



THE LIFE OF SHIVAJI MAHARAJ FOUNDER OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

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Chapter 7

Development of Swarajya

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In the last chapter we attempted to trace a faint outline of the pioneer labours of Shivaji as the founder of a sovereign power. In this chapter we shall follow the further expansion and development of his boldly conceived plans.

The country enclosing the jahgir domain of Shivaji was, as we have already observed, in the hands of ambitious nobles, who owed more or less a sort of hereditary allegiance to Bijapur, but for the most part were engaged in adventurous warfare among themselves. On the southern bank of the Nira, as far to the east as Shirval and southwards up to the mountains that skirt the upper courses of the Krishna, a petty deshmukh of the Maval regions, Bandal by name, held despotic sway. His head-quarters were the fort of Rohida. He harboured an ancient grudge against Shivaji and envied his rise. He always maintained the defences of his fortress in a condition of high efficiency and had a strong garrison. When fort after fort fell before Shivaji in his victorious career, Bandal was resolved that his fort at any rate should form an exception. He looked moreover with greedy eyes upon the fair fields around the fort of Purandar. When Purandar was surrendered to Shivaji, Bandal was naturally all the more anxious for the safety of his fort.

The uplands of the Western ghats, from the Krishna to the Warna, acknowledged the rule of Rajah Chandrarao More. Javli was the head-quarters of this chief and the fortress of Hashamgad was in his power. Shivaji's arts of conciliation were not likely to succeed with him. With his large feudal

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forces he defied everybody.

Wai was under a *mokassadar* of the Bijapur government, who also had Pandavgad, Kamalgad and other forts under him. Another great Mahomedan officer had charge of Kolhapur and the important fort of Panhalla in its neighbourhood.

Kalyan had once been under the Nizamshahi kings of Ahmednagar. By the treaty made with the Moguls in 1636, Bijapur had acquired possession of this strategical position. The district was divided into two parts and administered by separate officers. The northern half extending from Kalyan-Bhiwandi to Nagotna was under a Mahomedan noble of high family, Mullana Ahmed by name, whose head-quarters were at Kalyan-Bhiwandi. This was an extensive tract of land and comprised many of the hill forts on the ghats and the lowlands beneath. These fortresses were as a rule rarely kept in an efficient condition. The southern half of the province was under the sway of an Abyssinian nobleman. It was, indeed, in some sort, a *jahgir* which his Abyssinian forefathers had enjoyed from the Nizamshahi government, in acknowledgment of the services of the naval contingent maintained by them for the defence of the commerce on the western sea and the conveyance of Mecca pilgrims to and from the Red Sea. Not that it was a hereditary *jahgir* in its origin. The best naval officer of the Abyssinian corps in the service of the Nizamshahi state generally enjoyed this *jahgir* with the style and title of *vizier*. This high admiral had a staff of officers and sailors, who were generally of Abyssinian origin. Thus it came to pass that in course of time there arose a small but powerful colony of these Abyssinians on the Konkan littoral. The head-quarters of the Abyssinian naval squadron was Danda-Rajpuri. There was a little island off this harbour, which was strongly fortified. This island became famous under the name of Janjira. At the time under review Fatteh Khan was the high admiral of the Abyssinian corps. He had many forts under him, the principal of which were those of Tala, Ghosala and Rairi. These forts were all in charge of Maratha officers.

The Bijapur government had for a long time ruled over parts of the Konkan. That government had ceded considerable districts in *jahgir* to the *deshmukhs* of the Deccan and the *jahgirs* had been handed down from father to son. They absorbed the major part of the revenue among themselves. The chief command of the harbour towns of Dabhol (Dabul), Anjenwel, Ratnagiri and Rajapur was however still centred in the hands of government officers, who collected the revenue in the surrounding territory. Predominant over the rest of these *deshmukhs* was the Sawant family of Wadi. This *Deshmukh* was virtually master of the mountainous regions on the frontiers of Goa, which owned the rule of the Portuguese. Next in power under Sawant was Surve, the

deshmukh of Shringarpur.¹ On account of the isolated state of their jahgir the Surves were comparatively independent like the Mores of Javli.

Such was the political condition of the neighbouring jahgirs and fiefs, when Shivaji launched forth upon his venturous enterprise of enlarging his dominions, and under the circumstances it was perfectly natural that he should direct his first energies against these fief-holders. As for the *ghat-matha* regions and the lowlands beneath, Shivaji was already, thanks to the co-operation of his Mavali friends, in full possession of all the requisite information and had made the deshmukhs his own. For a similar purpose in order to sound the views of the Konkan deshmukhs and governors of forts, as also to make reconnaissances in that region and announce his general intention of declaring his independence of the Mahomedan government, Shivaji despatched Brahman and Prabhu officers of acknowledged merit as diplomats. They traversed the Konkan in its various parts and conciliated the sympathy and adherence of several deshmukhs and Maratha nobles.

