

# Role Of Bahirji Naik In The Rise Of Maratha Empire And His Relevance In Modern Warfare

Shreyas Girish Khopkar

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## I. Introduction:

The world since the beginning of humanity has seen multiple wars and its transition from unorganized to organized warfare. War between regional kings to full-fledged world wars between some of the most powerful nations in the world. Every King or every state has their own way of analysing, structuring strategies, planning and plotting the war in their own capacity. But one common aspect that every king and every state focuses on is being two steps ahead of the opponent and that is where Espionage comes in action. Written record of fifth century mentions the use of spies 2500 years ago in the Indus Valley. In China Sun Tzu penned comprehensive military treaties in his book *The Art of War* where he mentioned use of spies on and off the battlefield. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* has extensively mentioned how a king should use his resources to accumulate important intel from the enemy camp.

India has been ruled by various empires but Indian history is incomplete without the mention of Maratha Empire led by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The Marathas were known for using Guerrilla warfare and one of the most important aspects of implementing guerrilla warfare was Espionage and this department was led by **Bahirji Naik**. Bahirji Naik was known as The Third eye of 'Swaraj' – The Dream of Self-governance led by Shivaji Maharaj.

### Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and building the “Bahirji” clan:

The roots of Maratha empire were laid by Shivaji Maharaj in the heart of Sahyadri Ranges and the dense forests of the western ghats. These ranges back then were surrounded by Mughals and Adilshahi. Shahaji Raje, Shivaji's father was a sardar in Adilshahi's darbar. He had Pune-Supe and Bangalore Jahagir under his control. Shahaji's rising influence in the Pune-Supe region threatened Adilshahi and they sent him to Bangalore as a sardar but did not take Pune Jahagir either. Shahaji Raje left for Bangalore but kept young Shivaji at the helm of Pune-Supe and left his trusted ally Dadoji Konddev with Shivaji and Jijabai. Jijabai sowed the seed of Swaraj in the heart young Shivaji Maharaj.

At a very young age under the abled mentorship of Dadoji Konddev and Jijabai, Shivaji Maharaj started building the dream of Swaraj. In his conquest he was accompanied by the locals who he grew up with. He identified people in his constituency with the combination of unique talent, unmatched bravery and most importantly love for the motherland. Shivaji at the very beginning realized that the Maratha army was no match for the huge numbers compromising the Mughal and Adilshahi Army. A straight face to face battle would definitely mean defeat. That was the reason Marathas always used guerrilla warfare as their war strategy. Shivaji Maharaj was also well aware of the fact that implementing guerrilla warfare heavily depends on the information accumulated from the enemy camp and that was not possible without espionage. The responsibility of Espionage and bringing accurate intel from the enemy camp was on Bahirji Naik.

Bahirji Naik's actual name was Daulat Rao (Shivnetra Bahirji, Prem Dhonde). Daulat Rao was sent to Vijapur to learn about Islam. He spent 2 years in Bijapur in a Dargah under the mentorship of Kanhoji Jedhe. On coming back from Vijapur, Shivaji Maharaj in presence of Daulat Rao and Tanhaji Malusare named the spying team of Swaraj and “Bahirji”. Bahirji translates to Ba – Bahurupi (Polymorphus), Hir – Heer (Spy), Ji – Shivaji, So Bahirji translates to – “Shivaji Maharaj's Bahurupi (Polymorphus) Spies”. That is how the word Bahirji came to existence and Daulat Rao was the leader of this team of spies and that's why Maharaj honoured him with the position “Naik”. “Leader of Shivaji Maharaj's Bahurupi Spies. That's how Daulat Rao was re-named to “Bahirji Naik”. (Shivnetra Bahirji, Prem Dhonde)

### Bahirji Naik and his ways of Espionage:

Bahirji Naik was considered to be third eye of Swaraj. The network of all Bahirji's was spread across the territories of Mughals, Adilshahi and Nizamshahi. Bahirji's were common people who were drafted as spies by Naik which made it easier for them to disguise and mix in the population. All of them were well trained in Islam and were made to inherit the Islamic traits. Naik believed that to disguise oneself one needs to inherit and

acquire even the minute nuances of the character. Bahirji Naik's way of identifying his spies was to test them in a disguise. Along with being a polymorphous, Bahirji Naik was an excellent mimic. When combined these 2 skills, it became almost impossible to identify him in disguise. The major transit of the Bahirji's happened through dense forests. In order to communicate flawlessly, the Bahirji's were trained by Naik himself to replicate voices of Animals and Birds. These voices were set in a certain specific pitch and tone which made it easier for the fellow Bahirji's to understand the signal. There was also a sign language through songs that was created by Bahirji Naik for the communication of the spies. Apart from that Bahirji Naik was well versed of pathways even from the densest of forests and had secret hideouts in small caves and temples. The famous escape from Panhalgad to Vishalgad was planned and executed by Bahirji Naik himself.

