

Introduction

The rich and productive India has many a time been invaded by tribes from the North for plunder or rule by conquest. All of them sooner or later became Indianised and merged with the main population as new castes. But the case of Muslims was different. Soon after *Mohammad's* demise, the new Muslim Arab hosts spread East, West, North and South by land and sea. Sindh was conquered but India had to wait for a couple of centuries before *Ghazni Mahmud* began marauding India. Muslim conquest spread easily to the East while Central mountain ranges of *Vindhya* and *Sahyadri* held up the onrush. However, this also was overrun and reached the tip of peninsula. The Hindu reaction succeeded in stemming the tide in the form of the Vijaynagara empire, which titularly proclaimed itself as lord of the two seas. The Arabian sea and the Bay of Bengal. It defended Hindu *dharma*, tolerated all other faiths and lasted from 1336 to 1656 A.D.

The *Bahamani* kingdom was established at about that time, eleven years later just North of *Vijaynagara*. Though divided into five states, four of the stronger Shahi states joined together to defeat *Vijayanagara* at the battle of *Rakkastangadi*. The weakened *Vijayanagara* state continued to exist losing province after province, like the sick man of India. But this sickly empire throughout its glory and decadence had set an example of resistance to the invader of self respect, good administration and Hindu Muslim communal harmony in the administration. The memory of heroism and sacrifice, service and fair dealing still persisted among the Indians at large, particularly in the South of the *Vindhayas*. They had been recently rejuvenated by religious revival to which normally a subject people resort in gaining independence.

The Mughals who were the ruling dynasty in the North spread over by and

by, became a ruling caste after the Indian fashion. They employed converts from the Hindus, who joined for love of religion or of lucre. But there still remained fighting castes, like *Rajputs*, *Marathas* and others. Sovereignty spelled jealousy and rivalry of relatives. Hence perforce, the Muslim rulers took advantage of the sons of the soil. Hence the rise of sardars of the Maratha community in the kingdom of *Ahmednagar*, *Bijapur* and *Golconda* which had succeeded to the Bahamani kingdom.

In course of time the loyal feudatories of Vijaynagara empire became independent under the Nayakas of *Madura*, *Tanjore*, *Jinji*, *Keladi* and *Mysore*, who vied with each other in extending their frontiers in the South.

SHAHAJI IN KARNATAKA (1636 TO 1664 A.D.)

In this background we find Shahaji the Maratha soldier making his debut in Shahi kingdoms to seek his fortune. He was born in *Verul* a village near *Daulatabad* in the year 1594, March 15th to *Maloji Bhosle*, who was employed in the service of *Lakhuji Jadhavrao*. The latter was a powerful noble in the Nijamshahi government. Both *Maloji* and *Shahaji Bhosle* rose to be the helpmates of *Malik Ambar*, the Abyssian minister of Nijamshahi, who became practically the defacto ruler. With scanty resources, a handful of brave Maratha and Muslim soldiers he withstood the Mughal invasion for fifteen long years.

The Mughal emperors *Akbar*, *Jehangir* and *Shahajahan* established their power in the North were eager to subjugate the Deccan. They had the advantage of enormous resources, and competent Generals who were keen to annex the kingdom of *Ahmednagar*. This was a training period for Shahaji who quickly grasped the tricks of the trade - the method of warfare and diplomacy in the practical school of *Malik Ambar*. He proved his mettle in the battle of *Bhatwadi* in the year 1624 against the combined armies of the Mughals and the

Adilshahis. This success made his mentor jealous and the subsequent strained relations drove Shahaji to seek service under Adilshahis sometimes in 1625.¹ Shahaji remained here only for 2 years and joined Nijamshah only to desert it after the tragic end of his father in law *Lakhuji Jadhav* and his family members under the Nijamshah. With a feeling of revulsion and disgust against the Nijamshah, Shahaji joined the Mughal service at the invitation of *Shahajahan* himself, as the *Mansabdar* of 5000.² From 1630 to 32 for two years he served the Mughals. But the internal dissension within the Nijamshahi and repeated Mughal attacks and the subsequent submission and capture of Husein Nijamshah and his treacherous ministers, the unworthy son of *Malik Ambar*, *Fatehkan* all these perturbed Shahaji so much that he decided to join the Nijamshah once again to make one more final effort to resuscitate the failing fortunes of the state under whose patronage he and his family had thrived so long.

