



THE LIFE OF SHIVAJI MAHARAJ FOUNDER OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

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Chapter 17

The Sack of Surat and Barselor, 1664-1665

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On the retirement of the Rajah Jaswant Singh to Aurangabad, Shivaji mustered his forces in two concentration camps one at Kalyan and the other at Danda-Rajapuri, with the ostensible object of a campaign against the Portuguese at Cheul and Bassein and a final struggle with the Abyssinians of Janjira. The real motive for this concentration of his forces, however, was a sudden march upon Surat and the sack of that emporium of trade on the western coast. Among the populous and opulent towns of the orient, the port of Surat claimed a very high place. It was the seat of international trade. All sorts of foreign merchants traded in Indian wares in the marts of that town. Many of its citizens were counted among the most affluent merchant princes in India. Shivaji had sent to Surat his scout, Bahirji Naik by name, who scrutinized the fortunes of the leading citizens and furnished very valuable information to Shivaji so as to facilitate an attack. His report induced Shivaji to launch upon this enterprise. The town was shown to be an easy prey and wealth untold awaited the fortunate captor.¹

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1. According to some accounts Shivaji himself in a disguise had made his way to Surat and in a stay of three days had seen things with his own eyes and in particular the residences of the merchant princes.

Shivaji had decided to conduct the expedition in person, having learnt by experience of previous campaigns that much of the best results was lost when the command was entrusted to his lieutenants. The expeditionary force consisted of 10,000 Mavalis, including such leaders of distinction as Moropant Pingle, Prataprao Guzar, and several subordinate officers. With this great host he left the Konkan in a straight line of March upon Surat.² But in order to divert the attention of the Moguls from his real object he gave out that the march was for the sacred pilgrim place of Nasik, whence he proposed to go on a tour of inspection of the fortresses recently captured by Moropant. Having thus blinded the enemy as to his real intention, he advanced in a northerly course and by incredibly forced marches suddenly presented himself within a few miles of the city.³

On the morning of the 5th January 1664 the alarming news came to Surat that Shivaji's banners were seen at Gandevi, only 28 miles south of the town. The citizens were utterly taken by surprise. They had no suspicion of the coming storm. In their panic they began to flee away across the river, to the villages on the northern bank, with their wives and children. The governor sent a messenger to make a parley with the invader. The messenger was put under arrest as also the messengers of the Dutch and the English East India Companies, who had been sent to watch Shivaji's movements.⁴ Next morning Shivaji's columns were already hurling themselves upon the old mud walls of the city. The governor of the city, Inayet Khan, mustered his scanty forces and advanced, not to give battle to the foe, but to flee for shelter to the inner castle. Shivaji planted his batteries against the citadel. The inhabitants were left to their own resources.⁵

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2. According to Orme to disguise his plans Shivaji encamped his forces before Cheul and Bassein and made believe that he was preparing to capture these places by storm, and that Shivaji secretly started from the Bassein camp with four thousand horse, leaving strict orders to maintain the same vigilance as before with the usual flourish of trumpets and other war-like music.
 3. The Factory Records of the English Company at Surat give graphic accounts of the sack of Surat. The Log of the *Loyal Merchant*, an English ship then at the mouth of the Tapti, preserved among the Orme MSS., Vol. 263, is of special value. Next in importance are the Dutch Records and the accounts given by Valentyn, Bernier, Manucci, and Dr. Fryer.
 4. *Vide* the Dutch version of the event in Valentyn's "*Lives of the Moguls*".
 5. According to Bernier and Valentyn, the governor of Surat came to oppose Shivaji, but was made to retire on the understanding that Shivaji did not mean to force his entrance into the town but march outwards. Orme says that the governor of the town and the commander of

On the previous night Shivaji had despatched a message to the governor, requiring him and Haji Sayad Beg, Baharji (Virji) Borah, and Haji Cassim, three of the richest merchants in the city, to attend his camp, a little outside the city-gate, and settle the ransom, in default of which he threatened to plunder the town⁶. As no answer came to this summons, the Maratha hosts poured in. The invaders very soon made their presence felt all over the town. The mansions of the leading citizens were occupied and the city was subjected to a systematic pillage for the space of three days. The rich were forced under fear of death to disclose their buried treasures. In the confusion an opulent Jewish merchant fell into the hands of Shivaji. He was a native of Constantinople and had come to Surat to negotiate the sale of certain precious jewellery to the emperor Aurangzeb. He was produced before Shivaji and commanded to surrender his treasures. He refused and notwithstanding all manner of threats against his life persisted in his refusal. Thrice was he thrown down on the ground and the sword placed at his throat. But he did not yield for a moment. His gold was dearer to him than life⁷.

