



THE LIFE OF SHIVAJI MAHARAJ FOUNDER OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

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Chapter - 5

The Preparation for Swarajya

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The Marathi chroniclers are silent upon the early preparations of Shivaji in furtherance of his ambitious plans. That ambition in its essence comprehended the deliverance of his country from a very unbearable Mahomedan tyranny, the raising of the fabric of an independent national government, and the expulsion of Mahomedan bigotry from the land. The scanty material available on the subject has been laid under contribution but with extreme caution and reserve in the account that follows.

On his return to Poona, as described in the last chapter, Shivaji went out on various reconnoitring expeditions over the surrounding mountain tracts under pretence of a personal inspection of his jahgir. Attended by persons who from birth were familiar with the geographical conditions of the upland parts of the Western ghats, and forming acquaintance with the chiefs and men of position in every town and village, he surveyed all those inaccessible regions with a close scrutiny into the mountain fortresses and places of military advantage. He examined the routes of communication, the by-paths and mountain defiles, the glens and the valleys. His companions admired the ardent zeal he manifested in informing himself about the topographical conditions of these mountains. It was natural for them to be astonished that this young heir of a rising jahgirdar should expose himself to sun and shower, surmounting ascents and precipices, defying the attacks of wild beasts and a hundred other dangers, apparently with no other motive than an insatiable

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thirst for geographical information. Young Shivaji spent whole days and nights, wandering from forest to forest and mountain to mountain, with the swiftness of foot and gliding movement peculiar to the aboriginal tribes of these mountains. It was not easy for his companions to conceive how necessary these tours of inspection were to the career to which the young chief felt himself to be called as it were by the voice of duty. While making these explorations he was silently achieving another object of equally great importance, that of winning over a loyal body of followers and supporters.

There was a kind of personal magnetism by which young Shivaji attracted every heart towards himself. A few moments conversation sufficed to draw with a magic fascination the highest and the lowest persons in the land to follow his least inclinations. In conversation with young Shivaji every man instantly forgot all the restraints of reserve and laid bare before him his most secret thoughts and the innermost impulses of life. Shivaji put all men at their ease with such magic tact and courtesy that all thought they were pouring out their hearts to one who was their equal. He listened to their tales of sorrow and anguish and won them over to his heart with the closest bonds of affection, friendship and gratitude. His purse was always at the call of these companions of his early boyhood.

This lavish generosity entailed a large expenditure which considerably exceeded his slender allowance. Dadaji remonstrated with him for this drain on the jahgir revenues "You are, of course, the master," said Dadaji, "and I am bound to make any payment to anybody you want on your account. But when you exceed your allowance, it must be at the expense of the annual remittance to be sent to Shahaji, and I shall have account for the shortage. You must therefore get your allowance increased, and I shall have no objection to your extravagance." Shivaji retorted it was not for Dadaji to be anxious about his prodigality, and he would procure his father's sanction for the expenses beyond his fixed allowance. Dadaji was quite mystified at this reply. He did not see that there was rhyme or reason in Shivaji's mad extravagance. He had no wide range of thought or outlook upon affairs. His practical wisdom and philosophy was directed to the one absorbing task of procuring the largest possible revenue for Shahaji from year to year.

Thus did Shivaji go on forming a large circle of clients and dependents, every one of whom was imbued with a thorough faith in his master's nobility of heart. Their enthusiasm kindled into a loyal devotion and self-sacrificing passion towards the person of Shivaji. It was a strange attraction they felt towards him. In this circle of dependents, a large number of those who had won the entire favour and confidence of Shivaji were the Mavalis. These were rude and semi-civilized people, with an aspect anything but prepossessing.

