

Kanhoji Angre and Maratha Navy- Jewel in India's Maritime History

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Abstract

Kanhoji Angre had been a powerful and celebrated Sarkhel (Admiral) of the Maratha Navy, from 1698 to 1729. He has been credited with establishing the Maratha naval supremacy in the Konkan Region, on western coast of India. He successfully challenged various European powers like the British, Portuguese, and Dutch, by building a strong fleet, and establishing naval bases, forcing them to buy his *Sea Passes* for trade, and, thus, effectively controlling the coast from Surat to Vengurla. His innovative tactics and expertise with small, fast vessels, such as the ghurabs and galbats, allowed him to outmaneuver larger European ships of those days.

His prowess later forced the Portuguese in signing a peace treaty, and became an almost unsurmountable obstacle in the growth of the English East India Company, in the region. Post Kanhoji's death in 1729, there was power struggle between his brothers Sambhaji and Manaji, which had an adverse impact on Maratha Navy's strength and ultimately led to its decline.

This article thus deals with India's Maritime and Maratha Navy histories-briefly, Kanhoji Angre's early and naval life, his contribution to building and rise of Maratha Navy, his policies, his achievements, and impact of his demise on Maratha Navy's prowess.

Keywords: Maratha Navy, Kanhoji Angre, Sarkhel, Tulaji, Konkan Region, Chhatrapati Shivaji, English, Portuguese

Introduction

India has a glorious maritime history, dating back to more than 3000 years. The Maratha Navy forms an important chapter in India's maritime history. Maratha King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and his Admiral Kanhoji Angre have been credited as the chief architects Maratha

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naval prowess in the Maharashtra region, which fought valiantly with the foreign naval powers, operating in that region.

Sardar Kanhoji Angre was a skilled mariner, who was recruited by Chhatrapati Sambhaji (who ruled the Maratha Kingdom post demise of Chhatrapati Shivaji), for specific purpose of strengthening the fledgeling Maratha Navy- an important arm of Chhatrapati's armed forces. Kanhoji, the first Admiral of the Maratha Navy (Sarkhel), was a powerful and feared Maratha naval commander. He served Admiral from 1699 until his death in 1729. Many foreign navies, operating in the area of Konkan Coast (in Maharashtra) were weary of his prowess and tactics, for a good reason.

Sarkhel Kanhoji built the Maratha Navy into a formidable force, defending India's western coast from European powers like the British, Dutch, and Portuguese, and the troublesome Siddis. He was a strategic naval innovator, known for his daring tactics and mastery of using smaller, faster ships like Galbats and Gurabs (images of some of the ships used by the Maratha navy are placed and Appendix-I for better understanding), to outmanoeuvre larger European vessels. Maratha Navy is considered a foundation of the modern-day Indian Navy and Kanhoji is revered in India as a national hero, and a symbol of resistance against colonial expansionism (GOI, n.d., IN, n.d.).

It is a fact that any study related to India's *Maritime Heritage* would be incomplete, without examining the history of the of Maratha Navy and Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre. This article, thus, briefly examines India's Maritime history, Maratha Navy's contribution to that history, Kanhoji Angre's life both early and professional, his rise to the post of Sarkhel, and his role in building and rise of Maratha naval prowess, and Maratha Navy's condition post Kanhoji's death in the year 1729. The narrative is based on authentic primary and credible secondary sources. The article is expected to serve as a referral document for the researchers and students of India's maritime & Maratha Navy histories, as well as Kanhoji Angre's life history, and as legacy tale of Maratha navy and that of Kanhoji, for the general readers.

Literatures Review

Words of Sir Raleigh "For whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself" have stood the test of times (Raleigh, n. d.). Thus, it would be important here to examine India's Maritime and Maratha Navy's histories.

India's Maritime Heritage and Maratha Navy***India's Maritime Heritage***

Dr Avantika Lal in her research article titled “Naval Warfare in Ancient India” has focused on maritime activities on ancient India going back to 321 BCE. She has brought out many facets related to the maritime operations in those days. It has been observed that various rulers in ancient India had an understanding of the importance of the Maritime Power, and operated potent naval forces out of necessity. Those naval forces undertook three important roles: namely- transportation of troops to distant battlefields, participation in actual warfare primarily for protecting the state's seafaring authority, trade on sea and navigable rivers, and the maritime trade routes. The prospering and high value trade with Egypt, West Asia, Greece, and Rome, resulted in the growth of navies along India's west coast facing the Arabian Sea, and many dynasties ruling in various parts of India too maintained navies, to protect the trade being conducted through huge rivers such as the Ganga.

She has also pointed out that, on the east coast of India Bay of Bengal facilitated maritime activities, which led to colonizing expeditions to the Southeast Asia. The navies of the South Indian powers in those days, launched invasions expeditions in other countries, but the warships were used in battles with caution and only in cases where destroying the enemy's navy became crucial,

On the east coast facing the Bay of Bengal maritime activities led to colonizing expeditions to Southeast Asia. The navies of the South Indian powers were geared towards launching invasions in Sri Lanka, separated from India by the Palk Straits. The warships were used in battles which, compared to land battles, remained low in proportion. The ancient Indians preferred to fight on land, and fights on sea were not given much importance, except in a few cases where destroying the enemy navy became crucial (Lal. 2018). She has also indicated types of ships, used in those days (Fig-1).

