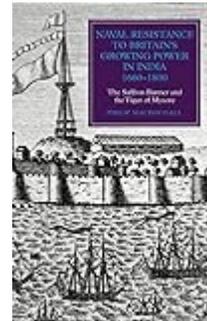


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Philip MacDougall. *Naval Resistance to Britain's Growing Power in India, 1660-1800: The Saffron Banner and the Tiger of Mysore.* Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2014. 224 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-948-4.



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Philip MacDougall's latest work joins a growing literature that sets sail from land-locked history to chart human interactions on the open water. Eschewing traditional terrestrial narratives of India's European colonization, MacDougall reconstructs maritime strategies deployed by India's indigenous states against Britain's East India Company (EIC) between 1660 and 1800.

MacDougall ushers evidence showing how the Maratha Confederacy and later the Mysore state attempted to thwart British encroachment via three maritime strategies: head-on fleet engagement; the targeting of unescorted and isolated merchant ships; and alliances with Britain's rivals, namely, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands. MacDougall argues that these efforts ultimately failed, however, due to the inability or unwillingness of India's indigenous states to create an effective blue-water navy. This development, he adds, would only have been possible if India's indigenous states overturned their continental mindset and adopted a vibrant economy supported by overseas trade (p. 45).

This succinct book is divided into three parts. Part 1 provides background to the eighteenth-century conflicts, mainly between Britain and India's indigenous states, which are central to the book. MacDougall also takes

time here to develop themes important throughout the book, including indigenous adoption of European technology, naval tactics, deployment of the play-off system, and the inability of indigenous states to overcome historical tensions and form a unified force.

The Maratha Confederacy, established in the seventeenth century, takes center stage in part 2. Originally conceived to counter Mughal and Siddi forces rather than fight European advances, the Maratha fleet began attacking British merchant ships around 1700 after it realized they were aiding its enemies. These conflicts escalated when the EIC extended its right not to purchase Marathan *dashtaks* (passports) to non-EIC vessels in order to avoid fees. The Marathan navy, viewing this as a violation of terms, retaliated by trolling the Konkan coastline and attacking vulnerable English ships to check if they had proper documents. Though numerous, the attacking vessels were small and only effective in coastal skirmishes. Further limiting the effectiveness of the Marathas was a tendency among the confederacy's leading chiefs to negotiate military alliances with the EIC for short-term gains. Together, these factors portended the confederacy's demise.

Part 3 sheds light on Mysore, the last of the In-

dian states to develop a navy with the potential to resist the EIC (p. 135). Unlike the Mughals and Marathas before them who believed they could maintain the economic benefits of European commerce while retaining their own sovereignty and control, Mysoreans saw the British presence solely as a threat. They began developing a blue-water naval force that could destroy the British at sea, cut off the cash flow back to London, and force their retreat from India. These measures, however, came too late. Despite an effective alliance with France, the Mysore fleet was simply not ready and it was a long way from being so when the EIC launched an assault against Mysore in February 1799 that effectively dismantled the state (p. 189).

Making novel use of well-worn sources, MacDougall sheds light on a form of indigenous resistance that has yet to receive much scholarly attention elsewhere. He also provides important correctives in Western historiography. In part 1, he reevaluates the importance of the death of Siddi Kassem to the demise of the Mughal Empire's maritime capabilities. Elsewhere, he offers a fervid rebuttal of the portrayal of the Marathas as a piratical force by showing how this myth originated during the eighteenth century to justify Britain's refusal to purchase *dashtaks* and use violence to achieve its commercial aims. The au-

thor, in contrast, presents the Marathan navy as a legitimate state force using unconventional naval warfare to fight a foreign enemy. Finally, MacDougall revises the narrative of the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War (1798-99) by highlighting the importance of indigenous sea power in challenging British power.

Despite MacDougall's contributions, his argument that the indigenous states of India had the potential to challenge British power in India seems at times a rhetorical exercise in the counterfactual what if of history, as the author himself acknowledges. This leaves the reader feeling that, despite indigenous states' attempts, their failure to develop an effective blue-water navy meant they could only temporarily stave off Britain's advances. Finally, one wishes MacDougall had spent more time crafting sentences and selecting quotations. Passive voice riddles the book while lengthy block quotes interrupt the book's flow and ultimately distract the reader from the book's key arguments.

Historians outside MacDougall's geographic specialization would do well to take notice of this recent historiographical contribution. Maritime, military, and global historians as well as historians of technology and indigenous peoples will all find valuable examples to enrich their own comparative analyses.

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