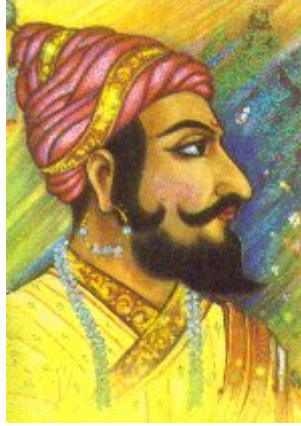


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A small boy is seated on the throne. A village Patel had dishonoured a helpless widow; in his limitless pride the Patel did not even think that a small boy would have the courage to hold an inquiry. Yet the young prince subjected this Patel, who proudly sported a thick moustache, to a proper judicial trial.

In a stern and majestic tone the young prince announced the judgement: both the hands and the feet of the Patel were to be cut off. All present were stunned at the firm devotion of the prince to justice. Not only were they wondering struck but also pleased beyond measure. The townsfolk began to say to one another: Ah! Look! How devoted to justice our young prince is, he is not in the least afraid of the wicked people. He metes out fit punishment to all that do wrong. He is kind and loving towards the poor, the downfallen and the wretched. He is ever determined to help them and to protect them. What is more, he regards all women as mothers. Surely when he grows up into manhood, not only will he save our land but also will uphold our Dharma. Therefore let us all stand by him.

Don't you wish to know who this young prince was? He was none other than Shivaji. At the time of this incident he was just

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fourteen. His small kingdom comprised the few small villages that skirted the township of Poona. His father was Shahaji who served as general under the Sultan of Bijapur. The father knew only too well the nature of his son. He felt joyous when he thought of the fearless Lion-like disposition of his son, which would never let him, bow down to any foreigner. How the father became aware of this fearless nature of his son is itself an interesting story.

On a certain occasion Shahaji took his son to the court of the Sultan of Bijapur. Shivaji was then not even twelve years of age. Shahaji touched the ground thrice and saluted the Sultan. He asked his son to do the same thing. But... Shivaji only retreated a few steps. He stood erect with his head unbent. His dazzling eyes seemed to carry with them his determination that he would not bow down to a foreign ruler. He walked back from the court with a Lion-like gait and bearing.

Till then no one had dared to behave in that manner at the court of the Sultan of Bijapur. All were wonderstruck at the boldness of the young boy.

Did such acts of the son enrage Shahaji? They did not. On the contrary he was mightily pleased at heart. He had not been fortunate enough to be an independent ruler. He sent his son to Poona, blessing him that at least he might become an independent ruler.

You may ask. How did Shivaji acquire all these noble virtues courage, heroism, love for the motherland and love of Dharma? Even when he was a little child his mother Jijabai used to tell him stories of heroes, of saints and sages who appear in the Ramayana, the

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Mahabharatha and the Puranas. As Shivaji listened to these tales of heroism and Dharmic deeds, he grew more and more eager to be like Rama or Krishna, Bheema or Arjuna. He was further blessed in that he had for his teacher and guides such a great man as Dadaji Kondadev was. He was also inspired by the memories of the glorious empire of the Vijayanagara Kings in Karnataka.

Shivaji was born in the fort of Shivneri in 1630. Strangely enough, his task of building up an independent kingdom too was to be accomplished with the help of forts only. Even at the young age of sixteen he captured one of the forts. It was the fort of Toranagadh. Torana! What a beautiful name, full of meaning and significance! It was as though he had woven an auspicious garland for independence. The saffron colored sacred banner, the Banner of the Lord, 'Bhagavajhenda', fluttered on the fort. Shivaji ordered his soldiers to strengthen the fort, this first fort that was to lead to independence. When the ground was being dug in the fort, the diggers saw hidden treasures. Was that the first gift of the Goddess of Fortune to the Goddess of Independence? Strangely, the poor diggers who came by so much wealth were not in the least move by thoughts of greed. They carried the entire treasure to Shivaji handed it over to him. They knew it was wealth granted for the struggle for independence. It belonged to the lord and they were not to touch it.

