



THE LIFE OF SHIVAJI MAHARAJ FOUNDER OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

Homepage: <http://www.gathacognition.com/book/gcb20>
<http://dx.doi.org/10.21523/gcb4>



Chapter 3

The Childhood of Shivaji

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Published Online

17 March 2018

We have already described in the last chapter how Jijabai far advanced in pregnancy was left behind at the fort of Shivneri, while Shahaji was being pursued by Lakhji Jadhav past the confines of the Nizamshahi kingdom. To look after his wife, Shahaji had detached from his secretarial staff three officers noted for their personal devotion towards himself. These were Balkrishnapant Hanumante, Shamrao Nilkant and Raghunath Ballal Korde.¹ The Jadhav had also on meeting his daughter at Shivneri deputed some men from his staff for her protection. She also seems to have found a watchful protector in Shrinivasrao of Junnar. Though we find her thus living in comparative safety amidst the troublous storms that were beating about her on all sides, a secret sorrow and anxiety seem to have preyed upon her mind as to the fate of her husband and her first-born, a child of three or four years, whom she had been compelled to part with at a time when they were fugitives before

1. In Malhar Ramrao's bakhar Hanumante's name is given as Krishnaji Hanumante. Instead of Shamrao Nilkant some chronicles give the name Shankraji Nilkant. Malhar Ramrao mentions a fourth officer Sonopant Dabir. Sabhasad in his well known bakhar says that these officers were sent with Jijabai from Bangalore.

Originally published in 'The Life of Shivaji Maharaj: Founder of the Maratha Empire', 1921. Adopted from the Marathi work by **K. A. Keluskar**.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21523/gcb4.1806>

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the vindictive rage of her father. Amidst these tormenting cares and anxieties, she made a solemn vow to Shiva, the guardian divinity of the fortress, that if by her favour the gloomy clouds should be dispelled from Shahaji's fortunes and she delivered of a male child she would christen him after the goddess's name, as the fruit of her divine favour. The founder of the Maratha Empire was born on the 10th of April 1627 (Monday, the 5th of the first half of *Vaishakh* of the *Shaka* year 1549).² The birth of this child, reserved by the call of heaven for such momentous events in the history of the Indian Empire, took place at a time of great political upheavals in the Deccan. He was born, however, in the comparatively secluded and at that time neglected neighbourhood of Poona. Shivneri is within fifty miles of that town. This was an event of great rejoicing in the little colony of exiles and refugees at Shivneri, and was celebrated with such pride and pomp as their present means and the humble circumstances of the place afforded. Women from the neighbouring villages coming to the fort with provisions were entertained with hospitality in honour of the joyful event and presented with gifts at their departure. Shahaji who was then at Bijapur had the news sent to him by special messengers, who received handsome rewards from the delighted father for the joyful tidings they had brought to him. The child was christened Shivaji after the goddess Shiva, in consequence of the vow made to that effect by Jijabai.

Jijabai spent three years at this fortress in company with her son. She was probably transferred to Byrapur from this place, for it will be remembered that in 1633, as described in the last chapter, she was captured by the Mogul army at Bijapur. On her release from the Mogul camp she was removed to the fort of Kondana by Jagdeorao Jadhav, and she seems again to have passed a part of her life at Shivneri and the fort of Mahuli. It does not transpire where she found safety during the tumultuous period of the interminable contests between the Moguls and Shahaji which then set in. So much at any rate is clear that she never sought shelter under the roof of her

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2. There are discrepancies about the date in the various bakhars. Malhar Ramrao and Shivadigvijaya give the second of the first half of *Vaishakh* as the date and Thursday as the day of the week. But the date and day do not seem to agree. The Rairi's *bakhar* giving the same date and day as in the text gives the year as *Shaka* 1548. Here again the date and day cannot agree. In Wilks's History of Mysore and the Chronicle called the *bakhar* of the Maratha Swaraja the same date is followed as in the text. Calculations of an astronomical character upon certain data furnished by Mr. Kashinath Krishna Lele to the Kavyetihas Sangraha are in accord with the time followed in the text here. Vide Rajwade's "Marathyanchya Itihasachi Sadhane" (Materials for the History of the Marathas, Section IV). The Shedgaokar *bakhar* gives Saturday the 3rd of the first half of *Vaishakh*, *Shaka* year 1549 as the birth-day, while the Jedhe chronology dates the event in *Shaka* year 1551, *Falgun*, which would be February 1630 A. D.