Fig: 1- Ancient India Ship



Source: <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/9105/ancient-indian-ship/>

This indicates that the ancient India had knowledge of ship building, and Indian kingdoms used has merchant arms and the fighting naval arms for prosperity of their states and protection of their maritime authority respectively.

Indian Navy's historical records, and Dr BK Apte's historical chronical titled "A History of the Maratha Navy and Merchant Ships" have also pointed out that India had been endowed with rich maritime history, going back to 3000 BC. The earliest references to India's maritime activities are found in the Rig Veda. Indian mythological literature also makes numerous references to the India's maritime power, testifying that even the ancient mankind benefitted from the wealth of seas and oceans. Further, the maritime activities during Indus Valley civilisation, mentions in Ramayana and Mahabharata to ships and sea travels, extensive trade activities during The Nanda, Maurya, and Ashoka periods, and maritime prowess' of dynasties like Satavahana, Gupta, Cholas, Cheras, and Pandyas, Cheras, and Vijaynagar kings indicate India's maritime heritage.

Going forward the Maratha Navy added a golden leaf to that history. The Arabs, British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese, had dotted India's maritime space then. These foreign navies created hurdles in the development of local trade and economy, as well as posed danger to area security, becoming *raison d'être* for birth and rise of the Maratha Navy (IN, n.d. a) (Apte, 1973).

Ancient Indian Trade Routes

Maritime Silk routes assumed importance for India during the 15th to 19th century, as seen in Marine Insight Report (MI, 2018). A map (Fig 2) has been depicted in the book titled "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea" (Tsiagalskis, 2018), has highlighted how the trade routes from the ancient ports in the Chera territory and other parts of India, and the trade routes connecting them to other parts of the world promoted the Indian trade in ancient times, bringing out reasons for merchant fleets in India. Records show that the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea or

Periplus Maris Erythraei was written sometime between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE (Common Era-Gregorian Calendar), by an unknown Greek author. He was an experienced sailor, who navigated the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and the Indian coasts of Kerala and Coromandel (eastern coast) and stayed for many years at the western Indian port of Barygaza-Broach (NEW, n. d.)

Fig: 2- Trade Routes from Ancient Ports of India



Source: <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/9102/ancient-indian-maritime-trade-routes/>,
Accessed on 29 Sep 2020

The above clearly indicates ancient India's maritime trade and naval prowess.

Maratha Navy's Contribution to India's Maritime History

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was the first regional king to recognize the need for a powerful navy. He built various kinds of ships including Galbats and Gurabs, and the coastal forts like Vijaydurg and Sindhudurg, strengthening defences against the Siddis and foreign naval powers of those days. Under his leadership, the Maratha navy grew to over 500 ships, holding off both the Portuguese and British for over 40 years. (IN, n.d. b) (Apte, 1973a).

Some other researchers have pointed out that the Maratha Navy under the command of Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre played unique position in the history of both Bharat and the Arabian sea. For almost four decades, he was feared by the contemporary foreign maritime powers, operating off the western coast. He valiantly led his sailors from victory to victory, and raised the prestige of Maharashtra, and the Maratha navy to unprecedented heights. It is said that when history is vague, the following generations tend to forget the glory of the tall figures, who wrote the history with their prowess. Same fate was encountered by Kanhoji, though he founded a dynasty in the late 1690s, which became the main reason for limiting the rise of the English East India Company (EIC)- as a hegemonic power in the Bombay region. Though, the Company tried its best to suppress the maritime depredations of the powerful Kanhoji, for more

than fifty years, some historical records did survive, and have allowed the researchers to bring Kanhoji Angre's legacy to the fore (HJS, n.d.) (Krishna, 2022).

From the above, it would be evident that both the Maratha navy and Kanhoji Angre made an astounding contribution to the India's maritime history.

Before moving forward, it would be important to examine the lay of the coast, for understanding of the maritime situation at that time

Lay of the Coastal Areas during Maratha Navy and Kanhoji Era

Konkan, Mumbai and its adjoining areas were the important geographical areas connected with the Maratha Navy, examination of which will bring in the necessary geographical perspective.

Konkan Region

The Konkan region (Fig:3), where Maratha Navy & Kanhoji had a strong hold, lies between the high Sahyadri ranges and the Arabian Sea. This region, is mostly dotted with many rivers, and channels of both potable and salt water. Though this region even to date receives heavy rainfall. The region then and even now suffers from scarcity of food and fresh water. It was this want of food which mainly drove early residents of this region to the sea- promoting navigational skills. It is important to note that Konkan climate, rainfall, and topography have not changed much, except for the damage resultant to modern ways of living. Thus, it would be easy to understand the difficulties faced by the people in that era.

Fig: 3- Coast of Konkan



Source:

<https://sahitya.marathi.gov.in/scans/A%20history%20of%20the%20maratha%20navy%20and%20merchantships.pdf> , Accessed on 03 March 2023

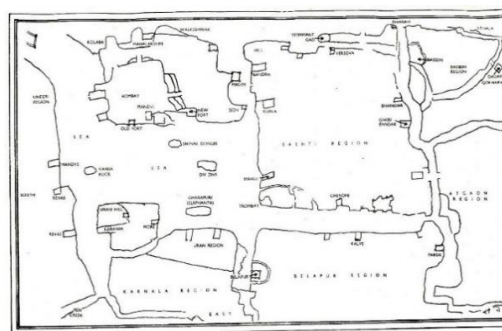
The Konkan coast covers the area from Daman in the north and extends as far as Goa in the south, encompassing districts of Thana, Kolaba and Ratnagiri, and also the former princely states of Janjira (in Raigadh district) and Sawantwadi (in Sindhudurg district). The Konkan area is naturally divided into two parts, near the northernmost point of Kolaba (at 18.83 in north latitude). The region which lies north of this point features various islands, deeper rivers and spacious backwaters facilitating ease of navigation. The part south of this point is indented with numerous rivulets, but has no spacious backwater base. The rivers run through rocky gorges thus making them navigable for large ships only at high-tides, and over a short distance. Kanhoji knew these intricacies and exploited them well to Maratha Navy's advantage.

