



# Maratha Empire

## Political, Economic and Social life

### POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

Chhatrapati **Shivaji Maharaj** was one of the most remarkable administrators in Indian history. He established a well-organized governance system that emphasized **centralized authority, efficient revenue management, military discipline, and public welfare.**

#### **Central Administration: The Ashta Pradhan Mandal**



The **Ashta Pradhan Mandal** was an **eight-member council of ministers** that assisted Shivaji in state administration. Each member had a specific portfolio and was responsible for both **civil and military duties** (except judicial and religious heads).



## Ashta Pradhan Council – Roles & Responsibilities

Title (Traditional/ Alternate Name)	Designation	Duties & Responsibilities
 <b>Peshwa (Mukhya Pradhan)</b>	Prime Minister	Head of the council; managed civil affairs and acted as king's deputy.
 <b>Amatya (Mazumdar)</b>	Finance Minister	Oversaw state revenue, budget, audits, and treasury.
 <b>Mantri (Waqia-Navis)</b>	Interior/Home Minister	Maintained court records, supervised internal intelligence and daily reports.
 <b>Sumant (Dabir)</b>	Foreign Minister	Handled diplomacy, alliances, and foreign negotiations.
 <b>Sachiv (Surnavis/Shurunavis)</b>	Chief Secretary	Managed official correspondence, documentation, and seals.
 <b>Senapati (Sar-i-Naubat)</b>	Commander-in-Chief	Supreme head of the military; oversaw strategy, training, and defense.
 <b>Nyayadhis</b>	Chief Justice	Administered civil and criminal justice; supervised legal procedures.
 <b>Panditrao</b>	Religious & Charity Head	Oversaw religious activities, rituals, charitable grants, and ethics.

### Important Note on the Ashta Pradhan System

- ♦ **Advisory in Nature:** The Ashta Pradhan was an advisory body. Its recommendations were not binding; the Chhatrapati held **supreme decision-making authority**.
- ♦ **Inspired, Not Invented:** The concept of a ministerial council was **not originally created by Shivaji**. It drew inspiration from earlier models such as:
  - **Bahmani and Deccan Sultanates**, which had ministerial bodies with similar portfolios.
  - **Adilshahi (Bijapur) and Nizamshahi (Ahmadnagar)**, whose Persian-influenced bureaucracies served as templates.
- ♦ **Shivaji's Innovations:** Shivaji restructured and indigenized this framework to create a **distinct Maratha-Hindu polity**:
  - Replaced Persian-Islamic titles with Sanskritized/Hindu administrative terms.
  - Assigned military responsibilities to all ministers (**except Nyayadhis and Panditrao**), reinforcing martial readiness and loyalty.
  - Introduced merit-based appointments and **discouraged hereditary succession**, ensuring competence and centralized authority.
  - Replaced the Jagir system **with fixed cash salaries** to curb feudalism and enhance state control.













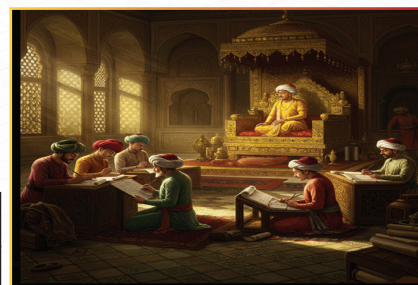
## Evolution of the Council

- During the **reign of Rajaram Maharaj** (Shivaji's son), a **ninth post, the Pratinidhi ("Representative")**, was added.
- Over time, the Pratinidhi often surpassed the Peshwa in influence.
- By the 18th century, posts **like Peshwa, Pratinidhi, and Amatya became hereditary** under the Maratha Confederacy.

## Ministerial Support Staff under Shivaji

Each Ashta Pradhan minister was assisted by a team of **eight key officials** responsible for departmental operations:

Official	Role
 <b>Diwan</b>	Departmental secretary.
 <b>Mujumdar</b>	Head auditor and accountant.
 <b>Fadnis</b>	Deputy auditor; assisted the Mujumdar.
 <b>Sabnis / Daftardar</b>	Office superintendent; managed daily administration.
 <b>Karkhanis</b>	Commissary; handled stores and supplies.
 <b>Chitnis</b>	Correspondence clerk; prepared documents.
 <b>Potnis</b>	Cashier; managed payments and receipts.
 <b>Jamdar</b>	Treasurer; custodian of departmental funds.



## Provincial and Local Administration:

Shivaji Maharaj established a well-structured and efficient administrative system, with a strong focus on decentralization and local governance.

### Provincial Administration:

- The empire was divided into **Prants** (provinces).
- Each Prant was headed by a **Deshadhekari or Mamlatdar** (governor or viceroy).
- Provinces were further divided into **Tarafs** (districts), administered by **Tarafdars**.
- Shivaji reduced the hereditary nature of offices and replaced them with **state-appointed officials** to curb corruption and enhance efficiency.



### District and Village Administration:

- The **village** was the basic administrative unit.
- Key village functionaries included:

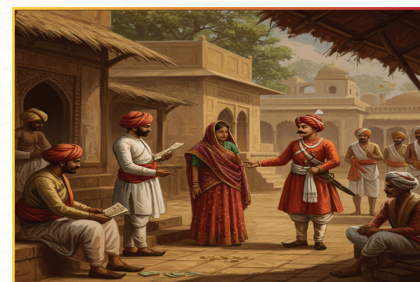




- **Patil or Deshpande:** Village headman responsible for law and order and revenue collection.
- **Kulkarni:** Maintained village accounts and records.
- **Kotwal:** Looked after police and municipal duties in towns.
- ◆ The **Village Panchayat** played an important role in resolving local disputes and managing community affairs.

### Revenue Administration:

**Shivaji Maharaj** established a **centralized and efficient revenue system** aimed at eliminating feudal practices and ensuring state control over land revenue.



