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The BATTLE OF PAVAN KHIND (13 July 1660)

300 MARATHAS against 10000+ ADIL SHAHI TROOPS

A Sparta style last man stand at a mountain pass which ensured Shivaji Maharaj's safety.

Valour, loyalty and sacrifice!

Baji Prabhu Deshpande was one of the most able lieutenants of Shivaji. He sacrificed his life defending Shivaji in a heroic last stand known as the "Battle of Pavan Khind" in which his force was hugely outnumbered.(1)

In this battle he became a martyr, but managed to halt the enemy forces for several hours, which secured Shivaji’s safety and victory on another front. Without this heroic last stand Shivaji’s glorious career may have been cut short.(2)

Baji Prabhu was senior to Shivaji. In the beginning he opposed Shivaji being from a rival Maratha clan, but realised that Shivaji stood for national resurgence. Henceforth he became a friend and loyal supporter of Shivaji.(3)

In 1660, Shivaji was trapped in the fort of Panhala, under siege and vastly outnumbered by an Adilshahi army led by general Siddhi Jauhar.(4)

Marathas thought that as soon as monsoon comes they can break the seige from inside and outside as mountains of Sahyadri turn non negotiable in the rainy season.(5)

Jauhar turned out to be difficult enemy. He managed to tighten the siege on the fort of Panhala. The commander in chief of Maratha forces, Netaji Palkar known as Prati (2nd) Shivaji tried and initiated attacks from outside to break the siege but was

repulsed.(6)

Failure of Netaji was big setback. Jauhar was tightening his grip with every passing moment.(7)

Months passed but there was no sign of the siege weakening. Maharaj decided to secretly break out of the siege using stealth manoeuvres and proceed towards the fort of Vishalgarh via the narrow path of Ghod Khind.(8)

Message was sent to Jauhar that Maharaj himself will come to negotiate terms of surrender.(9)

Shivaji had inflicted major defeats upon the Adil Shahis in the past, and they were determined to get even with him.(10)

The Adilshahis were often at enmity with the M0ghuls, but in this case they were aligned with the joint purpose of crushing Shivaji. A second front was going to be opened by the M0ghuls anytime.(11)

The Adil Shahi ruler at that time was Ali Adil Shah II. The fort of Vishalgarh, which was administered by a Maratha chieftain Narayan Orpe, who had pledged allegiance to the Adilshahis, but struck an agreement to switch sides and join Shivaji.(12)

There was also a M0ghul garrison stationed at Vishalgarh which Shivaji would have to defeat.(13)

Shivaji, Baji Prabhu and around 600 of their best troops, hardened mountaineers planned to escape past the Adilshahi troops at night. Shiva Kashid, a trusted soldier of Shivaji, volunteered to dress like Maharaj and get captured on the pretext of signing a truce.(14)

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It was expected that this move would buy some time, before Jauhar realises his error and gives chase.(15)

Shivaji made his escape on the night of July 13th, with a small contingent of troops. Baji Prabhu was 2nd in command. The Adilshahis gave hot and rapid pursuit after a tip off that the real Shivaji has escaped with an army of around 10,000.(16)

In the meantime Jauhar eliminated Shiva Kashid who was pretending to be Maharaj.(17)

It was clear that there was no way to shake off the enemy, and that the Marathas would not simultaneously prevail over both the Moghul garrison at Vishalgarh and the chasing Adilshahi army.(18)

The only option was for a section of the Marathas to stay back and fight the larger Adilshahi forces, while the rest of the Marathas would carry on.(19)

Shivaji decided that this was inevitable. Shivaji wanted to fight himself but his generals asked him not to and move towards safety.(20)

Baji Prabhu took the onus of facing the troops of Bijapur with half of the contingent. Baji Prabhu would wait to hear the cannon fire from Vishalgarh (the destination fort), as a signal of Shivaji’s safety.(21)

The strategic position of Ghod Khind (Horse Pass), a mountain pass was chosen for the defence. It was very narrow and only a few soldiers could pass at one time. This mountain pass was in the vicinity of Vishalgarh fort, near Kolhapur.(22)

Baji Prabhu occupied Ghod Khind, blocking the path of the pursuers, and made a determined stand against them. He knew the great importance of his task. He had to protect his king.(23)

He resolved to stand until the last man. The Adilshahi army repeatedly tried to break through the defenses of the pass, but were constantly repulsed.(24)

The battle raged for hours, with the defenders clinging on to their positions, although rapidly depleting in numbers. Only a handful of Marathas survived, and around over a thousand soldiers of the Adilshahi army were slain.(25)

5 hours after the battle commenced, the cannon fire announced Shivaji's safety at Vishalgarh. Hundreds of valiant Marathas had by then laid down their lives. Baji Prabhu who was fatally wounded also succumbed to his injuries.(26)

Shivaji's plan was successful. Having made his way to Vishalgarh, Range Narayan Orpe switched sides and the combined Maratha forces easily surprised and routed the M0ghul garrison situated there. This time maharaj fought.(27)

Baji Prabhu had earned them a breather before the Adilshahi forces arrived which had carried on chasing Shivaji to Vishalgarh. The Marathas repulsed the Adilshahis again inflicting heavy losses upon the latter.(28)

Baji Prabhu went down in joy that he had done his duty. So did his fellow generals and soldiers. They became a part of glorious Hindu history. Shivaji burst in sorrow upon knowing what happened.(29)

The defence of the pass of Ghor Khind by 300 Marathas led by Baji Prabhu was renamed "Pavan Khind" which means "The Sacred Pass". Sacred because of sacrifice of martyrs.(30)