

9. Pratapgad makes History.

Adilshah Perturbed : The Court of Adilshah at Bijapur was passing anxious days, due to the growing exploits of Shivaji. The Sultan summoned all his Sardars to court to take stock of the situation. All the Sardars including those known for their exploits and those comparatively unknown attended. Badi Saheba, the Dowager Queen, who personally looked after the Adilshahi administration from Bijapur was also present. The one question before the assembly was “How to bring Shivaji to book and break his revolt.”

Badi Saheba asked a straight question to her Sardars, “Tell me, who is willing to march against Shivaji and put an end to his rebellion?”

The court became silent. Everybody sat quietly in his place and started looking at the next person, for who would dare accept the challenge of fighting Shivaji ? Just then a giant of a man came forward and bowed respectfully before the throne. His name was Afzalkhan.

The Khan accepts the Challenge : The Khan accepted the challenge and picked up the betel leaf from the salver as a mark of acceptance. “Shivaji. Who is Shivaji ?” he said, “ I shall arrest him and bring him here or if that is not possible, I shall bring his dead body.”

Afzalkhan was one of the mighty Sardars at the court of Bijapur. His physical prowess and strength were

unbelievable. He could bend a crowbar with his bare hands. He was a past master in achieving his end by any available means. This Afzalkhan had accepted the challenge of bringing Shivaji to court, dead or alive. The court was highly pleased. Everybody thought that it was the end of Shivaji and that he would be brought to Bijapur either alive or dead.

Afzalkhan left Bijapur in great pomp. He was accompanied by a huge army fully equipped for battle. He was previously the Subhedar of Wai for twelve years and knew the country well. He marched on Maharashtra full of pride and confident of success.

Swaraj in Danger : At this time Shivaji was at Rajgad. He got the news of Afzalkhan’s movements. He immediately saw that his Swaraj was in great danger. But he did not lose courage. He knew that the Khan was full of stratagem and had a huge army with him. Shivaji’s kingdom was very small in comparison and so was his army. He could see that he could never hold his own in open battle against the Khan. His only hope was in some strategic move that would take the Khan by surprise. In consultation with Jijabai and with her blessings, Shivaji Maharaj shifted his headquarters from Rajgad to Pratapgad.

Afzalkhan’s Counter-move : When the Khan learnt that Shivaji had moved to

Pratapgad, he became very angry. He was aware of the difficulties in conquering Pratapgad. It was surrounded by thick forest and high hills. There was no proper approach road to the fort and it was very difficult to move his artillery. Besides, the jungle was full of wild life.

The Khan initiated many moves in the hope of bringing Shivaji down to the plains. He attacked the holy cities of Pandharpur and Tuljapur. He harassed the people. He was hopeful that these tactics would bring Shivaji down to the plains. But Shivaji proved too clever for him. He refused to leave Pratapgad. Then the Khan changed his tactics. In a spirit of apparent friendliness he sent a message to Shivaji. “You are like a son to me. Come and see me. Return our forts and I shall see that Adilshah makes you a Sardar at his court.”

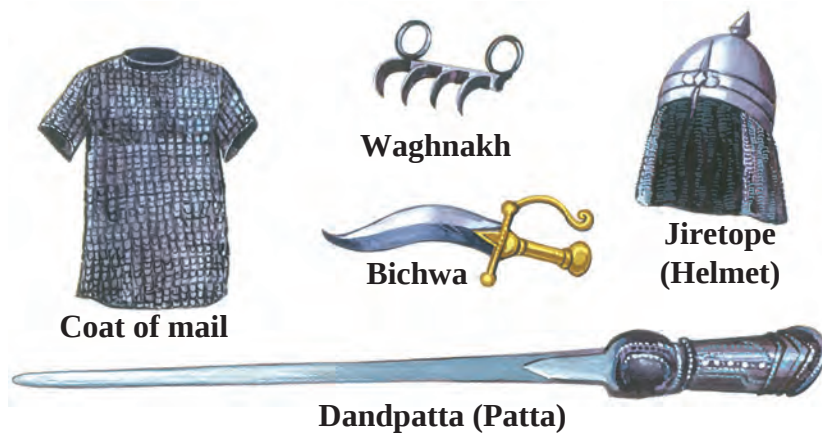
Tit for Tat : Shivaji quickly saw through the Khan’s offer. He was taking no chances. He decided somehow to persuade the Khan to come up to the fort. In reply to the Khan’s message he said, “Khansaheb, I am guilty of having captured your forts. I must have your promise of pardon for this. Please come and meet me at the foothills of Pratapgad. I am really afraid of coming down to the plains to meet you.”

This reply of Shivaji pleased Afzalkhan. Passing his fingers through his beard he smiled and said, “This is good news. What can Shivaji do against the mighty Afzalkhan? He has no guts to fight me. I shall myself go to Pratapgad and put an end to his life when we meet.” So he agreed to Shivaji’s proposal.