- ◆ **Abolition of Jagirdari System:** Replaced the earlier Mughal and Deccan Sultanate practice of granting jagirs for service. Instead, officers and soldiers were paid in cash, promoting a loyal and professional army and bureaucracy.
- ◆ **Ryotwari-like System:** Inspired by Malik Ambar's revenue reforms (Kathi system). **Peasants (ryots)** paid taxes **directly to the state**, bypassing intermediaries. Revenue assessed based on **actual cultivation and productivity**, typically 30%–40% of produce.



### Types of Land and Tenure



Type of Land Tenure	Description
<b>Saranjam</b>	Land grant under the Marathas for military or administrative service. Revenue used for troop maintenance. Often became hereditary over time.
<b>Miras</b>	Hereditary landholding, mainly in Maharashtra and South India. Mirasdars had customary cultivation and occupancy rights. Paid fixed revenue; enjoyed secure tenure.
<b>Inam / Manya</b>	Tax-free grants for religious, educational, or charitable purposes. Held by temples, priests, scholars, or loyal servants. Generally permanent; non-transferable without royal sanction.
<b>Watan</b>	Land granted to hereditary village officials (e.g., Patils, Kulkarnis). Often revenue-free or lightly assessed. Linked to official duties; revocable for non-performance.
<b>Amam / Moqasa (Military Grants)</b>	Land allotted to soldiers or commanders in lieu of salary. Revenue used for troop upkeep. Grantees obligated to provide military service. Common under the Deccan sultanates and Marathas.
<b>Khalisa (State-Managed Land)</b>	Land under direct state control. Managed by Moqasads (revenue officers). Duties: revenue collection, cultivation supervision, enforcement of regulations. Originally non-hereditary, but often became so over time.



## Military Administration

### ◆ Two-Tier Cavalry System:

- **Bargirs:** State-paid cavalry; horses and equipment provided by the state.
- **Silahdars:** Nobles or commanders who maintained their own cavalry, arms, and horses—akin to feudal retainers but under tight central supervision.

### ◆ Infantry (Paga):

- Backbone of Maratha army.
- Well-trained in **guerrilla warfare (ganimi kava)** for ambushes and rapid movement through hilly terrain.
- **Mavali Soldiers:** Mountain warriors of Shivaji's army.

### ◆ Naval Power:

- Built a **small but effective navy** to secure the Konkan coast.
- **Naval bases at Kolaba (Alibag), Vijaydurg, and Sindhudurg.**
- **Darya Sarang (meaning "Lord of the Seas")** was a title given to Maratha naval commander.

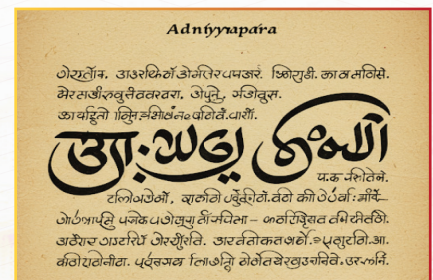


## Key Administrative Innovations of the Marathas

- ◆ **Adnyapatra:** A key state policy document by **Ramchandra Pant Amatya**, codifying **Shivaji's administrative principles**. Written in **Modi script**, it detailed governance, revenue, and military organization.

- ◆ **Curbing Deshmukh Power:** Shivaji reduced the influence of hereditary landlords (**Deshmukhs**) by expanding **crown land** and reinforcing central authority, limiting feudal decentralization.

- ◆ **Modi Script:** The **official script** of Maratha administration, used for revenue records, military communication, and state correspondence. Known for its **speed and legibility**, it was later replaced by **Devanagari**.



## ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

### Agriculture:

- ◆ Primary occupation; land revenue was the **main source of state income**. Revenue assessments were **based on the Kathi system (measured productivity)**.





## Important Taxes:

### ◆ Chauth (25%):

- The Marathas **claimed chauth (i.e. 1/4th of the total revenue)** from the neighbouring chieftains whose territories **did not form part of their homeland/swarajya**.
- It was a politico-military tribute, not land revenue—paid in return for **protection and non-aggression**.

### ◆ Sardeshmukhi (10%):

- An additional 10% tax claimed as the **hereditary right** of the Maratha king as **Sardeshmukh** (chief headman of the region). Collected after chauth, often from the same regions.

## Trade & Commerce:

- ◆ Coastal trade thrived via key ports like **Surat, Chaul, Dabhol, and Bassein**. Inland trade routes were secured under Shivaji's rule. Trade included textiles, spices, and horses.

### ◆ Coinage:

The **Shivrai paisa** (copper coin) was issued by Shivaji. Other currencies in circulation included **Hons** (gold), **Pagodas**, and **Mohurs**.



## SOCIAL SYSTEM UNDER THE MARATHAS

- ◆ **Caste-Based Hierarchy:** Maratha society was hierarchical, but **Shivaji promoted meritocracy**, appointing capable individuals from non-Brahmin communities like **Kayasthas and Prabhus** to key administrative and military posts.
- ◆ **Status of Women:** Women enjoyed relatively better status. They could own property, and in rare cases, **participate in governance**.
  - **Jijabai**, Shivaji's mother, played a crucial role in his early education and instilling values of **dharma and statecraft**.
  - **Tarabai**, widow of Rajaram, led the Maratha resistance during a critical phase, showcasing strong female leadership.
- ◆ **Bhakti Movement Influence:** Saints like **Tukaram, Ramdas, and Namdev** promoted **devotion, equality, and social unity**, shaping Maratha cultural life.
- ◆ **Bakhar Literature:** Marathi historical prose documenting **battles, leaders, and governance**.
- ◆ Served as both **historical record** and **moral-political guide**, reinforcing Maratha identity.



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