
CHAPTER 1: ICHALKARANJI: LOCATION, HISTORY AND
EARLY TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Ichalkaranji, which was a small village in the eighteenth century, has now grown into a good-sized city. It is situated midway between Kolhapur and Miraj railway line. This railway line is built in the later part of the nineteenth century. Ichalkaranji is 9.6 Km. South of the railway station Hatkanangale and it is 29 Km. from Kolhapur. Kolhapur is its district place. Ichalkaranji is situated on latitude $16^{\circ}-40'$ North and longitude $74^{\circ}-32'$ East.¹ To the North of Ichalkaranji is Sangli district. On the West is the district Sindhudurg, to the South and the East is Belgaum district of Karnatak state.

Ichalkaranji was one of the Jagirs of Kolhapur state in the eighteenth century. It was under the control of Joshi-Ghorpade who were from the Konkan. The founder of Ichalkaranji state Naropant was born in 1663.² When he was five years old, his father Mahadjipant breathed his last.³ In 1670, Gangabai, the mother of Naropant with her only son, settled at Kapashi.

Maloji Ghorpade was a fine cavalry leader, in charge of Kapashi. He had made a name which was renowned almost second to that of Shivaji the great. Maloji trained each of his three sons in the arts of war and statesmanship, one of the three, Santajirao, especially distinguishing himself in Shivaji's Karnatic war for which he received the particular approbation of Shivaji.

Santajirao first saw in the young Naro the makings of

a future soldier. Once Santaji appreciated the enthusiasm shown by Naro in tackling the horse. Since then Santaji took personal interest in Naro and he himself made arrangements for the boy to obtain all the advantages of the civil and military education which was available in those days.⁴

Santajirao entrusted to Naro the sole management of the accounts of the army and of his own personal Jagir, and it soon became obvious that the master loved his servant as well as, if not more than, he would love his own son. On one occasion, says tradition, Dwarkabai, the wife of Santaji asked Naro to eat food from the plate of Santaji in order to prove according to Maratha custom, that Naro was Santaji's son.⁵ In due course this loving relationship was definitely expressed when Naro adopted Santaji's surname Ghorpade for himself and his family, thus becoming a real nobleman and member of the aristocracy.

During the minority of Piraji, the eldest son of Santaji, the Deshmukhi and Sardeshmukhi of Miraj Prant were administered by Naropant on behalf of the family. The Mokasa Annals of Ichalkaranji, Ajara, Arag and Manerajuri had also been granted by Santaji. In 1697-98 Naro added to the area under his administration by purchasing the Kulkarni Watan of Mhapan, the place of his birth, the whole village subsequently being granted to him in Inam by the Sardesai of Sawantwadi.⁶

When Naropant died his son Venkatrao Narayan was barely seventeen or eighteen years, although in experience he was probably equal to many of the great men of his day.⁷ He was the son-in-law of Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath. In 1724, Shahu Maharaj assigned Military Saranjam to Venkatrao with the exalted title of Memlakat Madar and asked him to serve under Bajirao.⁸ Venkatrao attracted later place spent certain period every year in Poona with his wife Anubai.⁹ His great masterpiece was his expedition against Goa. He consolidated his position by seizing a number of forts and strategical places, whilst these activities in the south enabled Chimaji Appa to capture the almost impregnable fort at Bassein, to reduce the whole of the northern Konkan, and place that territory once again under the Maratha rule.¹⁰

In many respects Venkatrao was like his father, Naro. His active career, both civil and military, between 1720 and 1745 very plainly reveals that he was an able general, a judicious councillor and a careful administrator. Whenever he went to the Satara Darbar, Rajarshi Shahu received him standing, the title of Mamlakat Madar always being recognised by Shahu.

After Venkatrao, his son Narayan Venkatrao succeeded. He was popularly known as Tatyasaheb Ghorpade, who was not an able campaigner or a wise administrator like his father even though every opportunity had been provided by his father when he was

alive to acquaint with the art of good administration.¹¹

The third battle of Panipat was the turning point in Maratha history. After this war, there were constant clashes between the Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur and Ichalkaranjkar. The rulers of Kolhapur wanted to control the Ichalkaranji state but the Ghorpades were not ready to accept the control. Even the English supported the rights of Ichalkaranjkar. In October, 1822 Mr. Chaplin sent a very strong letter to the Kolhapur Darbar, "in the terms desired by Government charging him to continue the Eechukgerker as they had been conferred by the Peshwa".¹² Lastly the British Government in 1847 declared the chief of Ichalkaranji to be a feudatory of the Raja of Kolhapur. This decision proved to be the final one, thus fixing the seal of settlement on a longstanding dispute between the neighbouring states. On 1st March, 1949, the Ichalkaranji state was merged in Bombay province.