The house of Baharji Borah was plundered for three days and an incredible amount of money and precious stones was carried away with twenty-eight seers of large pearls. This house stood next to the Dutch factory, that of Haji Sayad Beg being close to the English. The Marathas plundered Haji Sayad's house for two days until the English company put an English guard upon it and took its protection in their hands. This brought about an exchange of threats of defiance between Shivaji and the president of the English factory, Sir George Oxenden. In this way burning and plundering went on for three days.

But Shivaji did not act in this extortionate manner towards all in the moment of his triumph. Certain anecdotes of his conduct on this occasion illustrate the innate generosity of his character. There lived at this time at Surat a Roman Catholic capuchin of the name of Father Ambrose. Though the dwelling-place of this priest was pointed out for plunder, Shivaji did not violate it. He is reported to have said that the *padres* were men of piety and it was improper to injure them in any way. Another story is that there was at Surat a certain citizen of the name of Mohandas Parekh who was an

the garrison in their fright betook themselves to the citadel admitting only a few who could be accommodated within, and fired upon Shivaji when he entered the town, but he made nothing of it.

6. Factory Records, Surat, Letter in Forrest's Selections Vol.1, p. 24.

7. Bernier, 190.

accredited broker to the Dutch East India Company. He was a person of high character and well spoken of for his philanthropy. He had died a few years before Shivaji's invasion of Surat, leaving behind him a large family and an ample fortune. Though reports of the vast wealth of this family were brought to Shivaji, he saved it from every species of violation, out of deference for the high renown of the deceased philanthropist.⁸

The English and the Dutch East India Companies had thriving factories at Surat at the date of Shivaji's invasion. These European merchants, and in particular the representatives of the English Company with great bravery defended their factories, chiefly with the powerful aid of the sailors on board their mercantile fleets at Swally, at the mouth of the river. Many native merchants found a safe asylum in the factories of the European merchants. An Englishman of the name of Anthony Smith was taken prisoner and brought before Shivaji. He was afterwards released.⁹ He has left a brief account of Shivaji's sack of Surat. He tells how Shivaji was seated in a tent and persons suspected of hiding their wealth were taken before him. When these men persevered in their refusal to disclose the places where their fortunes were hidden, he ordered them either to be executed or deprived of their hands. It is said that were it not for the gallant stand made by the British factors, Shivaji would have carried off a much greater amount of treasure. Their gallantry evoked the admiration of Aurangzeb. He congratulated Sir George Oxenden, the president of the factory at Surat, and presented him with a jewelled crest as a special distinction. The British merchants were granted a remission of 2½% in the customs duty; and the proprietors of the British East India Company were honoured with the presentation of a special gold medal as a mark of imperial favor.¹⁰

On his arrival at Surat, Shivaji had publicly announced that he had not come to do any personal harm to any of the native or foreign merchants in the city, but only to revenge himself on Aurangzeb for having invaded his own country and killed some of his relatives. Consistently with this declaration he had invited the governor of the city with three of the foremost citizens to attend his camp outside the city gates and settle the ransom there. In this

8. Bernier, 188-189.

9. The Log of the *Loyal Merchant* (quoted by Prof. Sarkar) says that he was ransomed for Rs. 350. The English chaplain, Escalot has given a similar account of the plunder in his letter to Sir T. Browne, the author of *Religio Medici*, which Prof. Sarkar quotes from Ind. Antiq. VIII, 256, to describe the state of Surat at the time and the manner in which the loot was carried out. An equally vivid description is given by Dr. Fryer. All these authorities are naturally prejudiced against Shivaji.

10. Vide Dr. Fryer, Vol. 1, letter II, Chapter V.

demand he was quite justified. He was at war with the Mogul government. His appearance before the city-gates was a masterly move on the part of the Maratha strategist. Again, as he rightly said, the Mogul emperor had forced him to keep a large army, and he would force the emperor to become its pay-master.

