



# THE LIFE OF SHIVAJI MAHARAJ FOUNDER OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

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## Chapter 9

# Relations with the Moguls 1650-57

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The alliance between Shivaji and the Moguls was destined to be a deceptive move in Shivaji’s game of politics. By this diplomatic stroke he had cut a gordian knot which might have proved too serious for the resourcefulness of any statesman of the time. His readiness to enter the Mogul service was a feint that had deceived both the Bijapur and the Mogul governments. In reality he desired nothing of the kind. When the deliverance of his father was once achieved, his ardour for the Mogul service at once cooled. While tempting the Padishaha with this offer, he was resolved to remain true to the vow of his earliest youth: never to do service to a Mahomedan ruler whatever the gains or emoluments.

But Shahajahan, through his viceroy, Prince Murad, continued his demands that Shivaji should according to the terms of his promise enter the Mogul service and receive a mansab or command in the military forces of the empire. Shivaji met these proposals with great tact. He sent an envoy to the imperial governor, Prince Murad, alleging that his family possessed the hereditary rights of sirdeshmukh over the provinces of Junnar and Ahmednagar, but for some time these dues had been withheld from them. He should, therefore, be restored to the enjoyment of his family rights over these provinces.<sup>1</sup> Shahajahan did not acknowledge these demands at the time, but

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1. Vide Parasnis’s MS, and Kincaid, Appendix B. page 149, where Murad acknowledges the demands of Shivaji made through his envoy Ragho Pandit (Raghunath Ballal Korde (?)) and replies that the same would be considered when he reached the royal camp in person.

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replied that when Shivaji came to the imperial court his rights would be duly considered. In this manner Shivaji put off to a future date the question of entering into the service of the empire.

In 1657 Shahajahan deputed his son Aurangzeb and the experienced general Mir Jumla to lead an army against Bijapur for the express purpose of conquering and annexing that kingdom. They carried in rapid succession the barrier forts on the frontiers of that kingdom, such as Kalyani, Bedar and others. Shivaji, ever watchful for the preservation of his interests, wrote to Aurangzeb that he owed service to the head of the empire and was prepared to render all possible assistance to the Mogul generals in their present campaign, on condition that the secure possession of the Bijapur forts and territories already under his power was assured to him, He on his part would be quite willing to co-operate with the Mogul forces in the conquest of Dabhol and other positions on the Konkan sea-board. It was quite in the nature of things that the imperial commander knowing Shivaji's worth should close with this proposal. Aurangzeb assured Shivaji that he did not meditate any interference with the Bijapur territories already under his sway and informed him that he should by all means turn his victorious arms to the Bijapur possessions in the Konkan low lands. 1657 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

Such was the purport of Aurangzeb's letter to Shivaji. Aurangzeb seems to have been anxious to have a personal conference with Shivaji and urge upon him the expediency of his making common cause with the Moguls against Bijapur and the numerous benefits that might accrue to him from such an alliance. Aurangzeb at a later date wrote to Shivaji upon this subject. His desire was to yoke Shivaji to active service under the empire. But Shivaji was too astute a statesman to swallow the alluring bait. He kept up his repeated assurances of loyalty and service to the padishaha, but always managed to avoid the abject dependence of an imperial courtier. Thus playing adroitly upon Aurangzeb's wishes and fears he secured the peace and tranquillity of his possessions from the grand Mogul's invading hordes. With the Mogul and Bijapur forces engaged in a deadly conflict, he set about concerting measures for the expansion of the Maratha power.

It will be remembered that Shivaji had often asserted certain hereditary claims upon Junnar and Ahmednagar. The former was reputed a wealthy town in those days. The emperor had so far turned a deaf ear to Shivaji's claims. Shivaji determined to retaliate by surprising these towns. With this plan he suddenly fell upon Junnar by a night attack and sacked the town. He carried away the richest spoils to Poona, about 300000 pagodas, 200 horses and other

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2. Grant Duff, I, 161-162, and Prof. Sarkar's *Aurangzeb*, II, 261-269.

valuables. The booty was safely transferred to Rajgad by officers deputed for the purpose. Shivaji made a similar attempt upon Ahmednagar, but did not succeed here so well as at Junnar.<sup>3</sup> For while he was plundering the suburban parts and the business quarters of the town immediately after the first onslaught, the city forces poured down in sufficient strength from the citadel and stopped the spoliation. However the first shock had already yielded a considerable booty, including 700 horses and four elephants. Shivaji carried them off in triumph through the ranks of the garrison forces, though not without many casualties in his gallant little army.

With these additions to his treasury, Shivaji resolved upon enlarging his cavalry forces. The sack of Junnar and Ahmednagar had as above described resulted in the capture of many horses. These he supplemented with his own purchases, and besides maintaining his own *bargirs*<sup>4</sup> he began to entertain in his service many a willing *shiledar*. The general in command of the cavalry force which up to this time had served under Shivaji was Mankoji Dahatonde, who had received the title of sirnobut or lord of the royal drum. Mankoji was an old veteran who had seen service in the stirring times of Shahaji's fights with the Moguls. He had maintained Shivaji's cavalry in the highest state of efficiency. On his death, the brave Netaji Palkar was appointed to succeed him. Palkar commanded great influence among the Maratha gentry, many of whom now eagerly sought to obtain commissions as shiledars in Shivaji's cavalry.

