

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref. GB/AR/1739\_IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2024

H.E. Mr. Vishal V. Sharma  
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate  
Permanent Delegation of the Republic of India to  
UNESCO  
Maison de l'UNESCO  
1, rue Miollis  
Paris Cedex 15 75732

## World Heritage List 2025

### Maratha Military Landscapes of India (India) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2025. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation procedure.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to the “Maratha Military Landscapes of India” was carried out by Mr. Hwa Jong Lee (Republic of Korea) between the end of September and the beginning October 2024. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 24 September 2024, an additional information letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the description and the historic context for the development of the nominated property, the nomination approach, the rationale for the selection of the component parts, protection and management requirements, and ongoing or upcoming development projects. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 28 October 2024 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2024, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2025. The additional information provided by the State Party, together with the mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2025.

We thank you and your Delegation for your availability and your participation in the meeting held on 26 November 2024 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that the “Maratha Military Landscapes of India” might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, this has not yet been demonstrated.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

### **Historical context, pattern of settlement and territorial control immediately before the rise of the Marathas**

ICOMOS acknowledges the account provided by the State Party of the contemporaneous polities with which the Marathas interacted. This was helpful to contextualise the rise of the Marathas. However, this account does not address how these contemporaneous polities, in the Deccan Plateau, the Western Ghats and along the Konkan coast, exercised territorial control. What physical structures existed to exercise territorial control and what were the governance systems in place? Conversely, how was this territorial control reflected in the settlement pattern in the area? ICOMOS would like to better understand the extent to which this pattern survived, what was incorporated into it, and what changed during the Maratha rule. This seems essential to assess the arguments that the already existing territorial system was made more clearly legible under the Maratha rule, also considering that Marathas regularly served in the armies of Deccan sultanates and were familiar with the defence and territorial control strategies deployed by those kingdoms.

Additionally, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could clarify the similarities and differences - e.g., in the use of the topography and geomorphological features, construction techniques, and military architectural and engineering solutions - of the defence systems and fortifications built and used by these powers immediately preceding or contemporaneous with the Marathas. What was the distinctiveness of the Maratha approach to military strategy and fortification?

ICOMOS also notes that many of the nominated component parts did not result only from Maratha agency; rather, these forts already existed and were taken over and incorporated into the Maratha state, frequently changing hands. Could the State Party please clarify the role that these forts played in previous polities' strategies of territorial control, as well as their construction history?

### **Fortification system and military strategy**

ICOMOS would like the State Party to provide further clarification on the specific role of secondary and tertiary fortifications in relation to the primary forts (that is, the component parts of the nominated series). How each cluster of forts worked together to deploy the military strategy and tactics? Does each cluster represent a different aspect of the military strategy?

Could the State Party please also explain how the buffer zones were delineated and how the area in their immediate vicinity was used for military operations? Where were the settlements located, and where did people live? Had people access to the forts in case of danger?

ICOMOS notices that in the nomination dossier it is only explicitly indicated for some forts that archaeological research and excavations have been carried out. Could the State Party please provide more detailed information on the construction history of each fort based on direct investigations, whether archaeological research, the stratigraphy of architecture, stylistic or construction technique analysis? Such information would help ICOMOS to better understand the contribution of the Marathas to the full deployment of defensive/strategic potential of the forts once they came under their control.

In several instances, for example for the Salher Fort (component part 1) and other nominated forts, it is indicated that both the first and second layers of fortifications received overlapping interventions during the Mughal period and immediately after the Maratha rule. ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could clarify what existed prior to the Maratha rule and what interventions the Marathas made on pre-existing structures. The same applies to all the other forts with an overlap between construction and adaptation phases.

In addition, to better understand how this fortified system was developed, could the State Party please provide a chronology highlighting the construction sequence and transformation of secondary forts, their establishment (by Marathas or other powers) and use by the Marathas?

### **Description of the component parts**

Despite the large amount of material provided by the State Party in the nomination dossier and made available in the additional information sent in October 2024, ICOMOS considers that a clear picture of each component part does not emerge. Indeed, the inventories and supporting documents provided describe elements of fortification individually, but they do not provide an overall description of each fort from an architectural and defence perspective. So far, the available descriptions do not convey how each component part of the nominated property contributes to the proposed justification for inscription.

ICOMOS would therefore appreciate if the State Party could provide a concise but exhaustive description of each fort. The description of the nominated component parts should explain how each of them exceptionally reflects the strategic vision, nuanced understanding of the terrain, innovation in military design, defence planning, social inclusiveness, deployment of military tactics of the Marathas, as indicated in the brief synthesis of the proposed Justification for Outstanding Universal Value.

It would be appreciated if descriptions of the component parts could be accompanied by commented maps and images to illustrate more clearly the specificities of the forts and their contribution to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated series as a whole.