After Toranagadh Shivaji began to capture one fort after another. The news that Shivaji was capturing forts reached the Sultan of Bijapur. In order to crush Shivaji the Sultan hit upon a treacherous plan. He got Shahaji captured by deceitful means; then Shahaji was

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brought to the Sultan's presence and was thrown into prison. A rumor spread that Shahaji would be tortured and executed.

This news was like a thunderbolt to Shivaji who was rejoicing in the birth of an era of independence. His mother Jijabai was heartbroken. She felt as if the God of Death himself was about to snatch her sacred 'mangalya' (The symbol of a life-long partnership with the husband). On the heels of this news came two other bits of frightening news: one, that Fateh Khan, the valiant Sardar of Bijapur, was proceeding against Shivaji with a large army; another, that Farrad Khan yet another valiant general was attacking Sambhaji, the elder brother of Shivaji. It was clear the Sultan was posing these threats only to see that Shivaji gave up fighting and surrendered to him. If he did not surrender, if he continued to fight, his father's life would be in danger. Shivaji was worried, not knowing what he should do. At this juncture his fourteen year-old wife, Sayibai, said to him; "why do you worry yourself over this? See that your father is freed. See to it also that you retain this state of independence. Destroy your enemies." She was a worthy wife of hero like Shivaji, wasn't she?

Shivaji came to a decision. The commander of Purandaragadh was in the employ of the Sultan of Bijapur; Shivaji won his heart with soft-spoken, friendly words. He stationed a small army there. The soldiers of Shivaji fought against Fateh Khan who attacked the fort.

This was the first test of the battle for independence. So valiant were the men of Shivaji that Fateh Khan had to retreat and run away.

All this was victory. But how was he to save his father? Shivaji was deeply troubled by this thought. Suddenly, like a flash of lightning,

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a plan occurred to him. His intellect was as sharp as his arms were supple. Shahjehan was the Emperor in Delhi at that time. So he wrote to Emperor: "My father is kept captive by the Sultan of Bijapur. As soon as he is released my father and I will willingly serve you. We are very eager". The Sultan of Bijapur came to know of this. He knew well that the Emperor of Delhi was waiting for an opportunity to attack him. He feared what would happen to him if the Emperor decided to attack him. So with all due honor he released Shahaji. With his valor and his diplomacy, Shivaji thus overcame the first great danger to freedom

Shivaji was twenty-eight. By then Kondana, Purandara, Kalyan, Raigadh and other forts numbering forty flew the flag of freedom. It was also at this time that on the West Coast the English, the Portuguese and other foreigners set foot. Shivaji was apprehensive that some day these foreign armies might occupy the whole land. Intent on containing them he began building fortresses by the sea. He began to equip himself with warships and trained the navy. Shivaji was the first among those who in their farsighted vision saw the lurking dangers of foreign domination, and acted to check such aggression.

Sultan Adilshah saw how Shivaji's dream of Swaraj would come true, and felt both anxious and helpless. Every day he received news of some fort or the other falling into Shivaji's hands! The Sultan had a foster mother, by name Uliya Begum. She hated Shivaji like poison. One day she herself held a Durbar. The far-famed heroes of Bijapur all attended it. At that Durbar Uliya Begum threw out the challenge to

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all present: "if there is one amongst you who can capture and bring Shivaji captive here, let him accept this token gift of 'pan'." So saying she held out the silver platter in which was placed the ceremonial 'pan' and betel-nut offering. A seven-foot tall robust general stood up and accepted the gift. The general was Afzal Khan. He was a Pathan general who was as brave as he was cruel and deceitful. The Sultan sent a strong force of 25,000 soldiers to help him.