relatives on her father's side, in order to save herself or her child from the wrath of the Moguls. There is not a shred of evidence to show that she ever sought refuge with the Jadhav family. It must also be considered that the Jadhavs were vassals of the Mogul emperor with whom Shahaji was at open war and it would have been extremely hazardous for the wife of Shahaji to throw herself upon the protection of a family which had entirely passed under the Mogul domination, nor would Shahaji have ever approved of such a step. It follows, therefore, that Jijabai and her son led an isolated life in the midst of great political hazards and turmoils, moving from fortress to fortress within the sphere of Shahaji's influence. Shahaji did what he could from his headquarters to ensure the safety of his wife and son. Had Jijabai indeed desired the protection of the Jadhav family - she, who had spurned the offers of her vindictive father in the delicate situation in which she was when she first came to Shivneri - that occasion had surely presented itself, when she was taken a prisoner to the Mogul camp. That she did not choose to accept the hospitality of Jadhav at that time of necessity and distress is a sufficient proof to show that she had no desire for any protection at the hands of her paternal relations. One might well imagine to himself the dreadful cares and perils to which her life was exposed in these days. Flying from fort to fort, in imminent danger of being surprised by the enemy, she had to look helplessly on at the dreadful political drama that was being played out, the most conspicuous figure in which was her own gallant husband, whom the numerous Mogul hosts were closing in upon from all sides. It reflects the highest credit upon the spirited Maratha lady that during all this time of stress and strife her confidence in her husband's courage and bravery and her own refined sense of dignity as a mother did not falter even for an instant. The annalists make no mention of the manner in which Jijabai conducted the education of her son Shivaji. It is, however, clear that during this time he seems to have made considerable progress in riding and horse management, archery and marksmanship, the use and exercise of the *patta*, the national Maratha javelin, and other warlike exercises, as also in reading and writing.

When Shahaji became a vassal of the Adilshahi sultan he took his wife and son to Bijapur. Shortly afterwards he was confirmed in the possession of his old jahgir by the Bijapur state, and was deputed to the province of the Karnatic as second in command to Randulla Khan. Upon this occasion he entrusted an experienced and faithful Brahman secretary, Dadaji Kondadev, with the administration of the family jahgir, and placed Jijabai and Shivaji under his guardianship. The education of Shivaji was entrusted to his care. Dadaji Kondadev brought mother and son with all their retinue to Poona and had a spacious mansion raised for their residence. In the following year Dadaji had to travel to Bangalore to submit to Shahaji the accounts of the

jahgir. Dadaji was accompanied on this occasion by Shivaji and Jijabai, who again returned to Poona in his company.

On Shiahaji's return to Bijapur from his successful campaign in the Karnatic, he wrote to Dadaji Kondadev expressing his desire to bring Shivaji to Bijapur and celebrate his marriage there. Shivaji replied that as Bijapur lay purely in a Mahomedan atmosphere, he preferred to have his marriage celebrated at Poona, where the ceremonies of the Hindu religion could be performed unobstructed with due pomp and solemnity. Such being the wishes of Shivaji, Dadaji Kondadev obtained Shahaji's consent to have the marriage solemnised at Poona. In consequence of this arrangement the marriage of Shivaji took place at Poona in 1640, with great pomp and eclat. The bride chosen was Sayibai, a daughter of the distinguished Nimbalkar family.

In 1641, Shahaji invited Shivaji and Jijabai to Bijapur, and seems to have kept them with him for two or three years. As the boy watched the persecution and sectarian bigotry of this Mahomedan capital, the purpose began to form itself in his mind of overthrowing the supremacy of Islam.³ The rudiments of that political wisdom and sagacity, which afterwards evoked the ungrudging admiration of the whole of the Indian continent, were also instilled into his mind during this period.