Thane Coast

The Thana coast also finds itself divided into two parts by the river Vaitarana, encompassing areas from the great gulf of Kolaba and extending inland as far as Thana. It is important to note that in those times this area was the widest bight of Konkan, and large ships could reach Thana without difficulty. The present marshy shore of the Thana estuary was then under water. The swamps now seen near Kalyan and Bhiwandi used to get flooded then during high tides. The area was dotted by seven islands, viz. Salsette, Turumbe, Juhu, Vesave, Marva, Dharavi and Raimurdha and Bombay (now Mumbai) proper, forming a group of islands in the seventeenth century.

Further, the Bassein and its neighbouring villages formed a remote tract known as the island of Bassein. The creek of Bassein was navigable as far as Kalyan and Bhiwandi. It was at these places that Chhatrapati Shivaji initially set afloat the hulls of the Maratha Navy's Ships. The Fig: 4 displays the areas discussed above.

Fig:4- Bombay Port and adjoining Areas



Source:

<https://sahitya.marathi.gov.in/scans/A%20history%20of%20the%20maratha%20navy%20and%20merchants.pdf> , Accessed on 03 March 2023

Kolaba Coast

The Kolaba coastal strip (Fig: 5) encompassing Revas to the river Savitri, covered nearly sixty miles of area. including the former Janjira State. This strip which recedes east-ward proliferates in hillocks rough and rugged, and is also dotted with numerous salt pans.

Fig:5- Kolaba Coastal Strip

A



B



Sources:

<https://www.akg-images.fr/search/AAAAAAEAGks9AAAAAAQ==> , Accessed on 22 Oct 2025, and

<https://sahitya.marathi.gov.in/scans/A%20history%20of%20the%20maratha%20navy%20and%20merchants.pdf> , Accessed on 03 March 2023

Ratnagiri Coast

The Ratnagiri coast, which too had an importance in Kanhoji's time, covered areas from the Savitri River in the north to the Terekhol in the south, measuring about 165 miles. Most part the thus coast was rocky and the rivers flowed through deep defiles, with skeletal alluvial deposits on their banks.

The mouths of these rivers terminated into promontories, and they were crowned with fortifications, forming guarding station of the coast. Many of the promontories and high hills on the southern end of the coast provided excellent anchorage in the rough season. It is important to note that Bhatya, Jatyapur and Vijaydurg creeks in the region also played a vital role in supporting the Maratha Navy (Fig: 6). This region thus formed the cradle and the preferred abode for the Maratha Navy.

Fig: 6- Ratnagiri Coast



Source: https://www.indiaspend.com/indias-climate-change-hotspots/against-the-sea-rising-sea-levels-in-ratnagiri-turn-farm-lands-into-mangrove-forests-864678#google_vignette,
Accessed on 02 Oct 2025

It would be examined later in the paper how Kanhoji Angre's knowledge about the geography of these coasts coast played a significant role in the Maratha Navy's prowess in the region Pendse, (Sources for above details- Apte, 1973b, Deshmukh, 2025)

Summary

The literature review above has clearly brought out that India has a glorious maritime history. References to India's maritime prowess have been found in the research papers, ancient literature like Rigveda, Ramyana, and archives, going back to 321 BCE. Records also shoe contribution made to the India's Maritime history by the Maratha Navy and its unique Admiral Kahnoji Angre. Kanhoji's understanding of the prevailing situation, his in-depth knowledge of the coastal areas and his acumen stood him in a good stead while fighting with the European navies in the area and Mughals and Siddis.

The paper would now move on to examine Kanhoji's life, his naval career and achievements.

Kanhoji Angre- Early Life, Naval career and Achievements

Kanhoji's Early Life

Kanhoji Angre, who was also known as Conajee Angria or Sarkhel Angré, was born on the fort Suvarnadurg, near Ratnagiri in the month of August, in the year 1667, to mother- Ambabai and father- Tukoji. His father was a trusted confidant of Chhatrapati Shivaji, and served at Suvarnadurg. Historically, his surname "Angre" was derived from Angarwadi. His predecessors were made the guardians of small state named 'Vir Rana Sank' and because of that his family members before him came to be known as 'Sankpals'.

Kanhoji started his life as a humble servant of some Hindus in the island of Versova. His family history has not been distinctly documented. But from the available information, some historian believed him to belong to Kshatriya cast, but some others believed that he belonged to the Maratha Koli cast. The latter opinion has been corroborated by the Portuguese. Similarly, Kanhoji's early life history has not been properly documented (Khandpekar, 2018) (Krishna, 2022a).