It was the duty of the governor to pay the ransom or defend the city. He does neither. He leaves the city to the mercy of the invader. The invader has to enter the city-gates and exact payments from the individual citizens. The governor having failed in his primary duty does not hesitate to employ an assassin to murder Shivaji in his camp. The assassin attacks Shivaji with his dagger. Both the murderer and the intended victim roll on the ground together. The blood is seen on Shivaji's dress. The Maratha soldiers for a time actually believe that Shivaji has been murdered. A cry runs through the camp to slay the prisoners. Even with this provocation there was no massacre. Shivaji's voice was the first to forbid it.¹¹

As a retaliatory measure only four prisoners were executed and twenty-four had their hands cut off. Those who condemn Shivaji for the cruelty of his exactions are, therefore, less wise in their censure than the citizens of Surat were when they threw dirt upon their governor, when the coward at last emerged from behind the shadow of the castle-walls upon Shivaji's retirement. In any case the sack of Surat was Shivaji's decisive reply to the Mogul emperor for the seizure and occupation of Poona and the surrounding districts by the Mogul hosts under Shaista Khan. That occupation had lasted for three years. If Shaista Khan had not plundered Poona, it was because he found little to plunder there. In 1657 Aurangzeb had given orders to the Mogul hosts invading Shivaji's territories, after the attack upon Junnar, to lay waste the villages, "slaying the people without pity, and plundering them to the extreme".¹² That was Aurangzeb's way of making reprisals for the attack on Junnar, – the robbing, the slaying, and the enslaving of the poorest type of countrymen. This was Shivaji's way of making reprisals for Shaista Khan's seizure of Poona – the spoliation of the wealthiest citizens of the wealthiest sea-port in the empire on the refusal of its governor to comply with the demand for ransom.¹³ How the Mogul armies themselves could pillage and plunder a great city was amply shown only seven years before the sack of

11. Prof. Sarkar's "Shivaji", 115.

12. Prof. Sarkar's "Shivaji", 62.

13. It must be remarked that the sack of Surat took place, while the Rajah Jaswant Singh was besieging Kondana (Sinhagad). *Vide* the dates in Jedhe's Chronology, pp. 186-187.

14. Elphinstone, 575; Prof. Sarkar's "Aurangzeb" Vol. I. Chapter X.

Surat, when on the treacherous orders of Aurangzeb, in defiance of treaties and existing peace, the Mogul hosts under the command of his son entered the Golconda territory under a vile pretext, and plundered the hapless city of Hyderabad, then the richest city in South India, for days together.¹⁴ It is needless, therefore, to be too censorious about the cruelty or injustice involved in the sack of Surat.

When the sacking of the town was brought to a conclusion, a huge cavalcade of heavily laden pack-horses started for Raigad, which they reached safely, without any attempt to obstruct them on the part of the Moguls. The wealth obtained in this enterprise is said to have been computed to amount to a sum of eight and a half crores of pagodas. A large number of horses was captured, brought down from Surat and formed into a new cavalry corps. On his return from Surat, Shivaji wrote to Aurangzeb in the following strain: "I have chastised your uncle, Shaista Khan; I have defiled the beauty of your fair city of Surat. Hindustan is for the Hindus. You have no business here. You have no business, too, to be in the Deccan. The Deccan belongs of right to the Nizam Shahi, dynasty, and I am the *vizier* of that dynasty." Aurangzeb made no reply to this letter.

Upon his return from Surat, Shivaji learnt the sad tidings of the death of Shahaji. The mourning and funeral rites were performed at Fort Sinhagad. After the full period of these funeral solemnities Shivaji returned to Raigad, where some time was spent in the re-organization of the various departments of government. It was at this period upon the death of the Raja Shahaji that Shivaji solemnly assumed the title of Raja and struck coins in his own name.¹⁵

While Shivaji was for a time resting and enjoying a lull in his war-like activities, his followers were by no means idle. They harried the Mogul provinces in the south. Netaji Palkar systematically took the field with his irregular cavalry during the favourable season from year to year, and at the beginning of the stormy season he used to return with his spoils. The naval contingent was equally active, laying an embargo upon the merchant vessels wherever they could and pillaging them according as occasion served. They levied contributions upon the pilgrim vessels plying between the western coast and Mecca. Wealthy pilgrims were subjected to heavy exactions. Shortly afterwards Shivaji took the field in person and led his victorious

15. Khafi Khan, (Elliot Vol. VII, p. 271).

legions to the sack of Ahmednagar and the devastation of the Mogul province of the Deccan up to the gates of its capital, Aurangabad.

