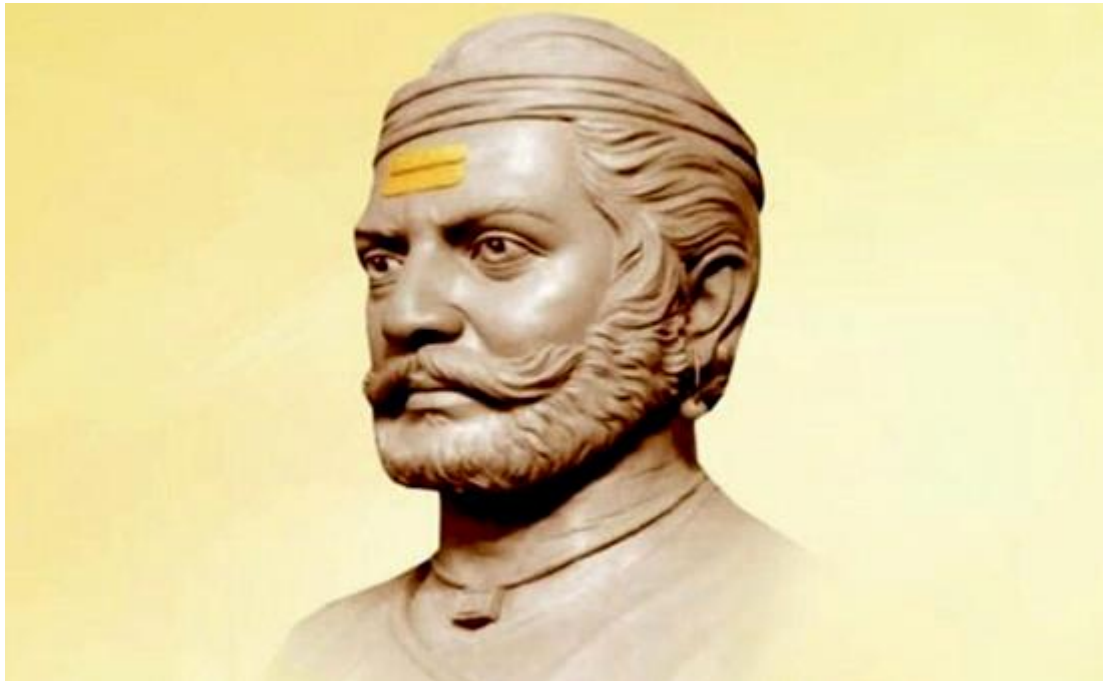


Raja Umaji Naik

When the British rule had been established throughout Maharashtra. Memories of the Swarajya established by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj were also almost faded. Everywhere, the British East India Company was dominant. During that time, Umaji Naik emerged as a leader of the Ramoshi community, with his brilliance and valor against the British.



The essence of history is that from time to time, certain individuals reflect various aspects of social, cultural, technical, political, educational, and economic thoughts and hopes. Keeping contemporary circumstances in mind, great men are seen attempting to bring political change during their tenure. A similar attempt was made by the revolutionary Umaji Raje Naik in Maharashtra. Although Umaji Naik's revolutionary career was short-lived, his supreme sacrifice was not in vain. What could a handful of the Ramoshi community do that wasn't achieved by the thousands of soldiers who participated in the First War of Independence in 1857? However, Umaji Naik was resolved to drive the British regime out of the country. Armed, Umaji Naik sounded the war bugle against the powerful British and sacrificed his life for the country. It can be said that Umaji Naik was the calm before the storm because, after him, many activists and revolutionaries increasingly participated in the movement against the British.

Umaji Naik is believed to have been born in 1791 in a village named Bhivadi, situated about one 'kos' (ancient Indian unit of distance, approximately 3.2 km) northeast of the Purandar

fort and eight 'kos' southeast of Pune in Maharashtra. He was born into an uneducated and backward community, so determining the exact date, time, and day of his birth is difficult. However, the Ramoshi community celebrates Umaji Raje Naik's birthday on 7th September. His father's name was Dadoji Khomne and his mother's name was Lakshmi. His father passed away when Umaji was young. His mother, Lakshmibai, used to narrate stories of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to him. Just as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's mother Jijabai educated him, in the same manner, Umaji's mother acquainted him with the art of warfare, spear-throwing, horse riding, and introduced him to various physical exercises and games.