With Adilshahi's assistance Shahaji mustered his energy against the ever surging Mughal forces for three terrible and agonising years. *Shahajahan* personally marched to the Deccan in 1636 January and closed down upon Shahaji from all directions. the Bijapuri and Golconda forces couldnot withstand the oncoming Mughal army and surrendered deserting Shahaji to his fate. Shahaji had to bear the whole brunt of this war single handed.

Shahajahan had won the greatest victory of his life after forty years of struggle, the Deccan was in his hands. On May 6th 1636, he sent a letter to Adilshah with terms of the treaty. This treaty sealed the fate of Shahaji.³ The sixth article of the treaty mentions that if Shahaji Bhosle sought Adilshah's service he should be entertained on the condition that he hands over to the Imperial officers "The forts of *Junnar*, *Trimbak*, *Pemgarh*, *Rajdhar* and *Tringalwar*, which were in his possession."⁴ Shahajahan also made it clear that Shahaji should be kept away from his stronghold i.e. former Ahmadnagar

territory and engaged him in the South.⁵

The treaty also redefined the boundaries of the Mughal empires and the southern kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda restricting the latter to the South and Eastern directions, across *Krishna - Tungabhadra* into *Mysore, Madras* and *Carnatic*. Hence forth the Shahi Sultans were debarred from interfering in the North. Therefore the Shahi Sultans divided the South among themselves, Golconda to extend along the East coast, below the Krishna delta and Bijapur to conquer Western Karnataka, *Malanad* and *Mysore* plateau. Here in these Karnataka conquest Shahaji was to play an important role, fulfilling his masters ambition of expanding the Bijapur kingdom into the South.

Adilshah knew the work of Shahaji hence undertook the responsibility of Shahaji, handing over the forts to the Mughals. He was also wary of the presence of *Shahajahan* for too long in Deccan, so persuaded him to leave for Agra. *6 By October 1636, Shahaji was surrounded by the Bijapur forces and he was forced to surrender the forts alongwith puppets Nijamshah. Both *Shiva Digvijay* and *Radha Madhav Vilas Champu*⁷ agree that Shahaji had sent *Naro Trimal Hanmante Mazumdar* to Bijapur for talks and *Muhammad Adil Shah* who readily agreed to take back Shahaji in his service. He needed people with grit and determination and Shahaji had proved it single handedly opposing the mighty Mughal power. *Jadhunath Sarkar* has very well summed up the work of Shahaji, before his entry into Adilshah court. "Eight years of ceaseless activity as the kingmaker, dictator of a revived Nijamshahi kingdom singlehanded long fight with Mughal had developed his powers of war, diplomacy and financial management. He had a strong loyal band of Maratha soldiers, experienced captains, expert civil servants, all this no Bijapuri General had achieved so far.⁸ Adilshah court had been torn between the *Deccanis* and *Pardesi* Muslim factions (foreigners like Persians, Arabs, North Africans and Abyssinians) and

to strengthen himself he needed a Maratha Shahaji. Bijapur army had lost his vigour as was proved in the recent war with the Mughals. The Southern provinces were in revolt and to bring them under control he needed Shahaji's expert services. The Sultan did not want to lose Shahaji to his rivals either Qutbshah or the Mughals as he knew, given an opportunity Shahaji might negotiate with them for his own advantage. Thus Mughal Adilshah treaty of 1636 brought Shahaji into Adilshahi camp. It was an year of preface to the fulfillment of Shahaji's political ambitions. His earlier service with the Nijamshahi, the Mughals and the Adilshahi's had not yielded positive results, forcing him to make and break relationships as and when required. His final allegiance to Adilshah bore fruit and his earlier disappointments helped him sharpen his astute qualities through long experience leading to ultimate success.