Afzal Khan first proceeded to destroy Bhavani of Tuljapur, the family deity worshipped by Shivaji. His axe broke. The idol of the Goddess Bhavani of Tuljapur was broken into pieces. The Khan desecrated this idol and another in Pandharpur. Shivaji was being informed of all these happenings daily. The Khan knew that as long as Shivaji was safely behind his fortresses and was in the jungle areas, it was difficult to defeat him. He hoped that Shivaji would come into the open plains and offer battle if he indulged in such desecration of temple, slaughter of cows and the molestation of women. Then it would be easier for him to defeat Shivaji.

Shivaji was not slow to understand this scheme; he knew that the Khan would overpower him if he came down from the forts and offered battle. So he made up his mind to proceed to the new fort of Pratapgadh which he had built in the forest of Javali. He then planned to attract the Khan to this place and fight him there. Just at this time he had a dream in which the Goddess Bhavani appeared to him and blessed him saying that he would be victorious.

Afzal Khan wanted to make Shivaji come down from the fort of Pratapgadh and meet him on the plains. Towards this end he sent a

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representative of his with secret instructions. He met Shivaji and politely informed him that Afzal Khan was a great friend of his father and that he did not intend any harm and Shivaji should come down to meet him. In reply, Shivaji sent a flattering letter through his own representative. He wrote, 'You are like an uncle to me. You must forgive all my crimes. You should come to Pratapagadh and uplift me and take me to the Sultan of Bijapur.' The humble and pleading tone of Shivaji's letter deceived the Khan. And the representative sent by Shivaji praised the courage of the Khan and made fun of Shivaji's cowardice. So the Khan was very much pleased.

The Khan arrived at the forest of Javali with all his forces. He stationed himself right at the foot of Pratapagadh. It was decided that Shivaji and Afzal Khan should meet as friends. It was also agreed that as Shivaji was a little terrified, Afzal Khan alone should meet Shivaji and the body guards of both should remain at some distance.

It was the night before this meeting. Who could sleep on such a night? Netaji, Tanaji, Kanoji and other trusted lieutenants of Shivaji came down from the fort and with their battalions, hid in the forest; they stood ready for action. They had been instructed that they should fall upon the enemy ranks and destroy them the moment they heard the booming cannon on the fort. The day dawned. As usual Shivaji bathed, and worshipped Lord Shiva. He put on a metallic helmet to protect the head and a metallic cost to protect he chest. In the scabbard at his waist were the dagger 'Bhavani' and a sharp knife. Meditating on Goddess Bhavani he went down from the fort, to meet Afzal Khan. They were to meet halfway down the hill; the place

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was hidden from view from the came of Afzal Khan. In the shamiana the Khan waited for Shivaji. He rose as soon as he saw Shivaji. Their eyes met for short while. Pretending to offer him the customary embrace of friendship, the Khan invited Shivaji. He stretched both his powerful and long arms in an act of embrace of friendship, the Khan invited Shivaji. It seemed as though it was an embrace of death itself. But whose embrace of death itself. But whose death? Shivaji too came forward and embraced him. At once the Khan drew out his sharp knife and biting his lips in anger thrust it into the side of Shivaji. Shivaji's steel vesttore with a grating noise, Quickly Shivaji released himself from the hold of the Khan and dragging out his own sharp knife thrust it deep into the entrails of the Khan. The Khan tried to run away. But Shivaji flung his sword at him and at one stroke the head of the khan fell down severed.

Shivaji stuck the severed head of the Khan on his sword and ran up the fort. Simultaneously the cannon also boomed as if it would cut opens the skies. The Khan's soldiers were rejoicing, forgetful of the situation in the thought that the Khan would have caught Shivaji. Suddenly the soldiers of 'Shivaji pounced upon them like leopards. Godess Tulaja Bhavani was now fully avenged. The Khan's forces were completely destroyed. Shivaji was all-victorious.

He sent Jijabai a gift. Can you guess what gift was? The head of Afzal Khan!

Shivaji fame as the slayer of Afzal Khan spread everywhere in our own country and abroad. A dark and dismal gloom descended on the Sultan of Bijapur. But Shivaji did not grow careless in the joy of

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victory. Taking advantages of this temp of victory he proceeded to other places and annexed quite a few forts of the Sultan of Bijapur.