Examination of some other available records by other researches has revealed that Angre's family hailed from the inland village of Angarwadi, near Pune. But Kanhoji grew up in very active atmosphere of Suvarnadurg, of which his father Tukoji later became the Commander. Tukoji's family had a strong maritime tradition, and Tukoji himself was a skilled naval commander, who served in the Maratha navy under Shivaji Raje. It is, therefore, quite likely that Kanhoji received a traditional fort, rivers, and sea atmosphere upbringing, before getting himself acquainted with the basics of the fledgling Maratha navy- around the age of 15-18 (HJS, n.d. a) (Gateway House, 2012). ND Histories (2023) has described Kanhoji as having somewhat portly build, dark complexion, strong body structure, fierce face and the piercing eyes- which played great part in his effective command of the Maratha fleet and fear in the minds of his adversaries.

Kanhoji's family tree details are placed at Appendix-II, as they would serve as a guide in understanding better the historical events in Kanhoji's life, described later in the paper.

Kanhoji Angre's Early Days in the Maratha Navy

It is fact that Kanhoji had no opportunity of working in Maratha Navy under the command of Chhatrapati Shivaji. After the death of Chhatrapati, in Apr 1680, the mantle of kingdom and the command of the Maratha Navy passed on to Chhatrapati's son- Sambhaji Maharaj, Kanhoji's real association with Maratha Navy began during the reign of Chhatrapati Sambhaji.

As stated earlier, Kanhoji Angre's career in Maratha Navy began around 1685, at age 18. During that period command of the Suvarnadurg had passed on from Kanhoji's father (Tukoji) to an undocumented Maratha official, who was trying to defect from the Maratha Kingdom to the Siddis. When Kanhoji came to know about this treachery, he captured the fort of Suvarnadurg, along with its defector commander, earning the approval of Chatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. It is important to note that Suvarnadurg (Fig:7), later became important for the Maratha kingdom, because of its location,

Fig: 7- Suvarnadurg Fort & Its Location Map



Source: <https://dwiep.ncscm.res.in/Island/IslandDetails/INMH036>, Accessed on 23 Oct 2025

The above heroic act of Kanhoji led to his appointment as the fort's commander, laying the foundation for his future leadership of the Maratha Navy. Historical documents show that during the period of rising European colonialism, starting in the late 17th and early 18th Centuries, Kanhoji emerged as a single dominant figure, along the Konkan coast. His prowess, as the first indigenous defender of local sovereignty over the coastal waters, was both respected and feared by all the foreign powers operating in that area.

As the Maratha Navy Commander, Kanhoji not only gained, but also managed to sustain an unquestionable hold over a heavily embattled stretch of Konkan coastline (Fig: 8), located in Maharashtra, throughout the early decades of the 18th century.

Fig: 8- Kanhoji controlled Konkan Coastline



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanhoji_Angre, Accessed on 02 Oct 2025

Despite having a comparatively smaller fleet of ships, many of which were little more than overgrown fishing boats - engineered by the local kolis (fisher folk) at his disposal, Kanhoji

established a fearsome authority- in the name of the Maratha Emperor -over a vast swath of India's west coast, using the combination of fleet manoeuvrability and his outstanding strategic tactics. The competition faced by him was fierce, and came from some of the accomplished powers of that time – the Portuguese, the British, and the Mughals- in the form of their coastal vassals, and also the dangerous Siddis. But Kanhoji faced them all and kept them under control, because of his in-depth knowledges of the lay of the coast (Sen, 1941).

Kanhoji was appointed as Sarkhel or Darya-Saranga (Admiral) by Chhatrapati Sambhaji, in 1698, after the death of his predecessor Sarkhel (Admiral) Sidhoji Gujar. Kanhoji was later reappointed by Chhatrapati Rajaram (affiliated to Tarabai Satara domain), who took over the reins after Chhatrapati Sambhaji's demise.

Under that authority, Kanhoji became master of the Western coast of India, from Mumbai to Vingoria (now Vengurla), in present-day state of Maharashtra, except for the property of the Muslim Siddis of Murud-Janjira -who were affiliated with the Mughal Empire.

As a naval commander, Kanhoji's orders used to be very strict, and any disobedience of his orders was dealt with strict punishment. But, at the same time, treated with his men generosity, affection, equality, earning their respect and loyalty (Athale, 2017) (ND Histories, 2023).

Under his leadership, oppressive trading, and dominance exerting activities of various foreign naval powers, and those of European trading companies, along the western coast of India, were kept under check. (HJS, n. d. b) (Krishna, 2022b).

Kanhoji's Career as Sarkhel of Maratha Navy

Historians universally acknowledge that Kanhoji Angre deserved a high place amongst the first-rate seafarers of his times, both Indian and foreign. He has also been rated as the best Maratha Naval Commander. Though in comparison with the Europeans seafarers of that time, he lacked major scientific knowledge- in nautical matters, and naval guns manufacture, he made up for it by his personal courage, his organizing skills, and knowledge of naval warfare. Thus, Kanhoji proved himself as good as any seaman of his day. Under his leadership, the activities of European trading companies were under control, along the western coast of India.

