

11th Standard- English

Hornbill-The Adventure Summary

Professor Gangadharpanth Gaitonde was travelling in the Jijamata Express on the Pune-Bombay route. This train was much faster than the Deccan Queen and he noticed that there were no industrial townships outside Pune. The train first stopped at Lonavala, 40 minutes after it started from Pune and then for a little while at Karjat. It went on even faster through Kalyan.

In the meantime, Professor Gaitonde, being a historian, was thinking of going to a big library in Bombay and looking through history books. He wanted to understand the present situation. He also decided to return to Pune and discuss with Rajendra Deshpande, who would surely help him understand what had happened. He hoped that a person called Rajendra Deshpande existed.

When the train stopped at a small station, Sarhad, an Anglo-Indian ticket-checker went around checking tickets. Khan Sahib informed Gangadharpanth that that was where the British Raj began. He inquired if Gangadharpanth was going to Bombay for the first time. Gangadharpanth had not been to this Bombay before. He asked Khan Sahib how he would go to Peshawar. Khan Sahib replied that he would go to the Victoria Terminus and would take the Frontier Mail. It would go from Bombay to Delhi, then to Lahore and then Peshawar. He would reach the next day.

Then Khan Sahib discussed his business and Gangadharpant listened eagerly. As the train passed through the suburban rail traffic, Khan Sahib explained that the blue carriages carried the letters, GBMR, that meant Greater Bombay Metropolitan Railway. The Union Jack painted on each carriage was a reminder that they were in British territory.

When the train reached Victoria Terminus, the station looked remarkably neat and clean. Most of the staff was Anglo-Indian and Parsee along with a few British officers.

As Gangadharpant came out of the station he found himself facing an impressive building. It was the East India house headquarters of the East India Company. He was shocked, because as per the history books The East India Company had been shut down soon after 1857. But here it was prospering.

He walked ahead along Hornby Road but he found there was no Handloom House building. Instead, there were Boots and Woolworth departmental stores, grand offices of Lloyds, Barclays and other British banks, as in a typical high street of a town in England.

He entered the Forbes building and asked the English receptionist that he wished to meet Mr Vinay Gaitonde, his son. She searched through the telephone list and said that there was nobody with that name there. He was shocked. He had a quick lunch at a restaurant; he went to the Town Hall to the library of the Asiatic Society to solve the mystery of history.

In the library he started browsing through the five volumes of history books including his own. Volume one was about the history up to the period of Ashoka, volume two up to Samudragupta, volume three up to Mohammad Ghori and volume four up to the death of Aurangzeb. Reading volume five, Gangadharant finally arrived on the precise moment where history had taken a different turn. That page in the book described the Battle of Panipat, and it mentioned that the Marathas won the battle. Abdali was defeated and he was chased back to Kabul by the triumphant Maratha army led by Sadashivrao Bhau and his nephew, the young Vishwasrao.

The book did not give a detailed explanation of the battle but explained in detail its impact for the power struggle in India. Gangadharant read the account eagerly. The style of writing was definitely his, but much to his surprise he was reading the explanation for the first time.

Their victory in the battle had not only increased the confidence of the Marathas but it also established their domination in northern India. The East India Company, observing these developments for the time being postponed its policy of expanding in India's territory.

For the Peshwas it resulted in an increased power of Bhausahab and Vishwasrao who succeeded his father in 1780 A.D. The threat, Dadasahab, was pushed to the background and he finally left state politics.

The East India Company was disappointed, as the new Maratha ruler, Vishwasrao and his brother, Madhavrao, combined political sharpness with bravery and extended their control all over India.

The Company's hold was then limited to places near Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. This was exactly like that of the Portuguese and the French.

The Peshwas kept the Mughal rule alive in Delhi to manipulate the situation. In the nineteenth century these rulers from Pune were shrewd enough to recognise the beginning of the technological age in Europe. They set up their own centres for science and technology. The East India Company saw another chance to enlarge its influence. It offered aid and experts. They were accepted only to make the local centres self-sufficient.

In the twentieth century more changes were brought about because of the Western influence.

Now, India moved towards a democracy. By then, the Peshwas had lost their zeal and democratically elected bodies slowly replaced them. The Sultanate at Delhi survived this change, mainly because it exercised no influence. The Shahenshah of Delhi was just a nominal head to rubberstamp the suggestions made by the parliament.

Gangadharpant began to understand India as a country that had learnt to be self-reliant and knew what self-respect was. It was in a position of strength but for only business reasons, it had allowed the British to be there. Bombay was the only colony on the subcontinent. That lease was to expire in the year 2001, according to a treaty of 1908.

Gangadharpant could not help comparing the country he knew with what he was viewing now. But he had to find how the Marathas had won the battle.

For this he started looking for reports of the battle itself. Finally he found Bhaushebanchi Bakhar. Even though he rarely trusted the Bakhars for historical verification, he found them entertaining to read. He managed to find a brief mention of how Vishwasrao luckily survived his close brush with death.

At eight o'clock the library was to close. As Gangadharant left the table he put some notes into his right pocket. Forgetfully, he also thrust the Bakhar into his left pocket.