Shivaji had by this time a very large following and several more were ready to throw in their lot with him. The difficulty was how to maintain this steadily growing number of followers. The revenues accruing from the territory already in his possession fell far short of his growing requirements. Prompt payment is the secret of military obedience. A large increase of cavalry and infantry was a *sine qua non* to the enterprise he had entered upon. The forts recently captured entailed a vast expenditure for their defence, while their safety from future assault on the part of the enemy depended on a large supply of food and provisions being constantly maintained for the emergencies of war. All this meant money, and it was essential that the scarcity of specie should no longer come in the way of his aspirations. Shivaji therefore set about to procure money. He commenced to borrow on a large scale from wealthy capitalists, and against those, who would not willingly part with their gold, compulsion was resorted to. There is no denying the fact that there was a grave injustice in this. But Shivaji believed that the great cause he had embarked upon was to the advantage of all and rendered imperative a large accumulation of capital.

While in this anxiety he received news that Mullana Ahmed, the *subhedar* of Kalyan, was forwarding a large surn of money to the Bijapur government by way of Wai, through the Konkan. Resolved to intercept this precious treasure and divert it to his own ambitious purposes, Shivaji set off with 300 horses and the flower of his Mavali infantry and falling upon the

1. Grant Duff gives Dalvi as the family name of this chief. Chietni, Sabhasad and Chitragupta style him Surve. We think Surve was the cognomen and Dalvi an agnomen of this family.

convoying party dispersed them in no time, transferring the precious treasure immediately to the fort of Rajgad². The convoying force deputed by the subhedar was by no means contemptible, for the subhedar had every reason to fear the emergency of the treasure being cut off by Shivaji or the marauding chiefs of the neighbourhood. In the contest that ensued, Shivaji lost about ten of his followers and had something like 25 men wounded. On Mullana's side about 25 were killed and a hundred wounded. With his wonted liberality, Shivaji rewarded the gallant soldiers who had rendered him this useful service and devised means for the maintenance of the families of those who were killed or wounded. This fresh proof of his liberality still further enhanced his popularity.

This event was followed by the outbreak of open hostilities with Mullana. Abaji Sondev who was despatched against him captured Kalyan by a surprise attack, seizing all its forts, and taking Mullana prisoner. No sooner did Shivaji hear the joyful news than he proceeded in person to Kalyan, and liberating Mullana sent him with all honour to Bijapur. Now in the assault on the fort, Abaji had seized upon the daughter-in-law of Mullana.³ Abaji informed Shivaji that he had made prisoner a woman of distinguished beauty and prayed that Shivaji might accept her as a fit person for his zenana. Shivaji bade him introduce her in open durbar; and when the beautiful lady was introduced, apparelled in the loveliest raiment, Shivaji smiled and exclaimed, "Would that my mother had equalled her in beauty, for then he who was born of her might have been as beautiful!" These words caused great amazement in the assembly. To those gathered there such self-restraint appeared truly marvellous. Shivaji continued his speech: "It is written that he who hankers after victory, should beware of love's meshes and other people's women. It was this which brought low the proudest towers of strength like Ravana of Lanka. What then of poor mortals like ourselves? Let the king look upon all persons as his children." These words of wisdom created a great impression upon the assembly. No circumstance could have stamped more vividly upon their minds an idea of the magnanimity and high worth of their master. The truth dawned upon their minds that they had to deal with a man whose rectitude would never swerve an inch, and in whose service no act of iniquity

2. According to the Shivdigvijay the convoy was looted by Yesaji Kunk and Tanaji Malusare under Shivaji's orders.

3. The version of the Shivdigvijay is that she was a daughter of Mullana and had been openly made over to Abaji by her father for a sum of money. The text follows Chitnis, page 34, which is corroborated by the Tarikh-i-Shivaji, page 14 (a).

Foot Note to page 116: The Bhawani was a "*firang*" i. e. a sword of European (Portuguese or Spanish) make. It was a long straight-bladed word, probably from the famous armoury of Toledo in Spain.

on the part of his followers would ever find countenance. Shivaji treated the lady with great consideration, presented her with ornaments and robes of honour befitting her dignity, and sent her with a proper escort to her father-in-law at Bijapur.

