

To The Memory Of A Lion

Tanaji Malusare was Shivaji's childhood friend and companion at arms. He was very brave and daring. Shivaji proudly called him his *Sivnha* or Lion. Tanaji had planned and fought many a battle by the side of his leader. They were determined to free their land from Mughal domination.

Tanaji lived in the small town of Umratha. One morning, Umratha wore a festive look. Colourful bunting fluttered in the streets. There was a *Mangal Kolas** at every door. Tanaji's son was to be married that day. People went in and out of his house, busy running errands.

Just then a messenger came galloping down the street. "Look!" cried a man who had noticed him in the distance. "What news can he be bringing?" he asked Tanaji's servant who was near him. Before the servant could reply, the rider came to a stop in front of them. He leapt off his horse and said, "Where is Tanaji? I must see him at once."

"In the house Sir," answered the servant. He had recognised the rider. "I'll take you to him."

"Sire," the servant called out.

*Pots decorated with mango leaves and a coconut.

Tanaji and his wife were busy selecting and packing clothes and ornaments for the bride and the groom.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"Suryaji," replied the servant.

Tanaji put aside the jewel-case he was holding and stepped forward. "Come in, Suryaji".

Suryaji entered and bowed to Tanaji and his wife.

"Welcome, my friend. What brings you here?" he asked. His wife, too, stopped inspecting the *sari* she had in her hand.

"Ka/e* wants you at Raigarh immediately," replied Suryaji.

Tanaji knew at once that it was something serious. He turned swiftly to his wife and put his hand affectionately on her shoulder. "My dear," he said, "you know I have to go. Postpone the wedding. My first duty is to my leader and my land. Come, smile and bid me farewell. Do not wony. Suryaji and my men will be with me."

Tanaji's wife was stunned. She held back her tears.

"Please wait," she said and went in to prepare the '*tilak*' and '*arti*'*** for the farewell.

"His Majesty.

^{s3}Vermillion mark on forehead.

^{co}"moving a lighted lamp round a soldier before he goes to battle.

Tanaji buckled his sword and stepped out of the room. He ordered his men to be ready to accompany him. The news spread and soon the soldiers assembled outside his house.

After his wife had applied 'tilak' on his forehead and performed the 'arti' Tanaji took leave of her.

Leading an army of horsemen, he rode fast to reach Raigarh fort. Tanaji walked straight into Shivaji's room and found him sitting in a pensive mood.



"*Raje*, I'm here at your service," said Tanaji bowing.

"Oh! my *Sionha* has come!" exclaimed Shivaji. He embraced Tanaji and said, "Come, sit down. We have a difficult assignment. *Ma Sahib*^{*} feels that the other forts are not safe so long as we do not recapture Kondana fort.

"Udai Singh Rathor is in command of the Mughal forces. His men are guarding the three gates. His sons are also with him. All of them are brave fighters. There is also the killer elephant Chandrawati. She is a force by herself. I have thought and thought, but can't find a way of capturing the fort. You are the only one who may be able to find a way."

The lines deepened on Tanaji's brow. Then he spoke. "I have a plan. The fort is guarded only on three sides. We will try to enter from the west."

"What?" Shivaji sprang up. "Enter from the west? You're not planning to climb that precipice? It is unassailable."

Tanaji said coolly — "No, *Raje*, it is not the way I intend doing it." He then explained his plan to Shivaji in detail.

"It is a daring plan," said Shivaji anxiously. "Very difficult to execute. Everything depends on just one thing."

"Yes, it is difficult, *Raje*, but not impossible.

⁴Queen Mother.

We will prepare well and we will succeed." Tanaji sounded confident.

"Very well, go ahead with your preparations. May Goddess *Bhawani** bless you."

Tanaji bowed to Shivaji and left. He called Suryaji and some of his personal friends who were waiting in the adjoining room. He swore them to secrecy and then told them of the plan.

"We begin preparing at once. Drill the soldiers, perfect them in the use of arms, but do not tell them for what. We have to take the enemy by surprise."