The Bijapur Sultans had to deal with Hindu kings and Hindu population. The Maratha party was purposely utilised to create a sort of equilibrium and was allowed to become powerful, often acting as arbitrators between Mughals and Adilshahi's, "to garner its political fruits the Hindu Shahaji was as much depended upon as the Muslim Asadkhan." ⁹

His success and failure in the past had made Shahaji wiser and he joined Adilshah not without conditions. He demanded a jagir in payment of his services from the Nijamshah territory. South of the Godavary, which the Bijapur Sultan had recovered after the fall of subsequent partition of Nijamshahi territory in 1636.

Grant Duff in his *History of the Mahrattas* clarifies that Shahaji was promised land before embarking upon his career in Karnataka. "Shahaji was being promised a Jagheer, in that quarter, consisting of the districts of Kolhar, Bangalore, Ouscotta and Balapur and Sera which were afterwards made over to

him and probably with a view of securing him by an interest in different parts of the kingdom. Mohammad Adilshah conferred on him a royal grant for the Deshmukhi of 22 villages in the district of Kurar (near Satara) the right of which had by some means devolved on government.) ¹⁰ Shahaji himself confirmed he got a jagir of four lacs and was commissioned to Karnataka ¹¹

Shahaji's other demand was that the expected proper treatment from the Bijapur sultans. Infact he insisted *Muhammad Adilshah* should consider him as 'Farzand (son)' The sultan abided by his promise and all his firmans (royal order) Mohammad Adilshah called him as '*Maharaj Shahaji Farzand* or '*Farzand Shahaji Raje*'. ¹² Even during Ali Adilshah's period this title was continued. The fact that a Hindu could call himself a *Farzand* of the Sultan in the Muslim kingdom speaks of the trust and faith sultan had in Shahaji. Yet another demand of Shahaji was that he should be allowed to have a standing army of 10000 of his own, recruited from *Junner, Pune, Supe* alongwith the necessary war material.

The reasons for Karnataka expeditions can be summed up as follows,

The 1636 Mughal Adilshah, Shahaji treat was not the only reason to send expeditions into Karnataka. The Persian chronicle '*Muhammadnama*' clearly indicates, 'As the Karnataka and Malanad had not been conquered before by any Muslim king of the Deccan, Muhammad Adil Shah thought of bringing them under his sway in order to strengthen and glorify the Islamic religion in the dominion of the Hindus'. ¹³ And to win for himself the title of *Mujahid* and *Ghazi* adds *Basatin us Salatin*. ¹⁴

Sardesai also confirms this by saying that *Muhammad Shah* was a fanatic in religious matters and was anxious to pull down the Hindu temples and

plunder the wealth for the glory of Islam. ¹⁵ As a matter of fact it is doubtful whether such things ever took place. The policy of the Adilshahis was broadly tolerant, since they ruled over predominantly Hindu population and their army consisted of many Hindu officers such as *Vedoji Pant*, *Raghoji Pandit*, *Sidhoji* and *Kanhoji*.

After the 1636 treaty both Bijapur and Golconda had to concentrate in the South. Both the powers competed with each other for greener pastures in the South. Between these two powerful forces *Srirangaraya* of Vellore, the last vestige of the Vijayanagara empire found himself completely crushed. His own feudatories were his worst enemies who to fulfill their own selfish ends deserted him and brought the Muslims into the South. This period tells us how 'slowly but surely the Muslim conquerors seized the former Vijaynagara empire and crushed its innumerable, disunited, mutually jealous warring Hindu feudatories across the entire Indian peninsula'. ¹⁶ These mutually jealous and warring Hindu feudatories were Kenge Hanumanayaka of Basavapattana a feudatory of *Keladi 'Ikkeri'* kingdom, the chief of *Sumaki Bagur* in Bangalore district, a feudatory of *Kempe Gowda* of Bangalore and *Chennayya* of *Nagamangala* of Mandya district of Mysore ruler and many more who openly invited and gave an opportunity for Bijapur sultans to interfere in their internal affairs. The sultan was only waiting for such opportunities and he promptly sent expeditions into Karnataka to make for his losses in the North.