Textile Industry in Ichalkaranji

A) Textile Industry in the Nineteenth Century

In Maharashtra certain villages were famous for the weaving work. Ichalkaranji and the neighbouring villages were well known for this work from the last century. At present Ichalkaranji is known as Manchester of South Maharashtra. The contemporary records state that, "in 1845 A.D. Hatkanangle taluka

of Kolhapur State there were 636 handlooms, of which 236 were in Ichalkaranji itself."¹³ Even after 37 years, in 1882 in Kolhapur State there were 2,102 total number of weaving looms and of these 688 were in Alta, 654 in Gadahinglaj, 422 in Karvir, 397 in Shirol, 350 in Ichalkaranji, 226 in Panhala, 179 in Kagal, 86 in Bhudargad, 58 in Bavda and 32 in Vishalgad. Besides these, 17 looms functioned in Kolhapur jail factory which weaved all sorts of cloth including towels and table cloths".¹⁴ It means that within 37 years 114 handlooms increased in Ichalkaranji. The important cause was that the plantation of the Kumtha cotton was the major crop in the neighbouring villages.¹⁵

The year 1892 opened a new era in the history of Ichalkaranji. This year Narayan Babasaheb was enthroned in Ichalkaranji state. Under his able leadership and active cooperation Ichalkaranji became one of the important places of weaving centre in Bombay province. The report of an industrial survey of Kolhapur State, published in 1895, has given the number of looms, "the number of looms working on cotton cloth in Ichalkaranji Jahagir had increased from 337 in 1882 to 447 by 1895".¹⁶ Further, in the same report the suitable condition for the industrial development of Ichalkaranji is explained. The report states: "Ichalkaranji has a dry climate, a large population, a weekly bazaar day, a big trade and the most important thing is that it has an educated and cultured ruler in Shrimant Babasaheb to look

after its interests; as a result of these factors, there is no doubt that Ichalkaranji will become, in the near future, a centre of flourishing and important trade. And other towns in Kolhapur state will derive considerable benefit by emulating the example of Ichalkaranji."¹⁷ Babasaheb was the farsighted ruler; he gave wholehearted support to the industrial development of his Jagir capital. For regulating civic affairs a separate Municipal Council was established by him in 1873. The Municipal Council has helped for the rapid growth of Ichalkaranji.

B) Narayan Babasaheb and Textile Industry

We have already stated about the vision of Babasaheb in industry, especially in textile-field. Babasaheb invited some weavers (Koshti) families from neighbouring villages to Ichalkaranji, sanctioned lands for their residence-cum-factories and gave them initial financial assistance to produce cloth on handlooms. This plan of Babasaheb has met with great success and "Ichalkaranji was known for its cloth production especially for its 'Patagi' and Kunabau sutade."¹⁸ The Galichas (woollen carpet) of Ichalkaranji were famous in those days.¹⁹

The economic condition of the Koshtis was not sound, so, Babasaheb often advanced money through the state treasury. He gave concession in even tax. He passed laws and created a healthy atmosphere for the growth of weaving industry. He supplied at

concessional rates plots of land for the weavers. In this way, he gave full support to those who were genuinely interested in this new job.

Upto 1892, only handloom industry expanded, but under the constructive leadership, the powerloom industry started in Ichalkaranji. At the beginning, with the help of powerloom, grey cloth was produced. The first powerloom factory named as Vyankatesh Rangtantu Mills was started by Vitthalrao Datar.²⁰

Finance is an important aspect for the growth of any industry. For this purpose, with the support of Babasaheb, the first Bank in Ichalkaranji known as 'The Ichalkaranji Central Cooperative Bank' (Ichalkaranji Urban Cooperative Bank) was established in 1929. It is due to the leadership and full support of Babasaheb that Ichalkaranji became an important powerloom weaving centre and later came to be known as the Manchester of South Maharashtra. The Times of India, Bombay wrote: "Shrimant Narayanrao Babasaheb has been a pioneer in fostering and developing women's education in Ichalkaranji and encouraging rural cooperative credit societies and Grain Banks in the villages. He has also fostered the weaving industry in the state."²¹ In brief Ichalkaranji became an important centre of weaving industry largely because of the patronage of Babasaheb.