The Sultan of Bijapur again chose another general and sent him to attack Shivaji with a force seventy thousand strong. The general, Siddi Jauhar, tried hard to capture Shivaji who was then in Panhalgadh. Even the English came to his assistance with their artillery. The attack gathered more and more strength. Shivaji hoped that the attack would lose its force and strength as soon as the monsoon set in. But in this Shivaji was disappointed. At the same time, in answer to a request from the Sultan of Bijapur, the Badshah of Delhi sent his uncle Shaista Khan with an army, a hundred thousand strong, to attack Shivaji. All thought that the hopes of Swaraj and the survival were completely blotted out.

During this period of great danger Shivaji's mother Jijabai took charge of the administration in the place of her son and managed the affairs ably. In the meanwhile Shivaji came to the decision that he should free himself from this encirclements. But how? For Siddi Jauhar guarded the fort from below. Shivaji thought of the less dangerous mode of escape. He sent to Siddi Jauhar through his envoy a letter offering to surrender. He had appealed earnestly that he would surrender unconditionally the next day and that he should be given pardon. The moment news of this surrender reached the soldiers of Jauhar they spent the whole night in great merriment. They hardly knew that such letters from Shivaji were sweet only to deceive. It was night of pouring rain, and terrible thunder and lightning. Just at that moment Shivaji and 800 of his men got down

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the fort and proceeded stealthily towards Vishagadh. The soldiers posted to watch the enemies were no doubt in their tents, by they were lost in merriment thinking of the surrender of Shivaji. Even the slightest suspicion would have resulted in utter destruction. Hence Shivaji's men were anxious at every step. But Bhavani's blessings wee with this mall battalion. They were able to escape unnoticed.

The group of Mavali soldiers carrying Shivaji in a palanquin ran faster and faster. As they ran the whole area was lit up with a large streak of lightning. One of the spies of Siddi Jauhar noticed the party and he ran to inform Siddi Jauhar of this escape. On hearing this Jauhar was thunder-struck. Still he did not lose heart. He sent for his son-in-law Siddi Masood. He was entrusted with the cavalry and was sent in hot pursuit of Shivaji. Shivaji too felt that it would be difficult to escape from this case. But once again he thought of plan. He sat in another palanquin and traveled in a different direction. There was a man in the army who was like Shivaji. This man put on the clothes of Shivaji and sat in the place of Shivaji, the soldiers captured him and proceeded to Siddi Jauhar. But when the captive was questioned it was found that he was a 'Shivaji' by name and was just a barber of Panhalgadh! All were put to shame.

So Siddi Masood again took up the chase. By that time Shivaji and his soldiers had already covered twenty-five miles and were now near the valley of Gajapur. Vishalgadh was a few miles from there. Five thousands soldiers of Masood raced towards the group. Shivaji had a brave lieutenant, a man strong like Bheema. He was Baji Prabhu Deshpande. He asked Shivaji to proceed to Vishalgadh

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taking half the force with him. With the remaining half he was their face the mighty battle on of Siddi Masood. It was a sight to see Baji Prabhu wielding two swords in both his hands.

In that narrow valley Baji Prabhu began cutting down the Pathan soldiers who rolled in again and again like waves. In the battle he too was wounded all over the body and blood was flowing out. In spite of this he gave battle till the evening. Many of his soldiers too fell in this battle. Finally Baji Prabhu fell a victim to an enemy's sword that severely wounded him. At the same time Shivaji had overpowered the soldiers who were attacking Vishalgadh, and climbing up the fort let the cannon resound in Victory. As Bajji Prabhu lay dying he heard this sound. He died in peace, happy that his efforts for his master had not been in vain. The valley was made scatted by the blood of this martyr. From hence this valley came to be known as Pavan Khindi or the Sacred Valley.