Observing how Shivaji was engaged in hostilities against the Moguls, two nobles under the hegemony of the Adil Shahi ruler at Panhala¹⁶ broke the former peace and made an energetic movement for the reconquest of the Konkan. They recaptured some of the principal stations in the Konkan. When Shivaji learned of the new crisis on the Konkan shores, he with marvellous rapidity presented himself at this new scene of war. A battle ensued, in which thousands of the Adil Shahi army were put to flight or killed. The agents of the British Company at Karwar and Rajapur have estimated the number of the slain on both sides as nearly six thousand.¹⁷ Hubli was plundered. The people of Vengurla rose against Shivaji's commander in that town. Shivaji retaliated by reducing the town to ruins. Concluding this business with extraordinary speed, Shivaji was again back at Sinhagad. For news had arrived that the Mogul army at Junnar had been reinforced and meditated an invasion of the territory under Shivaji's influence. Shivaji's quick return to Sinhagad nipped this hostile demonstration in the bud. When this danger had been averted Shivaji ordered his light cavalry south of the Krishna to raid the Bijapur dominions. While the people of Bijapur were thus attacked in their southern valleys, Shivaji prepared to deliver simultaneously another blow on the seaward side of that empire. This took the form of a sudden march upon Barselor and the spoliation of that wealthy entrepot of trade on the Konkan coast. The attack was to be made by sea. Shivaji's naval contingent received orders to concentrate at the sea-fort of Sindhudurg on the Malwan coast. These preparations were made with extreme caution and secrecy, and it was given out to the diplomatic world that Shivaji was mustering a strong force for a decisive attack on the Mogul camp at Junnar. Having thus thrown dust in the eyes of the enemy, Shivaji suddenly appeared at Malwan and the naval force made straight for Barselor.¹⁸

The invader descended upon the town quite unexpectedly before the morning twilight. It was sacked and pillaged for the whole day unhindered. The plunder which is supposed to have been almost as great as that of Surat amounted to between two and three crores.

16. Mohamed Ikhlas Khan and Fazal Khan.

17. Factory Reports, Surat, Vol. 86. The Bijapur general, Khawas Khan, was teemed round by Shivaji but escaped by a gallant charge.

18. In some bakhars, the name of the town occurs as Basnur. The Shivdigvijaya calls it Harhasnur. The Rairi bakhar calls it Hasnur. It is elsewhere called *Basrur*. It was the principal port of the Bednore Rajas.

Following on the sack of this town Shivaji extended his conquest to other sea-board towns, such as Kadwal, Shiveshwar, Miraj, Ankola, Kodre (Kadra), Humaud and others. The sacred shrine of Gokarn-Mahableshwar was taken possession of and large sums spent in religious charities at this frequented place of pilgrimage. At Bednore, further south, a jahagirdar named Shivappa Naik had made himself independent of Bijapur. This Naik had recently died and an infant prince had been put on the throne, under the regency of his mother. Before proceeding to those southern parts Shivaji had made a demand on this chief to agree to the payment of an annual tribute and the maintenance of an accredited agent at Shivaji's court; whereupon the insolent minister of the Naik challenged Shivaji to come and extort tribute from him, if he dared. Upon receipt of this haughty reply Shivaji came up by forced marches, conquering town and village and compelled the Naik to sue for peace. He sent his vakils with abject entreaties for pardon and with royal presents, including a *nazar* of a lakh of rupees. The young Naik with his guardian came down in person to meet Shivaji at a friendly conference, where promises were interchanged and the chief finally consented to pay an annual tribute of three lakhs of rupees. The Naik sent his vakil, Umaji, to reside at Shivaji's court.¹⁹

On his arrival at Gokarn, the greater part of Shivaji's naval force was ordered to retire to head-quarters, and the land force continued its depredations in the interior of the country. Karwar fell but suffered no harm, the inhabitants having offered to pay the victor a fair sum of money (1665). It is said that the local factors of the British Company bought their safety by a prudent arrangement to pay down the modest contribution of £ 112. With these trophies the invader began his retreat, the army marching by land routes, Shivaji himself sailing with a small naval squadron, with the object of inspecting with his own eyes the aggressive preparations of the Janjira chief by a cruise along the Konkan coast. But adverse winds delayed this voyage. The voyagers were suddenly becalmed and had to spend many days and nights, in a helpless and profitless manner, on the sea. Shivaji found himself for the time being cut off from all communication with his army and all knowledge of the movements of the enemy. He never trusted himself again to the mercy of the treacherous element. A ship he now found by experience to

19. All Adil Shaha of Bijapur had for years been fighting with this chief and his father. The father was Shivappa Naik and the son Somshekar, and in 1665, a puppet prince was reigning at Bednore under his mother's regency. Shahaji had fought against Shivappa in Ali Adil Shaha's camp.

be no better than a prison, in this that a man seemed thereby to be cut off from all communication with the towns and nations of the earth.