The Meeting Place : The ‘Machi’ on Pratapgad was chosen as the meeting



Fort Pratapgad



place. A date and time was fixed. It was agreed that each one would be accompanied by a servant and followed by ten bodyguards at a distance. A special road was constructed for the convenience of the Khan and a big shamiana put up for the meeting.

Every move of Shivaji was marked by great caution. He divided his army into small units. Each unit was told where to hide and when and how to act. He took every measure for safety and left nothing to chance. Many of his advisers tried to dissuade him from meeting the Khan. The Khan's word could not be trusted. But Shivaji brushed aside this advice and decided to meet the Khan as arranged.

Before the Meeting : On the day of the meeting, Shivaji visited Bhavani's temple in the morning and took 'darshan'. Soon after, he started putting on his ceremonial clothes. He wore his Surwar and coat of mail. Over the coat of mail, he wore a kurta and a flowing robe. On his head he placed the Jiretope (helmet) and tied a Mandil around it. He fitted Waghnakh onto the fingers of his left hand. Hidden inside the left sleeve was a Bichwa and he

carried the Dandpatta in his hand. He was now ready to face the Khan.

All the Sardars were waiting outside. Shivaji turned to them and said, "Friends, each one of you must carry out the duties assigned to you. I am sure the goddess Bhavani will see that we succeed. But if things go wrong and I am killed, do not lose heart. Install Sambhaji on the 'gadi', follow the commands of Maasaheb. Fight for Swaraj and extend its boundaries. Make the subjects happy. I shall go now to meet the Khan." He was accompanied by his Vakil Pantaji Gopinath and ten bodyguards including Jivaji Mahala, Sambhaji Kavji, Yesaji Kank, Krishnaji Gaikwad, Siddi Ibrahim and others.

When Shivaji reached the shamiana he saw that the Khan had already arrived. He was busy planning his future moves. Standing by his side was an armed soldier, Bada Sayyad by name. He was highly skilled in the use of Dandpatta. Shivaji came to the entrance of the shamiana, but on seeing Bada Sayyad, he stopped and would not proceed further. The Khan asked Shivaji's Vakil why Shivaji stood at the entrance instead of coming in.



Shivaji meets Afzalkhan.

The Vakil said, “He is afraid of Bada Sayyad. Please ask him to go away.” Bada Sayyad moved away and Shivaji stepped in. The Khan got up and said, “Come, Shivaji Raje, let us embrace each other as a mark of our friendship.”

The Struggle with the Khan: Shivaji Maharaj cautiously took a step forward and the Khan took him in his embrace. Compared to the giant Khan, Shivaji was short. He reached only as far as the Khan’s chest. At the same moment, the Khan held Shivaji’s neck in his iron grip and stabbed him on the side with his dagger. It tore apart Shivaji’s robe but the coat of mail underneath saved him. Shivaji, knowing that the Khan was trying to kill him, quickly thrust the Wagnakh in the Khan’s stomach. Drawing out the Bichwa with his right hand, he drove it

into the Khan’s stomach and tore apart his guts. The wounded Khan fell down. Khan’s Vakil, Krishnaji Bhaskar, came forward and attacked Shivaji with his sword. But Shivaji killed him with one stroke of the Patta. When Bada Sayyad heard the shouts and noise he rushed into the shamiana. As he was about to strike Shivaji, Jivaji Mahala came between them and killed Bada Sayyad with one stroke. ‘Because of Jiva, Shiva was saved’ became a common saying afterwards. Sambhaji Kavji displayed great bravery in this conflict.

The Rout of the Afzalkhan’s Army : Thus with triumph Shivaji went up to the fort. The gun boomed and gave the signal. On the instant, Shivaji’s troops came out of their hiding and attacked the Khan’s army. The Khan’s army was

completely unprepared for the attack and was caught in a difficult terrain. They could not even run away to save their lives. The Maratha troops chased them in hot pursuit and destroyed the whole of the Khan's powerful army. Fazalkhan, Afzalkhan's son who escaped with great difficulty, reached Bijapur. His account

of the disastrous campaign spread gloom over the whole of Bijapur.

Shivaji thus humbled the most powerful Sardar of the Bijapur Court. His fame spread everywhere. The songs of his exploits were heard in the hills and valleys of Sahyadri.

EXERCISES

1. Form a correct word from the given letters.

- (a) r t P a p a g d a
- (b) j a i i S v h
- (c) n h l z A a f k a

2. Write the answer in one sentence.

- (a) What challenge did Afzalkhan accept ?
- (b) What message did Afzalkhan send Shivaji in a spirit of apparent friendliness ?

3. Give the answer in two or three sentences.

- (a) Why did Shivaji have to use some strategic move to fight Afzalkhan ?

- (b) What did Shivaji say to his Sardars before going to Afzalkhan ?

4. Give reasons.

- (a) Afzalkhan became very angry when he learnt that Shivaji had moved to Pratapgad.
- (b) Gloom spread over the whole of Bijapur.

Activity

Collect a few Marathi proverbs or sayings that are related to historical events.