The news that Shivaji escaped from Panhalgadh and reached his capital fell on the ears of the Sultan of Bijapur. He felt like one who was struck by a thousand thunderbolts at once. He could not summon again the courage to attack Shivaji. But Shivaji had the other danger from Shaista Khan to attend to. How was he to free himself from this? For this Shivaji chose the month sacred to the Muslims when they observe Ramzan. It was a time when the community would fast all day and then eat sumptuously and be fast asleep at night. The day also was the anniversary of the coronation of Aurangzeb. Need it be said that on that day there would be all the revelry and merriment of a great feast? On that day Shivaji came

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down from Raigadh with an army of two thousand soldiers. He stationed himself at a distance of some two miles from Poona. Shaista Khan was then camping in the Lal Mahal at Poona, Where Shivaji had been brought up as a boy. In and around Poona a hundred thousand soldiers of the Moghul Emperor were stationed.

A childhood friend of Shivaji by name Babaji moved towards the Moghul camp with a small force of soldiers. Behind him proceeded Shivaji with another small troop. Babaji entered the city, chatting and shouting. The sentries stopped him and his men. But without a moment's hesitation, Babaji said, "We too, are the Khan's men; we just went out to keep watch and are now coming back." He and his men disregarded the sentries and quietly entered the city. Shivaji's soldiers followed them. Shivaji went directly towards the gates at the rear of the Lal Mahal. From there he went to the Kitchen and cut down all who were there. From there he proceeded to the place where Shaista Khan was sleeping. He had to pull down a small wall that obstructed his entry. A servant heard the wall collapse and went to inform the Khan of what was happening. But the Khan was so sleepy ' that he drove the servant away saying that it must be some rat in the kitchen.

Shivaji and his men rushed in. By that time the entire Lal Mahal was raring with shouts which announced that the enemy had broken in. The wives of Shaista Khan hid him behind a curtain. Shivaji burst in and flung his sword. Three fingers of the Khan, as it were for the three syllables of the name of Shivaji, were chopped off by this throw.

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The Khan jumped down from the window. By then the Moghul army had surrounded the Lal Mahal. In this utter confusion Shivaji and his men shouted, "Catch the enemy, cut him into pieces!" They opened the doors of the Lal Mahal and went away. They' escaped and raced to Simhoadh on the horses that were waiting for them in readiness, This incident convinced Shivaji's enemies that he was not just a mountain rat' but some sort of a fiend or demon, of superhuman powers. Aurangzeb was put to unbearable shame and even transferred Shaista Khan to Bengal as a punishment.

To build up such a vast kingdom independently and to rule it with an army and a navy, Shivaji needed lots of money. Where could he hope to obtain so much wealth for the purpose? He decided to extract this money from Aurangzeb himself who was enjoying the wealth of this country. In those days Surat was known to be almost the city of Kubera, the God of Wealth. So he attacked Surat on one occasion and then emptied the city of its great wealth.

This was the limit of Aurangzeb's patience and he was in a great fit of rage. But he checked himself from leading an army against Shivaji. He had known well how sharp the tearing nails of this mountain rat' were. So he thought of a plan. He decided that he should send a 'Lion' to overpower this lion. He chose for task the King, Raja Jayasimha. (Incidentally, 'Simha' means a lion.)

Jayasimha was a great warrior and a hero. He was also a clever general. What a shame that a man like him should be subservient to a foreigner who was ruling the land! Jayasimha proceeded south with his large army. He won over the Sultan of Bijapur to his side. The

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battle against Shivaji began. All of a sudden Shivaji wrote a letter to Jayasimha informing him that he would agree to a friendly compromise. What was more, he met Jayasimha and told him that he would remain loyal to the Badshah at Delhi.