He was only fourteen, but already at that early age he was fairly advanced in all the arts of war. Handsome and endowed with great muscular strength he was most agile in his movements. With this he combined unique powers of observation. From infancy he was fond of examining the qualities of horses and elephants and visiting military depots and magazines. He behaved with remarkable courtesy towards persons eminent for their wisdom, learning or experience, and endeavoured to acquire knowledge and to win their favour by the tactful and respectful manner in which he inquired into the various subjects or studies they had mastered. He hated vice and luxury. He treated age anti experience with the honour they deserved. These qualities soon won him the high regard of the nobles and gentry in the neighbourhood.

The nobles were so fascinated by the young Shivaji's manners that on one occasion they spoke of him with great enthusiasm in presence of the sultan, who at once expressed a desire to see a youth of such promise. It was, therefore, decided to introduce Shivaji to the court. But Shivaji was by no means pleased with the prospect of a meeting with the sultan. He pleaded with great modesty and submission that he was not inclined to flatter or to prostrate

3. The Basatin-i-Salatin gives details of the repressive policy of the Adilshahi sultans towards the Hindus, even in the haloyon-days of Sultan Mahomed Adul Shaha.

himself before the Mahomedans or their king, since they were so mean and insolent in their ways. He could not, he pleaded, tolerate the scant respect with which his religion and the Brahman expounders of that religion were generally treated in Mahomedan courts. When he passed to and fro in the streets, he constantly came across the hideous spectacle of cow-slaughter, and his blood boiled in his veins, and he could scarcely restrain the impulse to destroy the slayer of the kine. But out of regard for the feelings of his elders he had restrained his impulses. However he submitted that he could not contemplate calmly the prospect of visiting or paying court to Mahomedan nobles or princes or in any way coming in contact with them. When such a meeting took place, he could not breathe freely till at least he had changed his clothes!

Strange fancies these in the case of a youth of fourteen. It was pointed out to him by the officers in the service of Shahaji that his ancestors had risen to greatness by doing service to Mahomedan princes, that under the circumstances it was not becoming in Shivaji to hate the Mahomedans, and that in doing so he did not show proper reverence towards his elders. This sort of persuasion was also practised upon him through the mediation of his equals in age. Jijabai herself strove to persuade him to change his stubborn attitude, but without success. At last Shahaji called him to his presence and addressed him in this strain: "The Mahomedans" said he "are rulers of the land. What is the harm in serving them, while keeping the observances of one's own faith? It is a divine ordinance that in these unhappy times we should eke out our daily bread by serving the Mahomedans. If God had not decreed this, why should the Hindus have waned in power and the might of Islam waxed? I have risen to my present position and power by steering my bark according to the times, and to keep and continue what I have attained, it is but fair that you should seek to win the favour of the sultan." To all these remonstrances Shivaji, with all due deference and submission, returned but one answer: "I bow down," he exclaimed, "to the word of command, but I protest, I cannot look on a passive spectator of the cruelty towards kine and the desecration and degradation of our shrines and priesthood!"

It is plain that no one could have more regretted than Shahaji the anti-Mahomedan sentiments which had by this time taken root in the mind of Shivaji and already threatened to overshadow other considerations. But he did not deem it prudent to chastise with severity or crush under the weight of authority the impulses of such a promising youth. Not that he was himself a blind admirer of Mahomedan excesses, but it had always been a part of his policy to conciliate the followers of Islam, and thus to accomplish his objects in life. He does not seem to have much resented the obstinacy of Shivaji. But by constantly speaking upon the subject and by skilful appeals to Shivaji's

filial obligations he succeeded in inducing his stubborn son to consent to accompany him to the durbar. Shahaji had instructed his son about the court etiquette of saluting the sultan by bowing down to the ground, as soon as he came into his presence. But Shivaji only made a slight *salaam*, and seated himself by his father. The Sultan, observing that Shahaji was accompanied by a boy, inquired whether it was Shahaji's son, and was told that it was so, and that it was the first occasion for young Shivaji to come to the durbar. This answer was given lest the sultan should be provoked at the scant *salaam* made by Shivaji, unaccompanied as it was by the courtly prostration. The sultan presented jewels and robes of honour to the young jahgirdar as a mark of his favour. But as soon as Shivaji returned home, he discarded the courtly dress and, as though it had been a contamination, had an expiatory bath.

