

C H A P T E R - I I

SIR R.V. SABNIS : EARLY LIFE

(1857 - 1893)

Sir R.V. Sabnis was the most successful Diwan of Kolhapur, from 1898 to 1926. It is fascinating and interesting to study his early life, childhood, education, marriage, his first service in the Education Department of Bombay Government.

FAMILY HISTORY :

The ancestors of R.V. Sabnis were migrated from Mandevgad to Konkan first and later on from Konkan to Murud, Janjira, and entered in the service of Senapati Ghorpade who bestowed on them as Inam the hereditary post of 'Sabnis' of the fort of Gajendragad which was now situated in Karnataka State and where one branch of the Ghorpade family was ruling.¹ The post of Sabnisi continued in their family till Raghunath's father representative of the eldest branch broke away seeking lively hood in Kolhapur State about the early forties. Sir R.V. Sabnis father Vyanketesh Raghunath Sabnis later on entered in the service of Kagal Jahagir, which was one of the feudatory Jahagirdar of Kolhapur state. The Jahagirdar of Kagal was Ghatage family which was as old as other Maratha ruling families. The Ghatage's acquired their Jahagir from Adilshahi ruler first and later on became the Jahagirdar

of Kolhapur State. And in this historical Jahagir Sir. R.V. Sabnis's father joined the service in Revenue Department.² Vyankatesh the father of Sir R.V. Sabnis, was settled in Kagal town where he made his family. At this time Vyankatesh's salary was not very high and family lived in a poor condition. Vyankatesh's wife was 'Saraswatibai'. She gave birth to a female child in 1852, who's name was Gayabai. After three years Saraswatibai gave birth to second male child whose name was Narayan,³ elder brother of Raghunathrao.

But the year 1857 was memorable in the history of British India as well as in the family history of 'Sabnis' also. The year 1857 was important in the history of India because the great revolt of 1857 took place throughout India against British Imperialism. This was regarded as the first war of India's Independence. But unfortunately this revolt was suppressed by Britishers and India's first war of Independence was failed. Thus the war of Independence proved a futile attempt to libirate India from the clutches from alion power. The British rule was firmly established over this vast subcontinent.

BIRTH :

But the year 1857 was important in the family of Sabnis because in this year Raghunathrao was born on 1st April 1857 at Kagal.⁴ Raghunathrao was a third child of Saraswatibai and Vyankatesh. On 1st April 1857 was Ramnavami therefore this third child was named as Raghunathrao, the another name of Lord Rama, and Raghunathrao was also the name of grandfather of Sir R.V. Sabnis. But the pleasure and joy of this third son (Sir R.V. Sabnis) did not last long. Because at that time there was severe famine and epedemic of Cholera broke out in South India. Kolhapur state was also affected by this epedemic of Cholera. Many persons were dying every day. And pious Saraswatibai received a severe blow. And this was nothing but the death of her husband Vyankatesh in 1859 and Raghunathrao and his brother and sister became orphans.⁵

Farmily recored narrates this sad incident in the following way. "During that period Raghunath born at Kagal on 1st of April, 1857. In a village, where his father was maintaining himself almost on hand to mouth Cholera epedemic made its appearance and he was snatched away in or about the year 1859. He was thus left an orphan and Raghunath's mother was a very pious

ledy full of devotion of high character"⁶

Thjus Saraswatibai became widow and her three little kids became helpless. This was a difficult and critical time for Saraswatibai and her children. This family had no any other source for livelihood. They had no land or any other source of income.

RAJARAM CHITNIS :

At this critical time Raghunath's widowed mother then had to seek refuge in the home of one of her relatives her sisters son Rajaram Venkatesh Chitnis,. The later was an Inam holder as the family ? still is in the Kolhapur State. He was also a paid servant of the state having served in the education and revenue departments. His service as a tutor to the late Maharaja (Rajaram Maharaja of Kolhapur who died at Florence in Italy about 1869) was very greetly appreciated by his Royal pupil.⁷

SABNIS SHIFTED TO KOLHAPUR :