Soon everything was ready. Tanaji called his friends, and announced, "Tonight we attack. It is a moonless night and nothing will be visible. All of you must be absolutely silent as you approach Kondana fort. I will take the iguana Yashwanti. With her help, we will scale the rock." Then he turned to Suryaji. "You are to take the rest of the men and wait at Kalyan Gate. We will throw it open for you."

Last minute preparations over, they marched to the fort quietly as shadows. In a short while they reached the foot of the precipice. Tanaji tied a rope to Yashwanti's neck. Then he threw her up hard, so she could clutch the wall. But the iguana lost her grip and slithered down.

"Shivaji's family diety.

"Oh, it is a sign of bad luck!" exclaimed one of the soldiers.

Tanaji whirled round, "Who said that? There is no place for superstition in a soldier's life. He must only have faith, in himself and in God."

Tanaji once again hurled the iguana up with greater force. This time Yashwanti gripped the top of the fort wall. Tanaji breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hand me the bag containing the ropes," said Tanaji. A soldier gave it to him and he slung it on his back.

"I go up first. I will tie the ropes to the projections on the wall and let them down. With their help you can all climb up. Remember not a sound."

Tanaji held the rope tight and climbed up and up till he reached the ramparts. The soldiers followed him. Within minutes they were at the top.

Tanaji whispered, "There must be a number of guards posted on the ramparts. Take them unawares and silence them. They should not be allowed to sound the alarm. We'll get down and attack the soldiers inside the fort. Let's go."

The men stormed the fort and overpowered the guards in no time. Shouting '*Jai Bhatoani*', they rushed into the fort. The Mughal soldiers offered stiff resistance and a fierce hand to hand fight ensued.

One of the Mughal soldiers quietly slipped out and rushed to inform Udai Singh.

"The Marathas have entered my fort? But how?" cried Udai Singh.

He sprang from his bed and hurried to the next apartment. "Wake up, my sons. Tell the *mahout** to get Chandrawati. She'll crush the Marathas in no time."

Udai Singh's sons joined in the battle and the *mahout* sent Chandrawati charging into the fray. The Marathas fought bravely. The casualties were heavy. Among the first to perish were Udai Singh's three sons and Chandrawati, the elephant. Tanaji went looking for Udai Singh.

Udai Singh had by then heard of his sons' deaths. He rushed into the melee. "Tanaji, you have a lot to answer for. You can't escape me."

"That we'll see," cried Tanaji. With drawn swords, they closed in.

Both were brilliant swordsmen. The battle raged fiercely round them. The attackers had got the better of the defenders. In a strategic move, a section of the Maratha soldiers had thrown open Kalyan Gate.

Tanaji and Udai Singh were locked in a life and death struggle.

Both were tired and bleeding profusely. Udai
"Elephant-driver.

Singh made a gallant effort and plunged his sword into Tanaji's chest. Tanaji stumbled and fell. Quite unexpectedly he sprang up and inflicted a mortal wound on a triumphant Udai Singh. He fell dead. Tanaji, too collapsed and died.

All was quiet when Suryaji entered the fort. He rushed around, looking for Tanaji. He found him lying in a pool of blood. He knelt to feel his pulse.

He looked aghast at his dead friend. His grief soon turned into anger. "We must complete your task", he muttered, drawing his sword.

The Marathas, infuriated by Tanaji's death, fell on their foes like tigers. Udai Singh's death had taken the fight out of the Mughals. After a brief struggle, the Marathas won the battle. Kondana fort was once again in their hands.

Suryaji returned to Raigarh fort to inform Shivaji of their victory. He was anxiously waiting for them.

"*Raje*, the fort is taken," said Suryaji.

"Good. But where is Tanaji?"

Suryaji hung his head and remained silent.

"Speak, Suryaji!" cried Shivaji shaking him by his shoulders. "What has happened to him?"

"He is dead!" Suryaji said in a broken voice.

Shivaji's face went pale as he mumbled, "The fort is won, but my lion is gone." He turned and walked to the window.

He stood there looking out.

A memorial to Tanaji stands on the spot where
he fell. It is called '*Sionha Garh*

"The lion's fort.