After this Shivaji often accompanied his father to the durbar, but on every occasion he made only a slight *salaam* and took his seat in the hall. This conduct naturally excited a suspicion in the mind of the sultan, and doubting whether this was done on purpose to affront him, the sultan once called Shivaji aside and questioned him point-blank about it. But Shivaji replied with great presence of mind that though constantly reminded to make his salute according to the etiquette of prostration, at the critical moment he forgot it and made the usual *salaam*. He could only make an apology for this and beg that the *salaam* might be taken to stand for a prostration. Besides he made no difference between the sultan and his father, and until he learnt there was a difference he would continue to make the *salaam*. The sultan burst into a fit of laughter at this witty reply.

On the way to the court, there were butchers' shops, in which were set out for sale beef and heads of slaughtered cattle. In the same manner hawkers sat in their booths with cooked flesh for sale opposite the palace gates. Shivaji was much offended at the loathsome spectacle and could scarcely restrain his indignation. But he had to restrain his angry feelings for a long while. Once it happened that while Shivaji was on the way to the palace, he came across a butcher in the act of slaughtering a cow. Shivaji instantly fell upon the offending butcher, belaboured him with blows and delivered the cow from the axe. This event was much talked of in the bazaars and even reached the sultan's ears but on account of the weight of Shahaji's influence, no inquiry was made into the matter. Shivaji was now quite disgusted with the constant scenes of cow-slaughter. He could bear it no longer, and thought to leave the Adilshahi capital for ever and never more visit the state durbar. With this resolution formed, he entreated his father not to press him any more to accompany him to the durbar, as he could not bear to look upon the cow-flesh booths on the way, that if as a servant of the state Shahaji was obliged to connive at these things, there was no such obligation upon him and that until

this cruel slaughter and traffic in cow-flesh was put a stop to he could not think of attending the court. Shahaji was in great perplexity. For the sultan was sure to remark the absence of his son, and what answer was he to give? In this perplexity Shahaji consulted Mir Jumla, an old and tired friend at the court. After some deliberation, it was decided that Shivaji might stay at home for the day and that they should broach the subject with the sultan if they found him in good humour.

Accordingly the two nobles, one a Hindu and the other a Mahomedan, attended the durbar and, seeing that the sultan was in very good humour, submitted their views in the audience-hall. Mir Jumla reminded the sultan that he was the father of his people, both Hindus and Mahomedans. The royal favour was bestowed equally upon all his subjects. There were both Hindu and Mahomedan officers in the service of the state, and it did the state great honour that it allowed its servants to follow each his own religion. According to the ideas of the Hindu religion, it was a gross sin to kill king and to traffic in cow-flesh. But cow-slaughter openly took place in the thoroughfare round about the royal palace, and flesh-booths lined the palace road. This was a mortal affront to the Hindu servants of the state, and to none more than to Shahaji, one of the sultan's most tired and honoured servants. But he did not dare, submitted Mir Jumla, to lay the complaint before the sultan. His son had not attended the court that day, as he could no longer put up with the abomination of cow-slaughter, and had quarrelled with his father upon the subject. It was for the sultan to restrain this license. The sultan listened calmly to this petition of Mir Jumla's and thought a good case was made out requiring his immediate intervention. He forthwith issued an injunction against cow-slaughter in the vicinity of the palace and forbade the sale of cow-flesh within the city-limits. No one doing this in defiance of these orders would receive any redress for any retaliation or chastisement he might have at the hands of the Hindus. A proclamation was made to this effect and the slaughter-houses were removed out of the city, to an isolated place to the south. The butchers were ordered to migrate in a body to this place. When these orders were carried out, Shivaji began again to attend the durbar in company with his father. The sultan was struck with his lofty spirit and address, and occasionally signalled his favour with presents of robes and other marks of honour.

As ill-luck would have it, one day a butcher with a basketful of cow-flesh was squatting at the city gate to sell his wares, just as Shivaji with a band of his chosen friends was coming out on horse-back. To glance at the butcher, to draw his sword and to cut him down was the work of a moment. The butcher's wife filled the air with lamentations and went to lodge a complaint at the court, and called the gate-keepers to swear to the truth of her

complaint. The sultan, however, defended the deed as a condign punishment for breach of his edict on the subject. He paid her a small sum for the expenses of her husband's funeral and fixed a small payment for her maintenance.

