcutta: The Book Company Ltd., 1928, p. 91.

<sup>14</sup>Mountainous lizards can be found in the hilly areas of Maharashtra. They can easily climb steep hills.

<sup>15</sup>Sen, S.N., *Military System of the Marathas*, p. 101.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.* p.100.

<sup>17</sup>Sir Hector Munro and his men were violently assailed by stones when they attempted to capture Chunar. See, Sen, S.N., *Military System of the Marathas*, p.100.

<sup>18</sup>*Adnyapatra* was written by Ramchandra pant Amatya. He was jointly appointed as Amatya with his brother under the Shivaji Maharaj. See, Rao, V. D., 'Is Ramchandra Pant Amatya the Author of Adnyapatra?', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 9, 1946, pp. 312–15. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44137078>. Accessed 3 June 2024.

<sup>19</sup> S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar Rao Bahadur, (eds.), "The Ajnyapatra or Royal Edict", *Journal of Indian History*, Volume VIII, Part 1, April 1992, p. 219.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* p. 226.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.* p. 227.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.* p. 228.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.* p. 232.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.* p. 226.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.* p. 227.

<sup>26</sup>Sen, S.N., *Military System of the Marathas*, p. 105.

<sup>27</sup>Sen, S. N., *Siva Chhatrapati*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1920, p. 193.

<sup>28</sup>Sen, S.N., *Military System of the Marathas*, p. 95.