In the vicinity of the Purandar fort, the Ramoshi community, along with the Koli and Mahar communities, were traditionally entrusted by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj with the responsibility of guarding the fortresses. In return, they were also given the right to cultivate the surrounding lands. Umaji's family lived near the Purandar fort. Of the 38 nearby forts, people from the Ramoshi community worked on 14. In a real sense, the Purandar fort was a source of income for the Ramoshi community.

In Maharashtra, Peshwa Bajirao II, with the help of the British, secured the position of the Peshwa. In 1803, upon returning from the Vasai campaign, Peshwa Bajirao II realised that the Ramoshi did not recognize the authority of the Britishers. Due to the significant presence of the Ramoshi community in the areas near Pune, a small empire of this community was established. Bajirao II did not like this. In 1803 itself, he ordered the capture of all the forts and strongholds near Pune. The British also tried to seize the Purandar fort. However, the Ramoshi community clearly refused to relinquish their rights. Angered by this, Bajirao II revoked all the rewards, positions, and lands that had been granted to the Ramoshi community. As a result of this action, the primary source of income for the Ramoshi community was taken away.

After being expelled from the Purandar fort, Umaji Naik roamed in other regions with his associates for a few days. Around 1816, he returned to Purandar. He tried to regain his earlier responsibility of guarding the Purandar fort, which left him very disheartened when he couldn't. During this time, he developed an unhealthy addiction to alcohol. Once, under the influence of alcohol, he threw a stone at his own nephew's head. But this incident made him realize that while intoxicated, one is not fully aware of one's actions. Therefore, he gradually reduced his alcohol consumption until he became completely sober, which was a significant achievement in itself.

Umaji Naik committed his first robbery between 1817-1818, in collaboration with his friend Sattu. They looted a merchant named Chhanji Maniya. The loot was then distributed among the poor. However, after this robbery, Umaji and three of his associates were arrested by the British police and were sentenced to one year of imprisonment. During his days in prison, he learned to read and write. This fact was also documented by Captain Mackintosh, the English officer who wrote about Umaji Naik's character. By learning to read and write while incarcerated, Umaji Naik set an exemplary precedent for society.

Umaji Naik continuously resisted the British for ten years. In doing so, he would loot the wealthy merchants and moneylenders who supported the British, and distribute their wealth among the poor. Around 1824-25, Umaji Naik, with the help of his associates, looted the British treasury near Pune in Bhamburda, which contained six thousand and two hundred rupees. After this, the British made extensive efforts to capture him, but all attempts failed. After some time, due to the lack of manpower, Umaji Naik found it challenging to continue his relentless struggle against the British. He decided to abandon his continuous resistance against the British and temporarily compromised with them to give a new direction to his struggle.

It is believed that Umaji Naik began working for the British in July 1928, which continued until October 1930. During this time, he considered gathering like-minded people and arranging funds as more crucial tasks. Even while he was employed, the British kept a close watch on him. When the British believed they had grounds to capture and punish Umaji Naik, he was detained in Pune. However, in December 1830, Umaji Naik managed to escape from his captivity.

Together with his associates, he resumed his efforts to drive the British out of the country. On 16th February 1831, he issued a declaration of independence. The uniqueness of this proclamation was that it was addressed to the entire nation of India and was inclusive in nature. The intent of this declaration was to envision a new state, established on principles of justice, after the end of British rule.

India's brave son, Umaji Naik, was captured by the British on 15th December 1831, by tempting some of his associates with money. He was then tried for treason in the then Tehsil office of Pune. In the trial, Umaji Naik was sentenced to death by hanging. On 3rd February 1932, he was hanged on a peepal tree located within the premises of that office. That peepal tree still stands today, bearing witness to the supreme sacrifice of Umaji Naik.

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Reference: Umaji Raje, Mukkam Dongar by Sadashiv Athwale