After Chhatrapati Sambhaji's death in 1690, and during the reign of Chhatrapati Rajaram, the responsibility of reviving the shrivelling Maratha navy power fell of the shoulders of Kanhoji Angre, an admiral of outstanding abilities. By virtue of his valour and indefatigable efforts, Kanhoji succeeded in reviving entire Maratha navy, and make it a fearsome Maratha marine

fighting arm, by 1699. He commissioned Kolaba as his naval headquarters, with four major naval bases located at Colaba, Suvarnadurg, Vijaydurg, and Sindhudurg, to establish an organised area control (ND Histories, 2023a). Because of the then prevailing circumstances Kanhoji also had to deal with the outcomes of disputes between the naval powers of his rivals, along the west coast of India. As an Admiral of the Maratha Navy, he had to face many foes like the English based at Bombay, Portuguese at Goa, Siddis at Janjira, Dutch at Vengurla and the Sawants of Wadi. Of these the foreign powers were quite formidable. Though Kanhoji's task was not an easy one, he brought most of his foes under control- with his acumen. But the English were to suffer the worst at his hands, and they hated him the most (Indian Culture, n. d.).

As brought above, Kanhoji was reappointed as Sarkhel by Chhatrapati Rajaram, affiliated to Satara dynasty of Tarabai, but because of the dynamics of political circumstance, he later (in the Year 1714) switched his allegiance to supreme Maratha ruler- Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur, and his prime minister Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath, in the interest of Maratha kingdom and Maratha navy. With their support, Kanhoji was able to develop naval facilities on the western coast of India - that is the Konkan region. Because of his outstanding work, Angre was also placed as chief of 26 forts and fortified places of Maharashtra, by the Peshwa (Maharashtra Gazetteers, n. d.), and continued with his conquests against his formidable enemies.

Other historians have recorded that as the admiral of the Chhatrapati- Kanhoji exercised his rights to levy tariffs on ships of all nations by purchasing his passport, and to negotiate with any power he liked. His aims and objectives were clear and in that he wanted to protect Maratha merchantmen from the pirates- who infested the Malabar coast, protect the Maratha kingdom people from the depredations of the Siddis, and the protect the Sovereignty of the Maratha state, at Sea. As stated earlier, this angered the foreign powers operating in the region, and the English and the Portuguese started addressing Kanhoji as a *Pirate* simply because of their fear and hatred for this fearless one- who perpetually challenged their authority (Tembhekar, 2017) Khandpekar, 2018a).

In those days, the Maratha Empire as established by the Chhatrapati Shivaji, had taken a down turn, and the Konkan province had been overrun and devastated by the Mughals, as there were no allies to help, and no resources to rely upon for the Marathas. But Kanhoji, with his never say die spirit, sea-girt, and using geographical location of his forts (which were in far-away corners) to his advantage, gave a tough fight to his adversaries. The forts afforded Kanhoji an

excellent protection, and from there he sailed forth to attack enemy ships, and prey upon their merchantmen (HJS, n.d. c).

To better appreciate the essence of Kanhoji's achievements, it would be timely to examine his actions action against some of his most powerful enemies.

Kanhoji's Achievements

Kanhoji was not only determined, but also succeeded keeping Maratha kingdom's powerful naval adversaries at bay, by taking decisive actions against them, details of which are enumerated in the following paragraphs.

Kanhoji and the Siddis

Chhatrapati Sambhaji's death brought upon many calamities on the Marathas, and offered a great opportunity to Siddis- to extend their sway over Konkan. They recaptured many of the places they had lost to Chhatrapati Shivaji. In addition, Marathas also lost Raigad, the capital of the Marathas, Mandargad, and Ratnagiri to the Mughals, which also affected might of the Maratha Navy. In that, Mughals' occupation of the ports off Rewash and Thal impeded the movements of the Maratha Ships at Kolaba, and in the Pen River. Under such dire circumstances, it was Kanhoji's calm demeanour, bravery, and daring exploits, which kept the Maratha flag flying over Kolaba and Khanderi. With his valiant actions he forced the Siddis and the Mughal Subhedars to share half of their revenues- from various regions under their occupation. In 1697, when Kanhoji shifted his headquarters to Kolaba, the Siddis were greatly disturbed as that offered greater strategic and tactical advantage to the Maratha Navy. During 1698-1701, Kanhoji foiled the Siddis' attempts to capture Kolaba and Khanderi. Kanhoji kept on troubling the Siddis till 1725.

Kanhoji and the Portuguese

Constant struggles with the Siddis and their impact on his resources finally drove Kanhoji to despair. He was forced to seek help from the Portuguese, which was readily given, as Portuguese too were fed up with Siddis. This led to a formal alliance between Kanhoji and the Portuguese, against the Siddis, in 1701. This alliance lasted till 1708. But no sooner the Mughal threat to Maratha Empire diminished (around 1708), Kanhoji threw this tactical alliance to the winds, and once again started seizing Portuguese ships. In retaliation, the latter marched on Cheul, but were defeated by the overwhelming number of the Marathas. Kanhoji also fought two manchuas-of-war- belonging to the Portuguese fleet of the north, burning down one and

capturing another- along with 27 Portuguese sailors. Many other merchantmen sailing under Portuguese colours were also subjected to the same fate, which contributed to the Maratha coffers. In 1712, during the Viceroyalty of Rodrigo da Costa, Kanhoji attacked the merchant fleet sailing for the ports of the north, captured Portuguese frigates, and overpowered the Portuguese flagship, capturing about forty Portuguese sailors. This inflicted a great blow on Goa, as a large number of its citizen lost their mercantile enterprise. Though next year Kanhoji suffered some setbacks against the Portuguese, he did not hesitate in take possession of the Portuguese establishments on the Bombay coast, enabling him to cut off their communications by land and sea. However, from 1713, he suffered more setbacks against the better organised Portuguese forces. Kanhoji recognized that his strength lay mainly at the Sea. He also realised that possession of the coast was equally essential not only to maintain uninterrupted communication between different ports, but also boost his revenues, on which the navy mainly depended.