Shivaji was a lion that had grown up independently in the mountain ranges of Sahyadri. How then did he all of a sudden agree to bow down to the Badshah? All were baffled. Many thought that there lay behind this some secret plan. It is possible that Shivaji had planned to go to Delhi on the pretext of serving the Badshah as a dependent and then to put an end to the life of Aurangzeb in a direct encounter. This was perhaps a venture of greater heroism and sharper strategy than ever before in his life. Accordingly, Shivaji proceeded to meet the Emperor, Aurangzeb. His son Sambhaji also accompanied him. At home, in the land of freedom, all were filled with great anxiety. As he proceeded, the Hindu community welcomed him and with great respect bowed down to him. Shivaji reached Agra in order to meet Aurangzeb. The latter too was equally tactful. He never let Shivaji approach him. He bid him stay at a distance in the court. This 'was a great disappointment to Shivaji's hopes. Aurangzeb also acted in a manner ' that insulted Shivaji. Aurangzeb did not, keep the promise that he would treat him with respect. Naturally Shivaji was greatly enraged. Ignoring Aurangzeb he left the court.

Shivaji was now in great danger. For Aurangzeb was not such a fool as to let an enemy who had come within his reach escape easily. He ordered Shivaji to be imprisoned and to be executed also.

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In spite of the gravity of the situation Shivaji did not lose heart. At this critical hour his intellect and his courage shone more brightly. Suddenly Shivaji 'took ill.' He soon grew worse'. Shivaji begged of Aurangzeb that his Maratha soldiers might be allowed to return. Aurangzeb felt relieved 'and permitted them to go. Shivaji began distributing sweets to the Fakirs, mendicants and ascetics of the town hoping that his illness may be cured. He began sending gifts 'also to the wealthy in the town. Aurangzeb permitted all these. Even, such a very clever man as Aurangzeb had no doubts. No Vaidya or Hakim could improve Shivaji's 'condition'. The day of Shivaji's execution had been fixed. On the previous day Shivaji's 'illness' grew very serious, and he lost 'consciousness'.

As usual the baskets that would carry the sweets were brought in. Shivaji who was lying on his 'sickbed' suddenly jumped into one of the baskets and so did his son Sambhaji. Immediately the servants put on the lids and carried the baskets away.

The sentries who had been examining the baskets were convinced by long custom that they contained nothing but sweets. Even on that day the chief of the sentries, Polad Khan, examined a few of the baskets. They contained merely sweets. Luckily the Khan did not chance upon the baskets in which Shivaji and Sambhaji were hidden. That was by the grace of Goddess Bhavani, coupled with the forgetfulness of the Khan. He must have meant 'Let him live' when he said, 'Let the baskets go.'

Inside the prison where Shivaji had been lying a little while before, a friend of Shivaji by name Hiroji lay down. He put on the

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royal ring, which Shivaji had given him. He lay down, with his hand, which showed this ring thrust out. The rest of the body had been covered with the blanket. Madari, an innocent looking lad, was massaging the limbs. Polad Khan used to peep in now and again just to find out how Shivaji fared. The day came to a close and it was nightfall. The 'Shivaji' who was lying there all the time got up. He made up the blankets and the pillows to look like a man on the couch. Putting on his usual clothes, he came out and announced to the sentries that the condition of Shivaji was very serious and that it was a matter of a few hours for Shivaji. He said he was going to bring some medicine. So saying he went out. Madari too quietly followed him. Both went away never to return. Inside, on the couch, lay the huddled imitation of Shivaji. Outside the prison the sentries stood with swords drawn.

The day dawned. That was the day appointed for the execution of Shivaji. Polad Khan came in. There was a strange silence. He grew suspicious. As he stepped in he saw 'Shivaji' asleep. For a moment this sight put some comfort into his heart. But there was no movement. Thinking that Shivaji, might have died the Khan came near and pulled back the blanket. He was shocked to see just the bare bed and the pillows! Shivaji had disappeared. You can imagine the feelings of Polad Khan, and more important still, of Aurangzeb. They must have felt the agony of being stung at once by a thousand scorpions. Aurangzeb at once ordered his army to capture Shivaji and the army set out in all directions.