But under their rude exteriors, burnt hearts the most faithful and upright among Shivaji's followers. They had a strong faith in the unerring wisdom of their master and executed his most difficult orders with a display of sagacity and agility for which no one could have given them credit. They were brought up in the creed of passive obedience and unquestioning service. To them once a master always a master. Inured to poverty and frugal in their living, the employer who provided them with the means of coarse subsistence and clothing earned from them such a gratitude that they would court the greatest dangers and sacrifice their lives in his service. Dadaji Kondadev was the first to detect the sterling virtues in the heart of these rude mountaineers, and he maintained a corps of them in his service. Shivaji did not take long to ascertain their qualities. By his affection and generosity towards these humble people he made them his own. These mountaineers lived in the highlands of Shivaji's jahgir. They obtained a precarious living from the roots and shrubs in the mountain forests. They were quite at home in the zig-zag paths and mountain defiles over these woodlands. When Shivaji went on his tours of inspection he took these men as his guides. He soon became their idol. Only in him had they found in their experience of centuries one who was not repelled by their rude rusticity and sylvan manners, but who on the contrary treated them with courtesy and affection. This conviction bred in them a great pride and enthusiasm for their master, for whose prosperity they would renounce their fortunes, the ties of personal affection and life itself. Their spirit of self-surrender was many a time put to the proof, and no adversity, however great, could turn them away from the feet of the master. The leaders of these Mavalis, occupying the rank of *deshmukhs* among their tribes, were the earliest and closest of Shivaji's friends. The names of three of them have become famous in Maratha history. These three were Yesaji Kunk, Tanaji Malusare¹ and Baji Fasalkar. These three men commanded great influence among the Mavalis. They had a share from the beginning in all the young ambitions of Shivaji, and as the exigencies of his statecraft developed themselves in course of time, they performed the most glorious feats and exploits, sacrificing even their lives on the altar of personal friendship and devotion.

Although Shivaji's ambitious designs received scant encouragement from Dadaji Kondadev, he succeeded in winning over all the assistant staff of that loyal financier. When the *deshmukhs* or procurators of revenue, from the various towns came on business to Poona, Shivaji was for hours closeted with

1. Tanaji Malusare however was not strictly a Mavali *deshmukh*. He was a *deshmukh* of Umrathe in the Konkan lowlands beneath the Mavals.

them, setting forth his projects, asking their opinions and pleading for their adherence; and such was the fascination exercised upon their minds by his speech and courtesy, that the conversation invariably terminated in a league of enduring friendship. When Shivaji himself went in person on his tours of inspection over his paternal estates, he allowed no opportunity to elude him of interviewing the various deshmukhs and drawing them into his alliance. Such of the Maratha nobility and gentry in the neighbourhood as had occasion to visit him at Poona were entertained in such a lavish and magnificent style, that they invariably departed his fast friends and sympathisers. Much as they might criticise his comparative youthfulness and inexperience, they could not help testifying to his courage and enthusiasm, or acknowledging the practicability of the schemes he submitted to their approval. Their assent was promptly given, and their cordial sympathy and co-operation was secured to the cause. There was indeed a singular persuasiveness in the youthful hero, which, along with the cordiality of his offers, his religious enthusiasm and the unmistakable ring of sincerity in his hatred of Mahomedan rule, made even the most self-centred of them partake of his enthusiasm, reciprocate his feelings and embrace his proposals. They had besides the object-lesson of Shahaji's great triumphs; and the conviction was easily bred in them that the son of such a father would certainly lead them forth to victory and deliverance from the thralldom of Islam. Thus they became willing partisans in the cause; and the few who hesitated or refused soon had occasion to repent of their error.

It is time to review very briefly the influences which seemed to favour aid for the restoration of the national independence of Maharashtra.

