

Shivaji*

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In popular perception the upheaval of 1857 is considered to be India's first war of Independence. The perception is further heightened by the prominence gained by some great personalities who found a place in popular folklore; a prime example being Rani of Jhansi. This book serves to illustrate the fact that Shivaji was the first Indian King who sounded a clarion call for Swarajya. Surely, it was Shivaji who earned this honour as practically out of nothing he carved out a kingdom from the entrails of three hostile kingdoms. He was a practitioner of a form of warfare now known as asymmetric warfare. Many of the principles of war enunciated and practised by him are valid to this day.

The book is laid out in 23 chapters with 11 maps. This well researched work unfolds to fire the reader's imagination and curiosity. Shivaji's childhood was that of a fugitive with his mother a prisoner of the Mughals, but he lived among free and wild tribesmen who honed him for his future role. Early in life under wise tutelage Shivaji developed fine leadership qualities, concern for the poor and downtrodden, and a keen sense of justice and fair play.

The capture of Torna Fort is well described and is reminiscent of what Pakistan did at Kargil in 1999. Shivaji's exploits now grew bolder and soon like Robin Hood he attacked caravans and distributed the proceeds among the poor. With the defeat of Afzal Khan, Shivaji's reputation had reached its apogee. The Battle of Ghod Pass is graphically described and is a parallel with King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans.

The attack on Shaista Khan sent ripples across the country. Shivaji's legend grew and he was now believed to have magical powers. The common Maratha thought him to be an incarnation of a deity. So high was Shivaji's reputation that when he was granted

***Shivaji : A Great Leader, Statesman & Champion of 'Swaraj'**. By Colonel KD Sharma, (Satara: Kargil Offset Printing Press, 2013), pp.. 398, Rs 550/-, ISBN: NA.

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an audience before Aurangzeb the latter took precautions against his 'magical powers'. The story has a love angle too. Aurangzeb's eldest daughter fell in love with Shivaji, was not allowed to marry him and remained a spinster all her life. History seems to have ignored the effect of her influence in Shivaji's escape from Aurangzeb!

Given the circumstances of his birth, it is not exceptional that he became a great guerrilla leader, but what really was remarkable was Shivaji's analysis of the requirement for a navy for the domination of the seas. Shivaji wanted a navy to defend his coastal possessions, fight pirates, take on Portuguese Navy and raid the Mughal ships. He did this with his customary zeal and efficiency. The fleet was supplemented by a chain of naval fortresses and naval bases. The author has done well to describe these fortresses, explain Shivaji's naval tactics and compare the maritime powers of that time in the region. Shivaji was the first Indian king to use navy in support of land operations. He was as daring on the sea as he was on land and made the mighty English eat humble pie at Khanderi.

The quality of print is good and the book is well illustrated. However, there is scope for improvement in the content. Chapters 3 to 6 which cover the background could have been incorporated into one chapter. In some cases past and present tenses are mixed up (pp 100). Often wrong words have been used "irate young man", (pp 107,108), dictums (pp 117), bursting tears (pp 164) etc. Location of maps in the book needs more care. On pp 145, it is stated, "A map showing the interview venue and deployment of rival forces is attached". This map was better placed opposite this page rather than opposite pp 23.

This well researched book will play a role in arousing martial pride in our past and will be an inspiration to our youth. The fact that the author has explained the contradictions in some events in Shivaji's life, as recorded by other authors adds value to this work. Though many books have been written on Shivaji none of these has brought Shivaji alive in the manner this book has.