When Sabnis family shifted from Kagal to Kolhapur in or about 1859 after the death of Vyankatesh, Babasaheb alias Shivaji III (1838-1866) was the Chhatrapati of Kolhapur. This Babasaheb had a brother

named Chimasaheb who was connected with the activities against British and took indirect part in the great revolt of 1857. Therefore when this revolt was suppressed, British continued Chimasaheb and deported to Karachi where he breathed his last in 1867.⁸

This Babasaheb Chhatrapati had two sisters named Aubai and Balabai and one brother Chimasaheb Babasaheb Chhatrapati had issueless. Therefore his Sister Aubai's son Nagojirao Patankar and second sister Balabai's son Jayasingrao Ghatage were staying at palace in Kolhapur. Therefore to train these two royal Saradar's son, British Started a school which was known as Saradar School for the children of from Royal family only. British Government appointed very selected and clever teachers on this Sardar's School to impart education to them.

Sir Raghunathrao's relative maternal aunt's son. Rajarampant Chitnis was the teacher in this Saradar School. Rajarampant Chitnis took the permission from Chhatrapati for admitting little Raghunathrao Vyankatesh Sabnis in this school. Chhatrapati Babasaheb gladly agreed this request of Rajaram Chitnis, the teacher of the School and Raghunathrao's early primary education was started in the Saradar School at Kolhapur.⁹

Rajarampant Chitnis was successful teacher as well as expert in the knowledge of Jyotishi i.e. Astrology. He prepared 'Kundali' of little Raghunathrao Sabnis and he predicted that Raghunathrao would be abright and glorious future which became true when Sir R.V. Sabnis appointed as a Diwan of Kolhapur.¹⁰

EARLY EDUCATION :

Raghunathrao's early education was started in Sardar School at Kolhapur and his one schoolmate was Jayasingrao Ghatage who later on became the Jahagirdar of Kagal (Sr.) and the natural father of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj and Bapusaheb Ghatage. This friendship and intimacy between Jayasingrao Alias Abasaheb Ghatage and Raghunathrao continued and lasted upto the death of Jayasingrao Ghatage (1886).¹¹

Another Royal students and companion of Raghunathrao was Nagojirao Patankar who later on adopted for the Gadi of Kolhapur by Babasaheb Maharaj and became future Chhatrapati of Kolhapur and renamed as Rajaram Maharaj (1866-1870).¹² This show that Sir R.V. Sabnis had fortunate to have a good relation's with the Chhatrapatis house of Kolhapur Sir. R.V. Sabnis continued his good relations and served Kolhapur Chhatrapati throughout his life.

Raghunathrao left Sardar School after the completion of his early education and started high school education in Kolhapur High School which was later on named a Rajaram High School in the memory of Chhatrapati Rajaram (1866-70). Who went to Europe for a trip and died at Florence on November 30th, 1870.¹³

This Rajaram Chhatrapati was of friend and school companion of Sir R.V. Sabnis in Sardar School.

Right from the beginning Sir R.V. Sabnis was a clever, hardworking and studious student. He liked English and Sanskrit subjects. He had mastery over these two subjects in addition to other subject and general knowledge also. Because he knew the importance of English language which was international language as well as eye openers of traditional Indians. Early Social reformers also gave much value for the learning of English language and literature. Sir R.V. Sabnis joined Rajaram High School and paid much attention towards English subject, because English was the language of rulers.

The year 1872 was an important in the life of Sir Raghunathrao Subnis. Because he completed his secondary

education from Rajaram High School Kolhapur from where he passed his Matriculation examination in 1872.¹⁴ Another important event that took place in the year 1872, was the marriage of Raghunathrao with Janakibai who was born in 1862, in the Fadnis family of Torgal Jahagir.¹⁵ At the time of marriage Raghunathrao's age was about 14, and Janakibai's age was about 9 years. At that time there was a practise of early marriages which Raghunathrao had to face. Another thing which one can take note that Raghunathrao was a high school student and continueing his education when his marriage took place. But he was eager to prosecute his further higher studies. He had to confront many financial problems but any how his guardian and relative Rajaram Pant Chitnis decided to send Raghunathrao to Bombay for higher education after he passed his Matriculation examination in 1872, with good marks. The passing of matriculation examination, from Bombay University at that time was not a easy task. There were very few who passed matriculation examination at that time.