He therefore, acknowledged Chhatrapati Shahu's Supremacy, and concluded a treaty with him during 1713 -1714, as brought out earlier. After that the Kanhoji's fleet rode the sea boldly, seizing merchantmen of all nationalities which refused to purchase his passports, and the Portuguese found themselves powerless against Kanhoji and lost all their possessions on the coast and sizable amount of trade. As a result of it, in 1721, the Portuguese formed an offensive and defensive alliance with the English, against him.

In 1721, an Anglo Portuguese Combined army reached the gates of Kolaba, on 21st of September. Sensing the danger, Chhatrapati Sahu's emissary Bajirao Peshwa stopped the war, as it would have been a great folly to fight with such vast combined army. The Portuguese Viceroy concluded a treaty of peace with Bajirao on 12th January 1722, bringing Maratha-Portuguese conflict almost to end. But this doesn't diminish the glory of Kanhoji's daring leadership which brought the Portuguese to their knees.

Kanhoji and the English

From the time Kanhoji made Kolaba as his main station of admiralty (Maratha Naval HQ) the English were ill at ease. They become further apprehensive when Kanhoji took island of Khanderi under his Command, as Kolaba and Khanderi were within a few hours sail from Bombay. Khanderi Island also enabled Kanhoji to keep a watch on the English vessels entering Bombay waters, with ease. This was considered dangerous by the English for the trade and command over Bombay. As per the age-old dictum, *enemy's enemy is my friend*, the English

developed friendship with all those inimical towards Kanhoji. They gave all possible aid to the Siddis for creating trouble for Kanhoji. In retaliation, Kanhoji did not allow the practice of the English to permit their friends to fly the English flag, to avoid the purchase of Kanhoji passports. He was also firm in his belief that beyond some specified limits, outside the ports, he was free to deal with any vessel, as he pleased. In 1702, Kanhoji captured a merchant ship with its English crew, near Calicut, as it was without his passport. In 1706, Kanhoji captured three armed English ships one of which (named Diamond) had 12 guns. In 1712, Kanhoji seized yacht of the Bombay Governor, along with the Anne of Karwar.

But later when Siddis started troubling him more, he tactically decided to come to terms with the English. In Feb 1713, he sent a messenger to Bombay, with proposals for peace, offering to deliver the captured vessels, provided an Englishman of repute was sent to Kolaba, as an emissary. The Governor and the Council requested Kanhoji to return all the English ships seized by him, promise neither to trouble the English ships, their merchants, nor seize ships of any nationality entering the English harbours between Mahim and Khanderi, and finally allow the English merchants to come to his ports, on payment of due customs. In turn, the English agreed not to allow any ship to sail under their colours, except those of their subjects. The English also granted Kanhoji the liberty to trade in the Bombay port on payment of regular customs. According to this treaty, Kanhoji returned the two English ships which he had captured. But the said peace treaty did not last long.

In 1717, the ship *Success* belonging to the English broker Govardhandas was captured by Kanhoji. When talks regarding its recovery were in progress, another ship *Robert* fell victim to Kanhoji's aggressive manoeuvres. He also refused to return the ships. Within a couple of months from the *Robert* incident, Kanhoji seized yet another English ship the *Otter*.

Interestingly, the nationality of the above three ships (captured by Kanhoji) was a highly controversial. The owners of the ships were not English, but the cargo belonged to the English subjects. Thus, Kanhoji contended that they were not entitled to exemption from the ordinary rules of passports. He wrote to captain Cornwall that the ships belonging to Bombay, Bengal or Madras shall not be disturbed by him, but if the English were to freight their goods on any other country's ships, they would be captured by the Marathas. Kanhoji was unwilling to relax this condition, as it would have caused immense financial losses to the Maratha Empire.

These actions of Kanhoji drove the English to despair and they detained a Shibad (or Shibadi) belonging to Kanhoji at Mahim. Finally, on 17th June 1718, English declared a war against Kanhoji.

The English led numerous expeditions against Khanderi, Kolaba and Gheria without success. In 1721, suffering further losses, the English entered into an alliance with the Portuguese-against their common enemy. Their joint attack too failed miserably against Kanhoji due to his tactics and prowess. The failure of Anglo-Portuguese expedition undoubtedly added to Kanhoji's prestige, and he soon established his fearsome rule at sea. He continued to trouble the English ships whenever he could. Around March 1722, he burnt one English vessel and damaged another one and captured another big English ship, richly laden with coins and valuable goods (HJS, n.d. d) (Sen, 1941a) (Tembhekar, 2017a) (Deshmukh, 2025a)

It is important to note that, due to Kanhoji's fearless naval leadership and achievements, the Maratha Kings found it prudent to allow Kanhoji to fight the Europeans and the Siddis on his terms and sent reinforcements for his aid when necessary. That worked well as more economical strategy for maintaining a semblance of superiority in then prevailing political atmosphere. A holistic assessment of Kanhoji's success, thus, can be seen properly only if Kanhoji is placed within the larger political framework existing at that time, of which he was an integral part.

However, later Kanhoji's prowess started diminishing with age and the toll taken by continuous battles he had to fight with his adversaries. In October 1722, Kanhoji sailed from Kolaba, leaving his eldest son in-charge of the administration. The last three to four years of Kanhoji's life were mostly quiet, bringing in a new chapter in Maratha Navy saga.