Meanwhile the Moguls were inflicting defeat after defeat upon Bijapur, and this augured very unfavourably for Shivaji's future career. For it was plain that the extinction of the Bijapur kingdom would turn the Mogul conqueror upon Shivaji himself. Anticipating this exigency, Shivaji sought to conciliate Aurangzeb, submitting himself and his fortunes to the Mogul protection and offering a humble apology for the spoliation of Junnar and Ahmednagar. With a petition couched in these terms he sent his envoy Raghunathpant Korde, a trusty officer well versed in the diplomacy and finesse of Indian courts, to the imperial camp, that he might add verbal assurances to the entreaties for pardon made in the petition.

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3. On the authority of Kambu's Amal-i-Salih, Prof. Sarkar says the attack on Ahmednagar was made by Minaji (Manaji) Bhonsle and Kashi. Was this the same Minaji Bhonsle who as a Mogul mansabdar is said to have treacherously surrendered the fort of Mahuli to Shahaji (Vide *Abdul Hamid's Badshanamah* in Elliot, VII, p. 57). The same authority states that at the time when Shahajahan gave a mansab to Shahaji, the emperor also gave a mansab to his son Samaji (Sambhaji) and his brother Minaji, while the Marathi chronicles generally state that an imperial mansab was conferred upon Kheloji, the son of Vithoji Bhonsle.

4. These represent two classes of cavalry soldiers, the shiledar maintaining his own horse and being a sort of cavalier, the bargir using a horse lent by the state,

Fortunately for the future of Shivaji's enterprise, Aurangzeb received a confidential report of Shahajahan's illness from the princess Roshanara, who watched over his ambitious interests at the capital, and the imperial general concluded a hasty peace with Bijapur and with as large a force as he could collect in the southern subha, he immediately set out for Delhi. Emboldened by the sudden diversion of the imperial forces to the north, Shivaji forthwith sent another embassy representing his regret for the necessity that had led to the spoliation of Mogul territory by his forces, offering to place a large force of cavalry at the service of Aurangzeb, and undertaking the defence of the imperial territory in the south during Aurangzeb's enforced absence. In return, Shivaji prayed, he might be reinstated in the hereditary rights and privileges he claimed over certain territories that had passed under the Moguls, as also the jahgir lands of his family which had now come under the imperial power and the commission of deshmukh or zamindary rights over the districts of Junnar and Ahmednagar. The restoration of these rights and dues would be an ample return for his proffered service to the imperial crown. In conclusion he pointed out that the government of the Konkan districts had long been neglected by the Adil Shahi power and represented that the transfer of this province to himself would be of very great advantage to the empire.

These were serious demands couched in the adulatory language of court etiquette, but the great excitement in the Mogul camp did not leave to Aurangzeb sufficient leisure to indulge in resentful feelings. He rather chose for the present to leave Shivaji in a state of expectancy with regard to his demands and encourage him to continue his disturbances in the Bijapur territory, for in this the wily prince discerned the only means of preservation for the Mogul conquests in the Deccan during the strenuous civil wars which were now impending and were certain to jeopardize the security and integrity of the empire. Resolved to pursue this line of conduct Aurangzeb made answer in the most guarded manner possible. In the first place, while censuring Shivaji's conduct, he was pleased to extend to him that royal mercy which he craved. Secondly, he granted permission to Shivaji to turn his attention to the conquest of the Konkan. Lastly Shivaji was desired to depute Abaji Sondev to a conference where Shivaji's hereditary rights and perquisites would be duly considered, and pending a final adjustment of these claims keep his forces in a state of readiness and efficiency for the maintenance of Shivaji was required to send 500 horses to the assistance of the Moguls and peace and security in the Mogul province.<sup>5</sup>

These negotiations led to no tangible results in the end. It was only a make-believe sort of alliance on either side. In fact there was no time to seal a

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5. Parasnis M. S.

compact of permanent friendship. Aurangzeb was too much occupied by the stress of the civil wars that followed. It was his unnatural task to fight, slay, or execute his unfortunate brothers and to imprison his father in his helpless dotage, literally wading through slaughter to an inauspicious throne. That was just what Shivaji wanted. Right well did Shivaji know that the demands which he had made were too ambitious for the haughty prince to grant. On his part it was only a ruse to gain more time to pursue his ambitious plans in a leisurely manner.

Tradition has it that on reaching Delhi, when Aurangzeb finally resolved to usurp the throne and imprison his helpless father in his palace, he wrote to the Deccan nobles to come to his assistance, and that among others Shivaji too received such an invitation. Whereupon it is said that Shivaji shuddered at the contents of the letter and openly expressed his horror of the unnatural crime formulated by Aurangzeb in such a cold-blooded fashion. Nay, the story goes that he spurned the poor courier who was the bearer of the proposal and drove him from his presence and had the traitorous missive bound to the tail of a mongrel cur to be dragged over the mire and filth of Poona. On hearing of the contemptuous manner in which this proposal was received by Shivaji, Aurangzeb is said to have burst forth into a passion and vowed to avenge the indignity. But this plan of revenge he never had the opportunity to carry out, and it would even seem that his resentment must have been of short duration. For shortly afterwards when the news of the death of Afzul Khan at the hands of Shivaji reached Aurangzeb's ears, he congratulated the Maratha warrior by letter and presented him with two or three hill-forts on the borders of Bijapur. Not content with this he advised Shivaji to continue this plan of aggression against Bijapur and promised to confer on him tax-free all the lands he might succeed in wresting from the Bijapur government. It is obvious that in all this Aurangzeb was inspired by thoughts of his future dealings with the Adil Shahi dynasty, reflecting no doubt that Shivaji's pioneer work in the dismemberment of that kingdom would render his programme all the easier of accomplishment. As to the ultimate defeat of Shivaji he took it as a matter of course. Little did he then dream, with all his political sagacity that the most stubborn problem of all his life, reserved as the crowning wreck and disgrace of his declining years, would be just this - the war with the newly founded Maratha power.

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