During his time in Vijapur, Naik was disguised as Rahim Baba. He was a maulvi who lived in a dargah near the soldier's residence just on the outskirts of the city market. He had daily visits in the soldier's residence and city market in search of food. Rahim Baba was in Vijapur for almost 1.5 years now. After asking for food in city market Rahim Baba turned towards the soldier's residence. He asked for food at every house. He reached the last house stood in front of the door and shouted "The doors of heaven have opened" in Urdu. Everyone was surprised by Rahim Baba's actions and were left clueless except on soldier who was standing near the last wall of soldier's residence guarding the jail gates. He entered the jail and started walking towards an isolated cell. The soldier bent down and whispered the same sentence in the ears of a prisoner. The prisoner got up in desperation and started searching for something in the dark but could not figure out. Two days later Rahim Baba stayed late in the soldier's residence. Soldiers were accustomed to his presence around them so none of them questioned him staying late. That night Rahim Baba stood behind the prison wall near the sewage canal. He was being restless as the time went by. Soon he heard a very faint noise of someone falling down. As soon as he heard that noise he whispered – "Crawl through the canal till the exit out of the city" in Urdu. After a small light conversation, the man in the canal escaped the prison crawling below and fled the city.

Naik, after completing 2 years in Vijapur left back for Pune. While travelling in the night after crossing a river, Naik decided to rest for the day. He stood near a small cottage. Sensing some movement, the man from the cottage came out with a sharp object asking – "Who's there". Naik replied saying – "The person who saved you from the Adilshahi prison". The man's aggressive stance mellowed down and he looked squinting his eyes in the dark. He went back in the cottage and was followed by Naik. The man that Naik saved from the Adilshahi was a boatman on the river that Bahirji Naik just crossed. He was a close ally of Kanhoji Jedhe. Adilshahi soldiers killed his family after he helped them cross the river and kept him alive because there needs to be someone to help the soldiers cross the river again. With the help of Kanhoji Jedhe, he planted himself in the Adilshahi bawarchikhana (kitchen) as a chef. In an act of revenge, he killed the sardar who killed his family and was caught and put into prison. Kanhoji as promised sent his most brilliant spy to his rescue. Naik saw an opportunity here. He mentioned about "Swaraj" and Shivaji Maharaj to the boatman and asked him to work as a spy for Shivaji Maharaj against Adilshahi.

This specific incidence portrays how skilled and foresighted Bahirji Naik was even in his early days as a spy. Bahirji Naik wasn't just well aware of the roads and ways in the city, he was even well versed with the ways and paths below the ground. He had mapped the path of the sewage canal that led from the prison cell to the end of the city. This highlights his ability of observation and situational awareness. He in his conquest had an ally in the Adilshahi prison itself who he himself had planted. This shows his interpersonal and persuasion skills. Most importantly, the ability to disguise himself into a completely different character. The purpose of his first visit to Vijapur was to learn about Islam. He stayed in a dargah for 2 years, learnt Islam under the maulvi of that dargah, disguised himself completely from Daulat Rao to Rahim Baba, mapped the entire city of Vijapur and rescued an asset for Swaraj.

#### **Bahirji Naik's Contribution towards Swaraj:**

Bahirji Naik and his spies worked for Shivaji Maharaj as full-fledged covert army back in the 1700s. The spies were not just mere data collecting informers. They were full-fledged trained fighters and excellent in disguising themselves. A brilliant example of this is seen in the mission to kill Shaista Khan and take back the Pune – Supe Jahagir. Mughals were known to carry huge entourage. Shaista Khan with him carried more than 1 Lakh soldiers. Shivaji Maharaj entered the Shaista Khan camp with just 300 Malvas and managed to flee Shaista Khan from Lal Mahal. This operation was heavily based on the intel received from Bahirji Naik and his spies. The most important aspect to implement such operation was the accurate intel. Bahirji Naik entered the Khan Camp as a 'Sevak' and he extracted information right from the amount ammunition to the bodyguards in Shaista Khan's bedroom. The references of Shivaji Maharaj sending Spies to Shaista Khan camp were found in 'Shivrajodaym' written by Shirdhar Bhaskar Vernekar. Based on this Intel Shivaji Maharaj planned this operation and successfully implemented it where Khan ran for his life losing 3 fingers. This operation could probably be termed as largest commando operation to be implemented successfully.