This event was naturally much talked of. Murmurs arose on all sides that in a Mahomedan capital the Mahomedans had no hononr. Had the Mahomedan rule already become a dead letter? Strange that an infatuated king should allow such things to be done in the light of day! And by whom? By one who refused to make obeisance by prostrating himself as a vassal before his lord. And to humour this insolent subject, this same figure-head of a monarch deported the honest butchers from the town-limits, to the great inconvenience of loyal Mahomedans. What depths of madness! This son of Shahaji's had lost all restraint and balance. He was running amuck among innocent Mahomedans. There was something rotten in this state of Bijapur.

Such mutterings could be heard in all the thoroughfares, by no means disguised or measured in language; and no doubt there was truth in this incoherent strain of impotent rage and abuse. These murmurs soon came to Shahaji's ears and filled him with dismay. Adroit man of action that he was, he could not help contrasting the lofty virtues and talents of his son with these erratic and wayward acts of violence. Was the noble life, of which such earnest was given by Shivaji's youthful brilliance, to be after all destroyed by the violence of his bigotry and race-hatred? Had he made so much of his shining virtues and placed him on the high road to fortune and preferment, only that he might by such a puerile indiscretion not only wreck his own career, but drag his father and the achievements of a life-time into ruin? These thoughts flashed across Shahaji's mind and filled him with dismay. His wide experience of men suggested to him how he should deal with this case. He saw that mere rebukes or punishment would have the most undesirable effects upon a mind so proud and impetuous as that of Shivaji. The advice must be seasoned with an appreciation of his noble qualities and a lively appeal to his dutiful instincts. Armed with this resolution he is said to have addressed himself to Shivaji in Jijabai's presence to the following effect: "You are still in your teens, young man, and have no experience of life. It does little credit to your understanding to fly into a passion and commit excesses without provocation. Not to bow down before the Mahomedans to put your hand to your sword at the slaughter of a cow, — is this the sort of conduct by which you can achieve success in life? If we are to serve the Mahomedans, we must be prepared to submit humbly to them in these matters. Had I followed such a course of action, where in the world should I have been? It was by serving the Mahomedans, young man, that your ancestors rose to greatness from the humble rank of a peon in the infantry to the highest eminence! Need I

describe the hardships and perils through which I have passed, in attaining to my present greatness? Reflect upon the trials and tribulations of your father in the uncertain times of the Nizamshahi dynasty, and count the steps by which, when I had emerged from those clouds, I have risen to the full height of my position in the service of this Adilshahi state. It is natural that I should desire you to tread in my foot-steps, please and conciliate the powers that be and extend your fortunes. Nothing can exceed your happiness and glory, if following your father's example, you behave with prudence and circumspection. Continue in these wild pranks and fancies, and the heavens themselves will not be able to save us. We shall be sent away in exile and disgrace, despoiled of our fortunes and possessions. That such a catastrophe has thus far been averted is due to the intervention of our influential friends at the court. But if we have friends, we have enemies, and the moment they get an opportunity of injuring us, it is but the question of an hour to bring down upon us the royal displeasure and drive us away into exile. I appeal then to your own sense of duty and prudence and self-interest, and trust you will at once amend your ways." Shivaji listened in silence and replied not a word.

Shahaji did not rest here, but got Jijabai to advise the young man in the privacy of her apartments with her own tender and persuasive eloquence. She dwelt on the respect for elders, the virtue of obedience and the grateful co-operation with the ambitious labours of a father like Shahaji. She appealed to the high traditions of his ancestors and conjured him not to stain the noble escutcheon, coming down from a long line of illustrious ancestors. Shivaji listened to these words of love and replied that the least wishes of his parents were sacred commands to him and he was always ready to act according to their wishes. "But in this matter," he protested, "I cannot alter my nature. I cannot reconcile myself to bend my knees before Mahomedans or to tolerate cow-slaughter and other insults to my religious instincts. Forgive me, but when my eyes fall upon such atrocities, my passions rebel in my breast and I am no longer myself; I am helpless. Whatever may be the inscrutable dispensation of Providence, it is clear I cannot continue to eat the bread of a Mahomedan prince. Something tells me it is pollution, a falling off from heaven, an obstacle to my religious ideals. To save me from such deeds in future let me be sent away, I pray, far off from this place, yes, far beyond the barriers of any Mahomedan state. If I say this, in all sincerity and frankness, it is not in a spirit of rebellion and disobedience, but from a perfect knowledge of the feelings and passions in my breast, I entreat and implore you to grant my prayer."