Abaji Sondev having earned the grateful acknowledgment of his generous master for the conquest of Kalyan was rewarded with the governorship of that important province. The reformed system of revenue was speedily introduced here, and the riots oppressed under Mahomedan misrule now breathed a new atmosphere of hope and confidence. The old village organizations and institutions that had disappeared during years of confusion and anarchy were revived. The annual grants once conceded to temples and Brahmans were restored, and those which had remained despite the adverse circumstances were confirmed. The poor Hindu subjects were gratified at this beneficent and auspicious commencement of Shivaji's regime, and his fame as a merciful and benignant ruler spread far and wide.

This was the beginning of Shivaji's great triumphs. A spirit of noble exaltation and emulation now entirely possessed the hearts of his followers. Mullana having been so cheaply got out of the way, Shivaji's further career was signalized by the capture of fort after fort. The officers of the different forts were won over where possible; if they proved obstinate in their opposition, a surprise attack followed, leading inevitably to the capture of the fort. The Mavalis and warrior chiefs under Shivaji were as a rule armed with full information concerning the intricacies and vulnerable points of the different fortresses, and where this information was lacking, it could be procured from local experts. The sentinel guards of the hill-forts could be corrupted where other means failed, or the local contractors of supply outside the fort, who undertook to provide the thatching and roof-material against the expected monsoon for the buildings within, could be won over to the side of the assailants against the garrison who employed them. In this manner Shivaji's warriors could enter a fort, carrying on their heads bundles of hay, under which their swords were concealed, and with the assistance of the sentinels who were already in the secret, they could make an onslaught on the rest and conquer the fort. By this plan of operations, the forts of Kangari, Tung, Tikoni, Lohgad Rajmachi, Kuwari, Bhorup, Ghangad, Kelna, Mahuli and others were captured. The deshmukhs in this territory who were a perennial source of oppression to the riots were reduced to allegiance, either by conciliation or by force, and the Maval region was delivered finally from their tyranny. The Hindu population of these districts hailed with delight the advent of a capable Hindu ruler, who put an end to the rule of Islam and the reign of terror and license that had accompanied it. They had a foretaste of

freedom under Shivaji's banner and rejoiced in the unrestrained exercise of their religious rites.

The Hindu inhabitants of the southern half of the province of Kalyan which was under their Abyssinian ruler now envied the happier lot of their brethren in the northern half of the province. There were at the time two Maratha officers of the rank of Jamedar, Sodawlekar and Kodawlekar, in the Abyssinian service. They sent word to Shivaji that they were quite tired of their dependence on their Abyssinian oppressors and undertook to give over the fortresses of Tala and Ghosala to Shivaji, should he be pleased to make an expedition into the Konkan. They held out the prospect of a large accession of territory with the conquest of these forts and the secession of a large number of Maratha combatants from the service, of the Abyssinians. Under these favourable auspices, Shivaji turned his attention in that direction, with the result that the fortresses above mentioned fell before him. With them was conquered the neighbouring fort of Surgad and the low-lands commanded by its guns. It was however difficult to maintain his firm hold over this conquest, for the Sidi or Abyssinian ruler was a powerful chief. On this account, Shivaji erected new fortifications, the chief of which was at Birwadi, upon a spot prospected for the purpose. The fortifications of Rairi were also strengthened, and the fort of Lingana was built thereupon. This fort was afterwards further entrenched and became famous under the name of Raigad. In all these forts Shivaji maintained his own garrisons.

It was in this campaign that Shivaji obtained his famous sword Bhavani. As Shivaji was returning from a visit to the temple of Harihareshwar, he was told that there was a famous long sword worth 300 *hons* (pagodas) with a chief, Gowalkar Sawant by name. It was suggested to Shivaji that he should wrest this sword by force. Shivaji's reply was characteristic. He said, "A brave man should never covet what belongs to another. You will remember the puranic legend about that precious stone called the Syamantmani. The feuds that arose from the theft of that diamond required all the energies of the Lord Shri Krishna to settle. We poor mortals had better not raise such storms for trifles." Impressed by his austere attitude his people kept silence. Now while these conversations were going on in Shivaji's camp, the Sawant received independent advice from his ministers to seize the opportunity for conciliating Shivaji and seal the compact of amity by making him present of the precious sword. The Sawant saw the wisdom of this proposal and seeking an interview with Shivaji presented him with the sword. Shivaji was highly gratified with the gift and in return presented to the Sawant, as an earnest of his good will, a purse of 300 *hons* and a robe of exaggeration, simply adored this sword. He never started on an expedition without it. He gave it the name of his tutelary deity Bhavani. From the time of

the acquisition of this sword, he never knew defeat in any campaign. This he attributed to the sword, and he loved and adored it as something divine. During the nine days preceding the Dasara, dedicated to the worship of the goddess Bhavani, he placed the sword on the consecrated altar next to the image of the goddess and worshipped it as a visible favour from Heaven. On the tenth day, the auspicious festal day of the Dasara, he used to take it up devoutly from the altar and with this Bhavani blade in his hand set out upon his campaign.

