

10. Baji Prabhu and the Memorable Battle of Ghodkhind

Shivaji Conquers Panhala – Adilshah Gets Angry : While Bijapur was still mourning the death of Afzalkhan and the complete rout of his army, Shivaji captured the Panhala fort from the Bijapur garrison. This threw Adilshah into a fit of wild rage. He could neither eat nor sleep. He despatched another Sardar, Siddi Jauhar, against Shivaji. Siddi Jauhar had a huge army with him. Fazalkhan who wanted to avenge his father's death, also accompanied him.

The Siege of Panhalgad : Siddi Jauhar was brave but ruthless. He was a strict disciplinarian. He laid siege to Panhalgad and confined Shivaji within the fort. The rainy season was approaching and Shivaji thought that once the rains came, Siddi Jauhar would lift the siege. But Siddi Jauhar did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, with the arrival of the monsoon, he further tightened the siege. Supplies in the fort were running out. Shivaji was in a fix. Since he could not force Siddi Jauhar to lift the siege by an open battle, he decided to deceive Siddi Jauhar by a clever ruse. He sent a message to Siddi Jauhar to the effect that he would shortly surrender the fort. Siddi was happy.

Siddi's troops were already tired of the long siege. They were very pleased to hear that Shivaji agreed to surrender.

They relaxed the watch and indulged in food, drink and music.

Shivaji Escapes from the Siege : A plan was hit upon to escape from the siege. Two palanquins were kept ready. One was meant for Shivaji in which he would proceed using a difficult route. The other would be occupied by another person disguised as Shivaji. This palanquin was to leave by the 'Raj-dindi'. This other palanquin would be easily spotted by the enemy forces, and it would be captured by them. While the enemy celebrated the capture of Shivaji, the real Shivaji would escape by the difficult route. This was the plan. For this a brave youth undertook this task. He resembled Shivaji in looks. His name was Shiva Kashid. He was a hairdresser in Shivaji's service. He was courageous and shrewd.

As planned, the palanquin carrying Shiva Kashid came out of Raj-dindi. It was a dark night and it was raining heavily. Still, some enemy soldiers were keeping watch. They captured the palanquin. They thought that they had caught Shivaji himself and took the palanquin to Siddi's camp. Jubilations began in the camp. In the meanwhile, Shivaji escaped from the fort by the difficult route. He was accompanied by Baji Prabhu Deshpande and some select

soldiers. The Bandal Deshmukh army accompanied them. After some time, the plot of Shiva Kashid was exposed. The furious Siddi killed him then and there. Shiva Kashid sacrificed his own life in the cause of Shivaji and Swaraj. Thus, he became immortal.

When the Siddi learnt that Shivaji had given him the slip, he was livid with rage. Immediately, he despatched his Sardar Siddi Masaud, accompanied by a big army, in hot pursuit of Shivaji. At daybreak, the pursuing horsemen caught up with Shivaji at the Pandharpani stream. Shivaji was now in real trouble. With the greatest difficulty he and his men crossed the Ghodkhind.

Baji Prabhu, the Brave : The angry troops of Siddi were fast galloping towards the Ghodkhind pass. Shivaji saw that it was impossible to reach Vishalgad before the enemy overtook them. He said to Baji Prabhu, “Baji, this is a very critical situation. The road ahead is steep and the enemy is right on our heels. It is now impossible to reach Vishalgad. So let us turn back and face the enemy.” Baji Prabhu understood the great agitation going on in Shivaji’s mind. The enemy was fast approaching the pass. The life of Shivaji and, therefore, Swaraj, was in danger. He said, “Maharaj, you must proceed to Vishalgad. Take a handful of soldiers with you. I shall defend this pass and will not let the enemy cross it. I shall lay down my life in defence of this pass if need be. If I die, there will be many

other Bajis to take my place. But no one can replace you. Our Swaraj needs you. The enemy will attack in large numbers. We cannot hold out against them with our limited force. Please do not wait. Go ahead. We shall stop the enemy at the entrance to the pass. We shall not let him advance till we know that you have reached Vishalgad safely.” Baji Prabhu’s brave words and his sense of loyalty brought tears to Shivaji’s eyes. He was most unwilling to sacrifice this gem of a man for his personal safety. But he had no time to think of these things. He wanted to achieve his ideal of Swaraj. He fondly embraced Baji and said, “We shall move ahead towards Vishalgad. As soon as we gain the fort, guns will be fired. That will be the signal of our safe arrival. As soon as you hear the gun-fire, abandon the pass and follow us to the fort.”