Another fine example of their ability to disguise themselves were displayed during the battle of Pratapgad. When Afzal Khan was on a mission to kill Shivaji Maharaj. Afzal Khan and his huge entourage had camped in Wai, a village near Pune. Fighting on plain ground face to face wasn't possible with Afzal Khan. He had to be pulled towards Pratapgad to avoid a face-to-face war. It was important to understand the size of his entourage and ammunition Bahirji Naik and his spies entered in the camp as 'Khansama'(Cook) and 'fankar'(Artist). Shri. Umashankar Sharma Tripathi mentions in his book, '*Kshatrapatimahakavyam*' about the covert operations by Bahirji Naik's Army. He states that Bahirji Naik and his spies entered as artist and cooks and they gathered information right from food board and ammunitions to behaviours of Afzal Khan and his closest aids.

The highlight of Bahirji Naik as a spy was the Raid of Surat. Surat was a city of Pride for the Mughals. Even though Shaista Khan was made to flee, his stay in Pune had put a dent in the Maratha treasury. Surat was the largest port in Mughal kingdom and the Major trade centre for Mughals. It was also the richest city in the Kingdom. It was governed by the Mughal Sardar Inayat Khan. It was said that Surat was guarded by 10 thousand soldiers. Bahirji Naik himself took the responsibility of this mission. It was found by the Bahirji's that on ground Inayat Khan had only thousand soldiers to guard the city. Marathas with 8000 men marched in the city of Surat and looted a staggering amount of wealth which in today's age converts to approximately 30 million rupees. Surat was looted twice by the Marathas. Shridhar Bhaskar Vernekar in his book '*Shivrajodyam*' in the chapter '*Suratadhanam*' mentions that one month before the loot Bahirji Naik was sent to Surat as a blind beggar. He did not just find out the rich of the city but also found out the closest routes from the dense forests from Surat to Raigad.

#### **Brief Comparison between killing of Osama Bin Ladin and Battle of Shaista Khan:**

The mission conducted by USA to kill Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, the operation Wrath of God by Mossad, The Surgical strike by India in Uri, are some of the best conducted commando missions in modern day. All these missions were heavily supported by on ground intel. But if we compare these missions undertaken by Shivaji Maharaj, we realise that the dynamics of these missions are similar. The taking down of Osama bin Laden is one of the greatest commando missions. But it is very similar to Shivaji Maharaj taking over Shaista Khan. Both the missions were conducted in enemy territory. Both the missions were heavily base on ground Intel. The only difference in these missions were Osama Bin Ladin had to be located, Shaista Khans whereabouts were well known. In both the missions the commandos landed in the enemy territory, created chaos, took out the target came out and left. Osama Lost his life, Shaista Khan lost his 3 fingers.

## **II. Conclusion:**

In Kautilya's Arthashastra it is stated that commanders' arms and intelligence are the eyes and ears of the state. It is the principle that, eyes and ears are as sensible, sharp as the state is secure. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had a lot of loyal men in his army. Tanhaji Malusare, Baji Prabhu Deshpande, Kanhoji Jedhe, Yasaji Kanka and many more, but it was Bahirji Naik who was known as the third eye of Swaraj. Shivaji Maharaj in his life time won various forts, various battels but the back bone of these battels was Bahirji Naik. Organizations like Mossad have acknowledged the work of Bahirji Naik.

A successful Strategic development plan in Modern day warfare includes various aspects of Intelligence and Espionage. In fact, a war or a mission is completely dependent on the information acquired by the assets in the concerned state. Gathering key information and intelligence by the means of espionage is been the key to survival of the nations. However, with time the methods of espionage have been going hand in hand with the technological advancements. These advancements have made it easier to gather information. This also reduces the amount of time to gather information and plan the course of action.

Back in the day time management had to be accurate. With no technological support a mission had to be pre planned at least 4 to 5 months before the execution. In this time the spies had to enter the enemy territory, gather information, make sure it reaches the capital in time. The King then had to plan the mission with right execution completely dependent on the received information, taking in multiple factors in consideration. These factors included Climate, terrain, men and ammunition required for the mission etc. Bahirji Naik and the Bahirji Clan have been the eyes and spine of Swaraj.

In spite of being such an important part of Swaraj, there is very little that is being known about Bahirji Naik and his techniques of espionage. The only thing that has been for sure known about Naik is the location of his death. There are various opinions on the origins of Bahirji Naik but one thing that has been very evident is Naik has been the part of Swaraj with Shivaji Maharaj since the beginning and Bahirji Naik he has been 100% successful according to the recorded history and has been the most reliable aid for Shivaji Maharaj. Bahirji Naik and his Bahirji Clan were undoubtedly the best monitors in that era and even in today's day and age, matching the accuracy of the intel has been very difficult. The time management and accuracy are a lesson for the generation and generations to come.

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