In the course of the Konkan campaign, Shivaji attacked Rajapur. This was a town under the Abyssinians. Shivaji established a strict blockade and prepared to pillage the town. On the other hand the *kamavisdar* or civil commissioner in charge of the town made some show of resistance, but being thoroughly worsted had finally to yield. Shivaji levied contributions from the rich merchants and wealthy citizens of the town. But no material wealth Shivaji found in this town could compare with that sterling specimen of humanity, the loyal Balaji Avji, whose accession to Shivaji's side dates from this expedition against Rajapur. The father of Balaji Avji was Abaji Hari Chitre, once a *dewan* or minister under the Abyssinian chief. In a fit of passion occasioned by a trifling offence the Abyssinian put Abaji Hari and his brother to death and ordered the women and children in their family to be transported to Muscat and sold into slavery. This dire sentence was on the point of being executed. However, Abaji's wife, the mother of Balaji, was a woman of remarkable prudence and sagacity. She won over the sailors of the ship which was destined for Muscat and induced them to take them to Rajapur and in the mart of that town sell them as slaves. At Rajapur was her brother, Visaji Shankar, a merchant of great local influence. Visaji bought them without letting the sailors know that they were his relations. The eldest son of this lady was Balaji and the other two were Chimnaji and Shamji. Visaji gave a good education to these three children. Balaji was a *karkun* or clerk under a revenue officer in charge of a *kasba*. On hearing the news of Shivaji's arrival in the Konkan, he wrote to him detailing the tragic misfortunes of his family. Shivaji was filled with admiration at Balaji's hand-writing as exhibited in that letter and wrote in reply that he would with pleasure entertain Balaji as a *karkun* in his service. Upon this Balaji replied that he laboured under considerable obligations to his uncle and until that debt was cleared he could not think of joining Shivaji. On Shivaji's arrival at Rajapur he inquired after Balaji Avji and ordered him to be brought into his presence. Balaji was accordingly brought before Shivaji. Balaji's mother, unable to conjecture the cause, was filled with terror and came with maternal solicitude before the conqueror, prostrating herself before him and narrating the tragedy of her life. Shivaji was overwhelmed with deep emotion at the recital of this narrative, so

full of pathos, called up her two younger sons, and gave her an assurance as to their safety, entreating her to look upon himself as a fourth son, and to send them all to try their fortunes in his service. The good opinion that Shivaji had formed about Balaji from his hand-writing was greatly heightened by the personal interview. Pleased with his brilliant talents and the honourable precedents of his family he appointed Balaji to the post of *Chitnis* or Private Secretary. Chimnaji being versed in accounts was appointed to the Audit Department, and the youngest of the three, Shamji, was placed in charge of the stores at fort Raigad.

Balaji Avji was in the highest favour with Shivaji. He was the first person in his confidence and the repository of the most secret of his plans. This confidence was the well-merited reward of his unimpeachable loyalty and uprightness. Despatches of the greatest consequence and significance passed through his hands. Possessed of great activity of mind and considerable literary ability, he could at once grasp the vaguest thoughts floating in the mind of his royal master and express them with a lucidity, appositeness and precision that was simply astonishing. An anecdote told about him, whether true or false, is very characteristic of the man. In the course of a busy campaign he had received orders from Shivaji to write despatches on some affair of moment. Balaji's time was somehow occupied with other urgent affairs, and until night-fall he found no leisure to carry out the mandate. At night Shivaji summoned him to his presence and inquired whether the despatches were ready. Balaji was in great perplexity. He was quite aware that if he were to confess his fault, Shivaji would make an example of him for inadvertence and negligence as regards his express orders. He thought he must somehow tide over the present difficulty, and without any sign of dismay replied in the affirmative. Shivaji's next order was that he should read it aloud. Balaji opened his desk and, taking out a blank piece of paper, pretended to read out the despatch from the blank paper, and he did this without halting or stammering for a word. Shivaji was pleased with the supposed despatch and praised him for the deftness and skill with which he supposed him to have executed it. But this was too much for the torch-bearer who was holding up the light on the paper. He burst into a fit of laughter, and on Shivaji's inquiring the cause, he let the cat out of the bag. Balaji had to confess his fault and explain how he had no leisure to write out the despatches. Gratified with the marvellous proof of Balaji's powers of memory, Shivaji for once excused this dereliction on the part of his trusty secretary.