C) Textile Industry After Independence

After independence some enterprising persons brought from Bombay and Ahmedabad, old powerlooms discarded by the Mills, and laid the foundation of a booming industry in Ichalkaranji. The cooperative movement also played an important role in the weaving industry. Success of sugar cooperatives inspired and emboldened cooperators to organise cooperative spinning mills also and, accordingly, the 'Deccan Cooperative Spinning Mill', was established at Ichalkaranji in 1962 as the first cooperative venture in the state to commence production. Marwari merchants have also been instrumental to the growth of weaving industry. They built up a market for powerloom saris and dhoties. Further, the labour became familiar with the techniques of industry and in a short period a high standard of workmanship developed.

Now Ichalkaranji produces 20 lakh metres of cloth per day, and yarn consumption stands at 1,40,000 Kg. per day. The total number of looms is 40,000 which engage about 60,000 workers, almost one third of the total population of the town.²² Besides there are 95 sizing units, machine processing houses, 10 hand-processes and three spinning mills. About 750 traders are busy in the purchase and sale of yarn and cloth. A number of cooperative institutions and banks are busy helping the industry.²³

Ichalkaranji is the biggest industrial centre producing

cotton cloth on powerlooms. Dhoti, saree, poplins, cambric mulls, khadi etc. are the different varieties of cloth manufactured here. It is because of this since the last ten years, it has become the country's biggest cloth centre. It has started providing facilities for printing in a variety of colours. It has thus become a centre of attraction for national as well as foreign traders. The special facilities in the city start from making yarn to all sorts of processing of the produced cloth.

There are certain problems before the weaving industry in Ichalkaranji. The main handicap of the powerloom industry is under-utilisation of capacity. This is due to various reasons such as inadequate supply of yarn at reasonable prices, non-availability of working capital, crippling effect due to the master weaver system, sub-standard looms discarded by Mills etc. Unless prompt and effective steps are taken to solve these problems, the powerlooms may not be able to fulfil the target allocated to it. Ashok Mehta Committee in 1964 and the sub-working Group constituted by the Ministry of Commerce (Department of Textiles) to prepare draft of the fifth Plan has reported of the necessity of establishing cooperative spinning mills of powerloom weavers. Schemes for financial assistance to the spinning cooperatives of growers and handloom weavers should also be made applicable to the cooperative spinning mills of powerloom weavers.

This is the brief history of Ichalkaranji, from which it

can be learnt as to how Babasaheb was instrumental in encouraging the textile looms. In due course of time it has established itself as a textile centre and the growth of the same can be felt. The purpose of this study is to understand Trade Union movement in Ichalkaranji; because of the peculiarity of this town.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1
Gazetteer of India; Kolhapur District, Revised Edition of Vol. XXIV of original Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, 1960, p. 840.
- 2
Franks, H.G. - The Story of Ichalkaranji - The Scottish Mission Industries Co. Ltd., Poona, 1929, p. 8.
- 3
Ibid.
- 4
Ibid., p. 11.
- 5
Ibid., p. 17.
- 6
Ibid., p. 23.
- 7
Ibid., p. 30.
- 8
Ibid., p. 31.
- 9
Ibid.
- 10
Pisurlencar, Pandurang - Maratha-Portuguese Sambandha (Marathi) Poona, 1969, pp. 198-200.

- 11
Khare, Vasudeo Waman - Ichalkaranji Sansthancha Itihas (Marathi), Poona, 1913, pp. 99-107.
- 12
Quoted in Franks, H.G., Op. cit., p. 102.
- 13
Deshpande, D.N. and Kulkarni, S.Y. - Industrial Development of Kolhapur, in 'Kolhapur Darshan' (Marathi) 1971, p. 366.
- 14
Campbell, J.M. - "Bombay Gazetteer, Karnatak, Kolhapur", Vol. XXIV, pp. 211-212.
- 15
Maharashtra Magazine (Marathi) Poona, Oct-Nov., 1942, p. 43.
- 16
Modak, B.P. - "A report on the Industrial Survey of the Kolhapur State" (Marathi) 1995, p. 27.
- 17
Ibid.
- 18
Tamhankar, N.D. - Autobiography of Babasaheb Ghorpade (Marathi) 1951, p. 66.
- 19
Maharashtra Magazine (Marathi) Poona, Oct-Nov., 1942, p. 42.
- 20
Ibid., p. 43.
- 21
The Times of India (Newspaper), Bombay, 1.7.1942.
- 22
First All India Powerloom Weavers' Convention, 1981 (Souvenir), p. 29.
- 23
Ibid.