After a measly meal at the guesthouse, he leisurely walked towards the Azad Maidan. There a lecture was to take place. Professor Gaitonde walked towards the pandal and was awestruck staring at the platform. The presidential chair was vacant. He was drawn to it. The speaker stopped his lecture, as he was too surprised to continue. But the audience shouted at him to leave the chair.

Professor Gaitonde went to the mike and expressed his views. He said that an unchaired lecture was like Shakespeare's Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. The audience was in no mood to listen but Gangadharant was an experienced orator. He braved a shower of tomatoes, eggs and other objects. Finally, the audience came to the stage to throw him out but Gangadharant had disappeared in the crowd.

This was all he had to tell Rajendra. All he knew was that he was found in the Azad Maidan in the morning. He was back in the world he was familiar with. But he did not know where he had spent the two days when he was absent from there.

The story astonished Rajendra. He asked him where he had been, just before his accident with the truck. Professor Gaitonde said that he was thinking of the disaster theory and its consequences for history. Professor Gaitonde produced the page torn out of a book as evidence that he had not been imagining things. Rajendra read the text and seemed equally surprised.

Gangadharant said that he had intended to return the book to the library but in the episode of Azad Maidan, the book was lost and only this torn-off page remained. And that had the essential evidence.

Rajendra read the page; how Vishwasrao narrowly missed the bullet; and how that event, taken as a sign by the Maratha army, turned things to their advantage. Then Gangadharant took out his own copy of Bhausahebanchi Bakhar, where the bullet hit Vishwasrao.

Rajendra and Professor Gaitonde were both very curious to know the facts.

Rajendra tried to explain Professor Gaitonde's experience on the basis of two scientific theories. He explained that Professor Gaitonde had heard a lot about the upheaval theory at that seminar. He wanted to relate it to the Battle of Panipat. He said that wars fought face to face on open grounds offered excellent examples of this theory. The Maratha army was facing Abdali's troops on the field of Panipat. There was no great disparity between them as their protection was similar. So, a lot depended on the leadership and the confidence of the troops.

When Vishwasrao was killed, it proved to be the important moment of change. His uncle, Bhausahab, rushed into the fight and was never seen again. The troops were thoroughly demotivated as they had lost their important leaders. This led to their crushing defeat. The tom page was the path taken by the battle, when the bullet missed Vishwasrao, thus its effect on the troops was also just the opposite. Gangadharpant said that there was a likelihood of this as similar statements are made about the Battle of Waterloo, which Napoleon could have won. But since we live in a unique world, which has a unique history, this might just be guesswork but not reality.

Rajendra made his second point. He said 'reality' is what we experience directly with our senses or indirectly via instruments. But it is not limited to what we see.

Experiments on atoms and their constituent particles have proved that reality may not be exclusive. The Physicist discovered that the behaviour of these systems cannot be forecast conclusively even if all the physical laws governing those systems are known. For example if a bullet were fired from a gun in a given direction at a given speed, one would know where it would be at a later time. But one cannot make such an assertion for the electron. It may be here, there, anywhere. Professor Gaitonde felt that the quantum theory offered a lack of determinism.

Rajendra argued his case further. He asked Professor Gaitonde to imagine many world pictures. In each world the electron could be found in different location. Once the observer found where it was, he would know which world

we were talking about. But all those alternative worlds could exist just the same.

Professor Gaitonde wanted to know if there was any contact between those many worlds.

Rajendra said that there was a possibility both ways. We know the exact route of the planet. The electron could be orbiting in any of a large number of specified states. These states may be used to identify the world. In state no. 1 the electron was in a state of higher energy. In state no. 2 it was in a state of lower energy. It could make a jump from high to low energy and send out a pulse of radiation. Or a pulse of radiation could knock it out of state no. 2 into state no. 1. Such transitions were common in microscopic systems. These transitions could happen on a macroscopic level as well.

He felt that Gangadharpanth could have made a transition from one world to another and back again. He said that his theory was that disastrous situations offer completely different options for the world to proceed. It seemed that so far as reality was concerned all alternatives were viable but the observer could experience only one of them at a time.

By making a shift, Gangadharpanth was able to experience two worlds although one at a time. The one he lived in and the one where he spent two days. One had the history we know, the other a different history. The separation or split took place in the Battle of Panipat. He had neither travelled to the past nor to the future but was in the present but experiencing a different world. There must be many more different worlds at different points of time.

Gangadharpant wanted to know why had he made the transition. Rajendra said that there were many unsolved questions in science and this was one of them. However, he made a guess. He felt that Gangadharpant needed some contact to cause a transition. Perhaps, at the time of the collision he was thinking about the catastrophe theory and its role in wars or perhaps he was wondering about the Battle of Panipat and the neurons in his brain activated the transition.

Professor Gaitonde said he found the explanation probable. He had been wondering what path history would have taken if the result of the battle had gone the other way. That was what he was going to speak about in the Azad Maidan.

Rajendra laughed and said that now he was in a better position, as he would talk of his real life experience rather than just an assumption. But Gangadharpant looked serious. He said that his thousandth address was made on the Azad Maidan where he was so rudely interrupted. The Professor Gaitonde who disappeared while defending his chair on the platform will now never be seen presiding at another meeting as he had expressed his regrets to the organisers of the Panipat seminar.