

RAGHUJI BHONSLE I: HISTORY

NEWS: Maharashtra Acquires Raghuji Bhonsle's Sword For Rs 47 Lakh At London Auction

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS

The Maharashtra government repurchased the 18th-century *Raghuji Sword* of Maratha general Raghuji Bhonsle I from a London auction, highlighting cultural restitution efforts. Raghuji Bhonsle, founder of the Nagpur Bhonsle dynasty, led major campaigns in Bengal, Central, and South India, expanding Maratha influence.

1. Recent Development: Maharashtra Reclaims Raghuji Sword

- The **Maharashtra State Government** purchased the historic **Raghuji Sword** for **Rs. 47.15 lakh** at an **auction held in London, United Kingdom**.
- The acquisition is seen as a significant act of **cultural restitution**, bringing home a relic associated with one of the most prominent Maratha generals.



2. About Raghuji Bhonsle I – Maratha General and Statesman

- **Reign:** 1739–1755.
- Served under **Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj**, the Maratha king who consolidated the empire post-Shivaji.
- Honoured with the title '**Senasaheb Subha**', meaning chief of the army and provincial governor, as recognition for his exceptional military leadership.

- He was the **founder of the Nagpur-based Bhonsle (Bhosale) dynasty**, which emerged as a major power centre in the eastern and central Maratha Confederacy.

3. Military Achievements and Expansionist Campaigns

- **Eastern Campaigns:**
 - Led **successful invasions into Bengal in 1745 and 1755**, extending Maratha influence over **Bengal and Odisha**.
 - His expeditions increased Maratha revenue through *chauth* (tax) and *mukut* (tribute) from these regions.
- **Central India Consolidation:**
 - Controlled strategic territories like **Chanda, Chhattisgarh, and Sambalpur**, strengthening the empire's hold over central India.
- **Southern Campaigns:**
 - Defeated the **Nawabs of Kurnool and Cuddapah**, asserting Maratha supremacy in **southern India** as well.
 - These victories broadened the Maratha military frontier and ensured regional dominance.

4. About the Raghuji Sword – Historical Artifact

- The sword bears a **Devanagari inscription**, clearly identifying it as being **made for Raghuji Bhonsle I**.
- Its construction reflects a blend of **European blade design** and **Indian craftsmanship**:
 - **Blade:** A *straight, single-edged European-made blade* imported via the **18th-century global arms trade**.
 - **Hilt:** A local **Mulheri-style hilt**, crafted with **intricate gold inlay work**, typical of high Maratha aristocratic weaponry.
- The sword exemplifies how **European and Indian designs merged** in the Maratha military culture.

5. Weaponry and Craftsmanship of the Nagpur Bhosales

- The Nagpur region was **rich in iron and copper**, vital for weapon-making and metallurgy.
- The **Bhosale dynasty's artisans** were highly skilled in crafting durable yet artistically beautiful weapons.

- Their weaponry is **renowned for superior quality, ornate design, and combat efficiency**.
- The sword serves not only as a military relic but also as a **symbol of technological and artistic sophistication** of 18th-century India.

6. British Looting Post-Battle of Sitabuldi (1817)

- The **Battle of Sitabuldi (1817)** marked the **defeat of the Nagpur Bhonsles** by the **British East India Company**.
- Post-defeat, the British **looted the royal Bhosale treasury**, seizing:
 - **Priceless ornaments**
 - **Treasures**
 - **Weapons**, including swords and other royal arms
- The **Raghuji Sword** is believed to have been part of this loot, which explains its appearance in **European collections and auctions**.

7. Cultural Significance of the Sword's Repatriation

- The return of the sword represents:
 - A **revival of historical pride** for the state of Maharashtra and the Maratha legacy.
 - A symbolic act of **reclaiming colonial-era loot** and **preserving national heritage**.
- The sword will likely be displayed in a **museum or public archive** to educate future generations on Maratha history.

Source: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/maharashtra-acquires-raghuji-bhonsle-sword-for-rs-47-lakh-at-london-auction-8289790>