Jijabai communicated these wishes to Shahaji and pointed out the undesirability of punishing the boy for this sort of eccentricity, though otherwise so humble and docile and obedient. His mysterious hatred of

Mahomedans, she thought, agreeably to the feelings of a Hindu woman, must be a legacy inherited by him from a former birth. It was clear he could not be happy doing service to Mahomedans, and there was no use to seek to change his nature. She suggested that the best plan under the circumstances was to place him at a distance from the Mahomedan capital. If from love to his son he should keep him any longer, there was risk of his fortune and reputation being ruined. Shahaji sighed to hear this opinion of Jijabai and upon consultation with a few nobles who were in his confidence came to the same conclusion. About the same time, Dadaji Kondadev happened to come to Bijapur to submit the jahgir accounts, and he was ordered to escort Jijabai and Shivaji back to Poona.

Before leaving for Poona, Shivaji married a second wife at Bijapur. It is said that this second marriage took place at the express desire of the sultan. Once, when according to his custom Shahaji attended the durbar with his son, the sultan asked Shahaji whether his son was married. Shahaji replied that Shivaji's marriage was celebrated at Poona. The sultan ridiculed the marriage as celebrated in the absence of the father and far from the court and insisted that he should be married again in presence of the court, with all the pomp and circumstance befitting his rank. In deference to the sultan's wishes Shivaji was wedded to the second bride chosen from the select Maratha nobility. All the omrahs of the court and the sultan himself attended the wedding, at which great festivities and exchanges of bridal presents took place. This second wife of Shivaji was named Soyarabai.

As described above Shahaji had to bid farewell to his wife and son, who came back to Poona, in the company of Dadaji Kondadev. This parting was final: they never lived again under the same roof either at Poona or Bijapur. The fact is that Shahaji soon afterwards marched to the Karnatic and had no occasion any more to reside at Poona or Bijapur. Upon this slender foundation, some historians have raised a fictitious story of a quarrel between Shahaji and Jijabai, and the old quarrel between Shahaji and Lakhji Jadhav has been brought under contribution to lend a plausible colouring to this theory. But a close observation of the events as they have been thus far chronicled in these pages will show the absurdity of such a theory. For the first ten years after the birth of Shivaji, Shahaji was involved in such political complications that he had no leisure whatever to give to family life. Nor can the second marriage of Shahaji lend countenance to this view. For the custom of polygamy was much in vogue among the Maratha families in those times and still prevails among them. Hence a second marriage does not necessarily mean estrangement from the first wife. When Shivaji began his attacks upon the borders of the Bijapur territory it was natural that Shahaji tried to relieve himself of all responsibility by giving out that he had no connection with

Shivaji and Jijabai. But this at best was a transparent pretext. Had there been a real cleavage between husband and wife, Shahaji would certainly not have taken his wife and son to Bijapur, as he did, as soon as his fortunes were well established in the service of the Bijapur state⁴. If in 1643 again Jijabai and Shivaji were permanently stationed at Poona under the care of Dadaji Kondadev, we must credit Shahaji with having done so, on account of the insuperable difficulty of keeping Shivaji at Bijapur. It is clear Shahaji was convinced that Bijapur was no congenial residence for a young man obsessed by a virulent hatred of Islam. Judging by these circumstances, we find no reason to accept the theory of a family feud to account for the divergence of the fortunes of father and son and of husband and wife, which commences from this stage. Jijabai's elder son, Sambhaji, always remained with Shahaji, a sharer in his toils and supporter of his ambitions. From this it does not follow, however, that Shahaji's love and affection for Shivaji were in any way less.

4. Grant Duff (Ch. III) sets forth the theory of a disagreement between Shivaji's parents. Ranade (Ch. IV) assumes it as true. Mr. Sardesai assumes the theory of her disagreement with her husband but praises her for not seeking for shelter with her father's people (Marathi Riyasat, I, Page 159).