### **Rationale for the selection of the component parts**

Despite the additional information provided by the State Party in October 2024, the rationale for selecting the component parts remains unclear to ICOMOS. The selection of component parts seems to be structured around a multiplicity of approaches, based on typological considerations, on territorial scope, and, above all, on the strong biographical association with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of the Maratha Kingdom, rather than covering the entire breadth of the Maratha expansion under the Peshwas. Yet, it remains unclear to ICOMOS whether the nominated series, as it is shaped, can be considered consistent with the proposed justification for inscription and criteria. At this stage, it is difficult to see the nominated series as reflecting how the Maratha Kingdom developed, expanded and turned into a crucial military and political player in the early modern Indian subcontinent and particularly to illustrate its culture and social structures.

Also, ICOMOS observes that the administrative characteristics of the Maratha system are not reflected by the nominated series, which appears to be based essentially on territorial defence and control strategy. For example, it has been noted that the Marathas built urban quadrangular forts - Jagirardars/Mirasdars - to control commercial routes: these forts also played a role in maintaining the strength of the state, ensuring stability, frontier defence, revenue collection, and tax collection. However, ICOMOS notes that none of them have been included in the nominated series.

In addition, the selection criteria presented in the additional information of October 2024 are not always convincing - e.g., the idea of primary anchors, associations with battles, encounters, or other historical events, and forts exhibiting Maratha fort-building principles. Too many selection criteria seem to have been chosen, making it difficult for the selected elements to fulfil them all.

Could the State Party please explain how, from the initial list of 390 forts, 60-75 forts were selected? How were the selecting parameters implemented to further reduce the selection from the 60-75 forts to 29 forts, and to the 14 forts included in the Tentative List and eventually to the 12 nominated component parts?

The response provided in October 2024 with regard to the rationale for the selection of the component parts has clarified some aspects but also raised additional questions on how fortifications have been classified as primary, secondary, supporting, etc. ICOMOS would like to better understand why in some cases forts that were supposed to be component parts were relegated to the buffer zone as supporting or secondary layers of fortifications. In this regards, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could clarify the articulation of the buffer zones and the fortified elements they include with the selected component parts.

### **Cultural landscape**

ICOMOS is thankful for the additional information provided in October 2024 on the reasoning for nominating the property as a cultural landscape.

ICOMOS understands that the State Party has drawn inspiration from the *ICOMOS Guidelines on Fortifications and Military Heritage* in defining the nominated component parts: this has certainly assisted in understanding important aspects of the Maratha fortifications and the definition of its qualities. However, deep concerns emerged as regards the possibility to apply the notion of cultural landscape to the nominated series as well as its definition as a military landscape.

Although natural landscape features such as topography, geomorphology, and hydrology come into play in the development of the system of fortifications, ICOMOS does not consider at this stage that the nominated component parts can form one singular cultural landscape or individual cultural landscapes, as per the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

ICOMOS would like to point out that significant further information would be needed to understand how and to what extent the territory and its features, including, but not limited to, vegetation, settlement patterns, road and trail networks, have been modified and how they were used for defence purposes. Only if these attributes were included within the boundaries of the nominated series - and not in the buffer zone - might the nominated series, and not necessarily in its current configuration, be considered under the category of cultural landscape.

### **Changes to the delineation of boundaries**

ICOMOS notes that the State Party has provided a new set of maps with modified boundaries in the additional information of October 2024. Could the State Party share an explanation in writing of these modifications, as well as maps showing the initially proposed boundaries and the changes that intervened later?

### **Factors affecting some of the nominated component parts**

ICOMOS is concerned about the negative impacts of interventions and developments that have taken place at a number of the component parts. These include the presence of steel towers and solar panels at Khanderi Fort (component part 4), the existence of a ropeway at Raigad (component part 5), with supporting buildings in the citadel, as well as other modern buildings, pipelines and electric power poles in the nominated property. Of concern are also new buildings in the buffer zone of Pratapgad (component part 7), a communication steel tower and other modern power facilities, water tanks, concrete buildings, and a road cutting through the nominated property at Panhala Fort (component part 9). The presence of steel towers and new buildings constructed adjacent to the nominated property for commercial purposes and community use in Vijaydurg (component part 10), as well as the existence of National Highway 77 that cuts through Gingee Fort (component part 12) are also factors whose impact need clarification.

In addition, as the technical evaluation mission could not access all component parts on the ground, could the State Party please provide additional photographic documentation of the state of conservation and conditions of integrity and authenticity of these component parts?

ICOMOS would be pleased to receive updates on the legal protection status of Pawangad Fort, with an implementation calendar for the finalisation of its protection, if not yet achieved.

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation procedure.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation procedure.

Samuel

Copy to Archaeological Survey of India  
ASI, Mumbai Circle  
Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra  
UNESCO World Heritage Centre