The first asset in the cause of the national regeneration that Shivaji possessed was the example of his father. He had the great example before him of the defender of the Nizamshahi dynasty against the Moguls, and the reviver of that sovereignty after its extinction. It was plain that the ultimate discomfiture of Shahaji could only be ascribed to the overwhelming armaments of the Mogul invaders. The curtain had fallen upon these early activities of Shahaji, only to disclose a new scene of almost regal pomp and splendour in the Karnatic. The experiences of Shahaji, both in his victories and failures, had established the fact that with a proper band of disciplined followers it was not only possible but easily practicable to overthrow the Mahomedan power in Maharashtra and to establish an independent Hindu sovereignty in its place. Fired with a desire to outshine his father's greatness, Shivaji had the sagacity to perceive and to remedy the defects in his system. He often openly expressed his regret that Shahaji should have thought it necessary, after his distinguished career against the Moguls, to take service under Bijapur and shine by the reflected light of the Adilshahi dynasty.

Another circumstance which confirmed Shivaji in his ambitious resolves, was the discontent of many of the local chiefs and procurators of revenue or *deshmukhs*, with the Mahomedan government.² Emboldened by the prevailing disturbance and misrule, the inevitable precursors of revolution and change, these men carried on an uncertain war and brigandage among themselves. It was indeed a time of “*bellum omnium contra omnes*” and the Bijapur government exercised little of the rights of a sovereign state over these parts. It was almost an impossible feat to unite together these warring chiefs under a common standard or to give their bellicose spirit a higher purpose. Shivaji succeeded in the seemingly impossible task, healed the scars of private feuds and concentrated their powers to be brought into action for the higher ideal of a national enterprise.

The third circumstance, which it is necessary to advert to, is the fact that the districts of Poona, Supa, Maval and other tracts had for a long time been under the Nizamshahi state of Ahmednagar, and the troublous times of the Mogul invasions and the rapid vicissitudes through which the Ahmednagar state had passed had produced a general laxity of administration, with next to no supervision on the part of the central government. It is true indeed that these districts had at the time of the final partition and territorial adjustment passed under the Bijapur flag, but this change was so recent and the transfer had created such complications, that the Bijapur government had scarcely felt its way to bring under its direct authority these frontier parts of its dominions. There was a marked insufficiency of the military garrisons and equipments in the hill-forts, and the growing dissensions in the Bijapur council were not calculated to improve the situation. But the government of Bijapur had lulled itself into a belief in its security by continuing these districts in *jahgir* to Shahaji, who had held them from time to time since the times of Maloji. Dadaji Kondadev had administered the *jahgir* with great skill and wisdom. The people were happy and prosperous under a practically Hindu regime and had no desire to pass under the direct authority of the sultan. What wonder then that when they saw a noble spirit like Shivaji, himself the son of an approved leader like Shahaji, embarking upon the ambitious plan of a revived Hindu sovereignty and marked his never failing genius and enthusiasm in all his operations, they came forth to acclaim the hero and devote themselves unreservedly to his cause and service?

That Shivaji had the ability to conduct the affairs of a new monarchy from its very foundation has been amply shown by the original administrative

2. A good deal of light has been thrown upon the social, political and economic condition of the Maval *deshmukhs* by Mr. Rajwade in the later volumes of his work (Vol. 15 to 18).

reforms he introduced as a ruler, the rudiments of which he had learnt at home, in listening to the conversation of Dadaji Kondadev, Jijabai and the jahgir officers. To this was joined the experience he had gained during his short residence at Bijapur. On account of the pre-eminent position of Shahaji at that court, Shivaji was able to watch the despatch of public business on some of the most momentous questions then engaging the attention of that state. Shivaji's followers therefore had no misgivings on this ground. Nor on the other hand was there much fear to be entertained on the ground of the arduous nature of the task and the inadequacy of the means for its fulfilment. The peculiar facilities for the undertaking of such an enterprise, which were offered by the political situation of the time, Shivaji had seized upon with an intuitive judgment that well qualified him for the duties of a ruler. More than this could not be expected and surely was not needed for a general of such natural talents and abilities, stimulated as his ambition ever was by the impulsive zeal of his mother and the glory shed on the Bhonsle name by his father.