End of the Kanhoji's Legacy

Kanhoji Angre, an outstanding Admiral of the Maratha Navy, who had never lost to his adversaries, died on 04 July 1729. During his career Kanhoji had successfully extended Maratha sovereignty over the seas against not only the English, the Dutch, the Portuguese, but also the Siddis. Kanhoji Angre had thus emerged as a *master of the Arabian Sea* - from Surat to South Konkan.

Kanhoji has also been credited with the foresight that a Blue Water Navy's role is to keep the enemy engaged away from the shores of the land. At the height his power, he commanded hundreds of warships and the foreign navies could do little to combat the Maratha Navy's

proWess. During the initial two decades of 18th Century, Kanhoji's Navy had defeated the English and Portuguese Naval fleets again and again, and the Maratha also had defeated the armies of both on land (Pendse, 2016).

It is said that had he been in England, he would have been knighted and lionised as a national hero, but in India he died as a tall warrior who never permitted any foreign ruler to filch even a part of his precious little dominion, owing to his acumen, bravery and fearless command. Hence, the name of Kanhoji Angre has been engraved permanently in the naval history of India.

A Samadhi (a memorial) located in the Nagaon beach area near Alibaug, Maharashtra, has been dedicated to memory of the legendary Maratha admiral Kanhoji Angre. This historical site includes a tomb, a large statue, stone structures, and a garden with sea views.

Aftermath after Kanhoji's Death

After Kanhoji, descendants of Kanhoji assumed the responsibility of leading the Maratha Navy. But by then Maratha Navy's prowess was already on decline due to prolonged battles with multiple enemies. Kanhoji's kin Sekhoji Angre was appointed Sarkhel after Kanhoji and he proved to be a worthy successor of Kanhoji. All traditional Maratha adversaries equally feared the might of Sekhoji too.

Post death of Sekhoji, Sambhaji Angre took over the reins, after a bloody war of succession with his brother Manaji. Manaji was supported by the English in his struggle and the feud between the two brothers continued. The Peshwa, realizing the dangers of such feud, put an end to it through a treaty between the two brothers in February 1735 by dividing the coastal region between Sambhaji and Manaji with their headquarters at Suvarnadurg, and Kolaba respectively. The title 'Vajarat-mab' was conferred upon Manaji, while Sambhaji continued to hold the hereditary title 'Sarkhel'. Samabhaji died in the year 1742.

Tulaji Angre became Sarkhel after the death of Sambhaji, with his headquarters at Vijaydurg. Anjanwel fell to Tulaji's might in 1745. It was one of the greatest achievements to the credit of Tulaji in the history of the Marathas for the liberation of Konkan. The fort was renamed Gopalgad.

But Tulaji had strained relationship with Peshwa as he did support Peshwa's initiatives. This was not taken too kindly by the then Peshawa, who ironically pooled the forces with the English to battle it out with Tulaji. Tulaji was completely defeated in the battle of Vijaydurg in 1756 by the Peshwa and the English. His armada was burnt, and he was made a prisoner for life. It was

really a sad moment in the Maratha naval history, wherein a Maratha admiral of Tulaji's achievements was exterminated by the Peshwa, with the help of the English.

Tulaji's defeat acted like proverbial 'last straw on the camel's back' for the Maratha Navy and its decline to inconsequence became inevitable, writing a sad saga in the history of the Maratha Navy (Deshmukh, 2025b).

Maratha Navy and Indian Navy

The Maratha Navy and Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre undoubtedly contributed significantly to India's Maritime History. The origins of present Indian Navy can be attributed to the Maratha Navy. Today the Indian Navy is addressing a completely different spectrum of problems, requiring much varied skills and capabilities, but the core idea of protecting India's trade, territorial waters, maritime boundaries, and Blue Economy still remain same as done by the Maratha Navy, then. It is important to note that Indian Navy has recently adapted Chhatrapati Shivaji's *Ashtakoni Mudra* (Octagonal Stamp) on its Naval Ensign, in the honour of the Chhatrapati Shivaji (PIB, 2022). Indian Navy has also commissioned a shore establishment named INS Angre in Mumbai, to honour the memory of Kanhoji Angre (Indian Culture, n.d.)

Conclusion

India has a glorious maritime history dating back to more than 3000 years. Many dynasties and Indian kings like Cholas, Chalukyas, and Satavahanas had displayed their dominant naval prowess.

Chhatrapati Shivaji, his Maratha Navy and his successors Chhatrapati Sambahji, Rajaram, and Shahu, and the Peshwas have contributed to India's Maritime history. The legendary Maratha Admiral Kanhoji Angre wrote a golden chapter in both the history of Maratha Navy and India's Maritime history.

Kanhoji Angre undoubtedly held a multifaceted legacy as an undefeated naval commander, a strategic visionary who understood sea power, and a symbol of indigenous resistance against foreign colonial expansion. His personal success however, proved difficult for his successors to maintain (except Sekhoji to some extent), foreshadowing the eventual decline of Maratha naval dominance.

Kanhoji Angre was never defeated in a naval battle against the combined European powers of the English, Dutch, and Portuguese. His ability to counter technologically superior European

vessels with smaller, more agile fleets demonstrated his courage, exceptional strategic skill and tactical genius.

Kanhoji's naval supremacy directly challenged the imperial ambitions of European trading companies along the western coast of India, especially the English. By controlling the seas from Surat to south Konkan and levying taxes (Jakat) on foreign merchant ships, he established Maratha sovereignty over the region's maritime trade.