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By this time Shivaji and Sambhaji had already mounted the horses that were kept in readiness for them and proceeded south. They dashed away at great speed. On the way they were sheltered comfortably in the Maths established by Swami Samarth Ramdas.

Like a holy man in the robes of a 'sanyasi', Shivaji finally reached Raigadh. For a while even his mother Jijabai could not recognize her son. But when she understood who it was, what a shock of recognition! Who can describe the ecstasy, at such a moment, of a mother who had born such a noble son?

When the news of Shivaji's escape from Agra reached the ears of his enemies in the south, they were all speechless and helpless. Not just that Shivaji's fame spread all over India. Shivaji had thrown dust into the eyes of the greatest schemer and politician like Aurangzeb and had escaped from the latter's capital where all the twenty-four hours of the day sentries stood with drawn swords. He had evaded the gaze of the Moghul soldiery for a distance of a thousand miles. The world had never before heard of such daring and cleverness.

Shivaji established an independent empire that was a source of inspiration to all the Hindus. Yet he had not been crowned in accordance with the rites of the Shastras. Many, therefore, did not feel that he was truly the - King. So a great pundit from Kashi came down south to remedy this shortcoming in the life of Shivaji. This great pundit, Gagabhatta, crowned Shivaji King by name, in accordance with the rites of the Shastras. This great event took place in 1674. Shivaji was then 44 years of age. The towering fort of

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Raigadh became the capital. After touching his mother's feet and obtaining her blessings, Shivaji sat on a golden throne on the fort. Gagabhatta held over his head the golden umbrella, the symbol of Kingship, and proclaimed that Shivaji had become the Chatrapati. Women offered 'arati'. Sages and saints blessed him. The people assembled shouted in great joy "Victory to Shivaji Maharaj!" The cannons over the forts resounded. The Sultan of Bijapur and the English acknowledged Shivaji as an independent King and sent him gifts. Samarth Ramdas sang in praise of this great event: "The land and its Dharma have been uplifted. A kingdom of bliss has arisen.

Shivaji did not just content himself with establishing an independent kingdom by defeating his enemies. He also undertook reforms to make his people happy and contented. To him the people were the Gods and he would let no one harm them. His soldiers had to go far to defeat the enemies. To these soldiers he had laid down a firm rule: "No harm should come to the people whom you meet on the way. Their standing crops should not be touched." Shivaji would always mete out severe punishment to those who disobeyed his orders. Shivaji was all affection for the poor farmers of villages. They were all, at that time, groaning under the injustice of wealthy Zamindars. Shivaji took over the land of such Zamindars and distributed them among the tillers of the soil.

Untouchability too was rampant, among the Hindus at that time as it is today. Society had branded some amongst its own members untouchables and had kept them at a distance from the others. Shivaji loved them also. He invited them to join his army and

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promoted them, to high positions and offices in it. They too served Shivaji and looked up to him with great devotion. They struggled hard for the establishment of Swaraj. Many of them gave up their lives too fighting. Shivaji set an example to all Hindus that they belonging to the same faith should not hate one another.

Shivaji was also greatly interested in the education of the people. Sanskrit language had lost its glorious position. Everywhere Persian was being held up to esteem. Shivaji saw to it that Sanskrit words were substituted for Persian words.

Sometimes, Hindus who had been forced to become Muslims wished to go back. But the Hindus refused to take back such converts. Shivaji felt that this was not right. So he reconverted all those who wished to return to their old faith. He also cast aside the foolish belief that it was sinful to undertake a journey on the seas. He undertook expeditions on the sea and established forts.

Shivaji was very angry with people who were corrupt or who worked against their country. He hated those who betrayed the land. He would have punished even his own son if the son had turned against his country. Shivaji was an embodiment of justice. He never showed any special favors to his relatives. He always encouraged those who were virtuous and meritorious. This enabled those who were virtuous to progress and occupy high places. There was no scope for selfish contrivers in his kingdom. In this manner Shivaji revolutionized every department of life.

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