Baji’s Defence of the Ghodkhind Pass : So Shivaji left for Vishalgad leaving Baji Prabhu to defend the pass. Baji made a low bow to the receding figure of Shivaji and then prepared himself for battle. He took a sword in his hand and stood at the entrance of the pass. He divided his company of soldiers into small groups and posted them at suitable points. The Mavlas took their positions and collected huge boulders and stones to be used as weapons. The Mavlas across the pass were now a strong barrier in the path of the enemy. By this time the enemy had reached the mouth of the pass and one could hear their war cries. Baji



Shivaji and Baji Prabhu Deshpande in Ghodkhind

addressed his troops and said, “My brave soldiers and comrades, be prepared. You may die fighting but do not desert your post. Do not allow the enemy to conquer the pass, no matter what price has to be paid.” So Baji Prabhu and his Mavlas stood at the mouth of the pass, firm and fearless, awaiting the enemy. The pass was difficult to cross, there being only a narrow and a zigzag passage across it.

At the other end, Shivaji was speeding towards Vishalgad. The fort was still some distance away and it would take Shivaji at least two hours to reach it. If Baji Prabhu could hold out for those two hours, Shivaji would be safe.

The Battle of Ghodkhind : By now the enemy was at the mouth of the pass where a fierce battle was in progress. The Mavlas who were adept at the use of the sling harassed the enemy with showers of stones and boulders from the hill-top and killed many of them. The first batch of the attacking troops withdrew in confusion. Another batch took their place. Baji Prabhu urged his troops into the attack. The Maratha war cry “Har Har Mahadeo” echoed through the hills and the brave Mavlas cut down the enemy troops in the fierce and desperate attack. Through the din of battle they heard their captain shouting encouragement to them : “Bravo, my lads, go ahead, attack and destroy the enemy”. The second batch of the enemy troops was also defeated.

Shivaji was by now, almost at the foot of Vishalgad. Vishalgad was also besieged by the enemy. Shivaji fought

through the ranks of the besieging troops and was on the last lap of his ride to safety.

Baji the Brave : In the meantime, the battle at the pass continued unabated. Enraged at the defeat of his first two attacks, Siddi Masaud organized and despatched a third batch of troops against Baji Prabhu and his brave men. They surrounded Baji Prabhu who fought with great courage. Though wounded and attacked from all sides, with his body covered with blood, Baji would not withdraw from the pass but continued the fight. At the same time, he urged his Mavlas to attack the enemy. Disheartened by the fearful attack, the enemy again withdrew. But Baji was fatally wounded. He was hanging on to life just to hear the sound of gun-fire from Vishalgad.

Ghodkhind becomes Pavan Khind : And then the sound of gun-fire was heard from Vishalgad. “Maharaj has reached Vishalgad. I have done my duty. Now I can die in peace.” So saying, Baji breathed his last on this historic battlefield. When Shivaji heard this news on Vishalgad, he was greatly grieved. He exclaimed, “Baji Prabhu Deshpande laid down his life on the battlefield in the cause of Swaraj. The Bandals gave a great battle.”

It was because of brave patriots like Baji Prabhu that Swaraj was won. Their blood made the Ghodkhind a place holy in Swaraj. Ghodkhind became immortal in history as ‘Pavan Khind’. We pay our repeated homage to the brave Baji Prabhu and his brave men.



EXERCISES



1. Fill in the blanks :

- (a) Siddi Jauhar laid a siege to
- (b) Baji Prabhu's sense of brought tears to Shivaji's eyes.
- (c) Ghodkhind became immortal in history as

2. Write the answer in one sentence.

- (a) What message was sent to Siddhi Jauhar by Shivaji, in order to escape from the siege ?
- (b) Why did Siddhi Jauhar become livid with rage ?
- (c) What did Shivaji say to Baji Prabhu, while leaving for Vishalgad fort ?

3. Write the answers in two or three sentences.

- (a) Which plan was hit upon for Shivaji's escape from the siege ?

- (b) What preparation did Baji Prabhu make to halt the enemy in the Ghodkhind pass ?

4. Give reasons.

- (a) Adilshah was thrown into a fit of wild rage.
- (b) Shiva Kashid in service of Shivaji Maharaj became immortal.
- (c) Pavan Khind became immortal in History.

5. Write the name of the person :

- (a) Brave and yet was cruel
- (b) Gave most gallant fight at the 'Ghodkhind' pass
- (c) Escaped from the siege

Activity

Obtain more information about the dedicated people in the service of Shivaji Maharaj with the guidance of your teacher.