Kanhoji achieved this incomparable feat by consolidating and professionalising the Maratha navy, building upon the foundations laid by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. This included establishing a network of fortified coastal bases at locations like Kolaba, Vijaydurg, and Khanderi, and setting up shipbuilding facilities. He understood that protecting the coastline was essential for the Maratha Empire's security and prosperity.

It was an irony that while Angre masterfully commanded the seas, the centralized Maratha authority was struggling with internal conflicts. Despite that Kanhoji was able to carve out an almost independent sphere of influence.

Sadly, Kanhoji Angre's death in 1729 marked a turning point in the history of the Maratha Navy. The subsequent feuds among his sons, compounded by the Maratha state's shifting priorities away from naval power, created a vacuum that the British and Peshwas eventually exploited. The joint British and Peshwa attack that led to the capture of Fort Vijaydurg and capture of Tulaji Angre the last Sarkhel, in 1756 marked the end of the Angre dynasty's power and the beginning of the end for Maratha naval strength.

It is undeniable that the enduring legacy of Kanhoji continues to inspire the Indian Navy today. The naval base INS Angre and the lighthouse named in his honour are tangible reminders of his contributions to Indian maritime history. Indian Navy ensign is adorned with Chhatrapati Shivaji's *Ashtakoni Mudra* to honour his contribution as founder of the Indian navy.

It is important this glorious history is brought to the notice of the younger generations, to ensure a lasting continuum of the India's Maritime power. It is joped that this research paper will fulfil that need.

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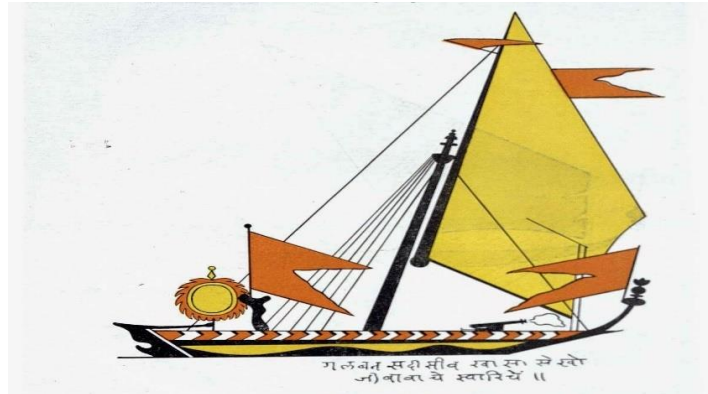
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Appendix-I

(Refers to Third Para under heading: Introduction)

Images of some of the ships used by the Maratha Navy



Galbat- Sadashiv (<https://maratha-navy.blogspot.com/2015/01/Galbat-sadashiv.html>, Accessed on 23 Oct 2025)



Gurab (<https://in.pinterest.com/pin/wooden-model-ship-with-sails-and-flags--508977195403381304/>, Accessed on 23 Oct 2025)



Shibad

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Datta Pal (By- Nadar-

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maratha_Ships#/media/File:Model_of_Maratha_ship_-_DattaPal.jpg, Accessed on 23 Oct 2025)

Appendix-II

(Refers to Fourth Para under heading: Kanhoji Angre-Early Life)

Kanhoji Angre Family Tree limited to Four Generations (Compiled by the Author)

Kanhoji Angre, the Maratha admiral, had six sons from three wives and several concubines. His death led to a power struggle among his sons, ultimately weakening the Maratha navy.

Kanhoji Angre's family tree

First Generation: Tukoji Angre

- Father: Tukoji Angre, who served under Chhatrapati Shivaji in the Maratha navy.
- Mother: Ambabai.

Second Generation: Kanhoji Angre

- Kanhoji Angre (born 1669, died 1729), the famous admiral of the Maratha navy.
- Wives: Rajubai (of the Mahadik family), Lakshmibai (of the Jagtap family), and Gahinabai (of the Bhonsle family).

Third Generation: Kanhoji's sons

From his wife Rajubai, Kanhoji had two legitimate sons:

- Sekhoji Angre: Succeeded his father as the Admiral of the Maratha Navy but died a few years later in 1733.
- Sambhaji Angre: Took over from his brother Sekhoji but was challenged by his half-brother, Manaji, leading to the division of the family's holdings. Sambhaji was based at Suvarnadurg.

From his wife Lakshmibai, Kanhoji had two sons:

- Manaji Angre: Rebelled against his half-brother Sambhaji with Portuguese and Peshwa support, and was given control of the Colaba region. He captured and blinded his half-brother Yesaji.
- Tulaji Angre: Succeeded Sambhaji but was captured in a joint British and Peshwa attack in 1756, which effectively ended the Angre family's naval power.

From his wife Gahinabai, Kanhoji had two sons:

- Yesaji Angre: Served under his half-brother Manaji until Manaji rebelled and had him blinded. Yesaji's children later settled in Gwalior.
- Dhondji Angre: Mentioned as a son of Kanhoji Angre.

Fourth Generation: Continuation in Gwalior

- Mawji Angre: Son of Yesaji Angre. He and his brother moved to Gwalior.
- Baburao Angre: Son of Yesaji Angre. He was appointed as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of Gwalior.
- Maina Bai: Daughter of Yesaji Angre. She married Anandrao Scindia and was the mother of Daulat Rao Scindia, the ruler of Gwalior.