Due to the efforts of Rajaram Pant Chitnis Raghunathrao went to Bombay and joined Elphinstone College where he started his higher college education. He completed his college education with the help of his

relatives where he was staying because right from the beginning Raghunathrao had to struggle very hard for subsistence. He was sincere and studious college student also, because he knew his financial condition. Being a clever and studious student Raghunathrao received Junior scholarship and Senior Scholarship during his college days while he was studying in B.A. in the Elphinstone College, Bombay. He was fortunate because Principal 'Wordsworth', Prof. Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar, K. T. Telang, were his great orientalist scholars, taught Raghunathrao Sanskrit, English Professors were teaching English subject to Raghunathrao. Right from the beginning Raghunathrao liked Sanskrit and English subjects. Which he selected for his B.A. course. He passed B.A. Examination of the Bombay University in 1877 from Elphinstone College with English and Sanskrit subjects.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that same year Lokmanya Tilak and Agarkar passed the examination.

After passing B.A. Sir Raghunathrao toyed with the idea of going in Law. But dropped the idea and entered educational service of Bombay Government. Tilak and Agarkar also entered Educational field, but that field was non governmental. They were among the founders

of the Deccan Education Society and worked as teachers in the educational institutions run by the Society. Tilak could not adjust himself to work in ^ocooperation with other teachers and the members of the Deccan Education Society and had to leave it.

The family record narrates the following account about R.V. Sabnis early career as follows.

His career at the college was fairly successful was both a junior and senior scholar in the F.A. & B.A. Classes. After graduation it was his desire to study Law. After a year's course at the Law classes he passed his jurisdiction examination but owing to straitened circumstances of his cousin he partly to support himself on tutions. One of his pupils for sometime was the late Sir Cowasjee Jahangir father of the present Baronet. Unable to further prosecute his studies he held service in the Bombay Educational department and was acting 1st Asstt. Master in Dhulia High School in 1879. During his college career his cousin was unable to send him sufficient where with all necessary for his maintenance at the college and for books and other necessaries he was able however by freeship and scholarship at the college and also by tutions somehow to finish his college education. He

wished to take up law and had even with that view filled up the terms for the junior students examination which he passed from Dhulia. As usual he formed very intimate friendship at college where among the prominent members of his co-students were now the late Mr. Ganesh Narayan Chandvarkar L.L.B., Ganesh Shrikrishna alias Dadasaheb Khapardekar LL.B., B.M. Kharkar Late Diwan, Janjira, Mr. Vinshu Krishna alias Tatyasaheb Bhatavdekar, LL.B., Mr. Ghanashyam Narayan Pandit of Rajkot Mr. Deshmukh C.S., Laxman Gopal alias Appasaheb, Mr. Raghunath Shivaram Tipnis, District Judge, Mr. Narayan Daji Gupta Pleader of Thana, Rao Bahadur R.N. alias Jalgesaheb Mudholkar LL.B. and for some time also Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He served at Dhulia from 1878 to 1886 as 1st Assistant and some time as head master with a short break. And thence was transferred to Thana where he put in a service of nearly 7 years (1886-93). As usual both at Dhulia and Thana the honorary of the secretaries of Libraries was performed by him while as 1st Asstt. in Byramjee Jijibhai Thana High School the idea again came into his mind of further prosecuting his last studies with that view he took furlough leave filling terms at law college. But on the day of examination a very serious attack of

Lumbago prevented him from appearing for the examination. So he had finally to give up the idea and when he felt well he resumed his duties Byramjee Jijibhai High School. Within a short time he was transferred from there as 1st Assistant Master to Poona High School in 1893, where he served only for a short time under the late Mr. R.D. Prior who was the head master of the school and who subsequently occupied the highest post in the Bombay Educational Department, then the director of Instruction. I was in short connection with Mr. Prior that subsequently led to his transfer to Kolhapur. Service as tutor to His Highness The Maharaja of Kolhapur.¹⁷

R.V.SABNIS AND EDUCATION DEPTT : (1879-1893)

It is interesting to note the meeting between Raghunathrao and Justice M.G. Ranade and Vishwashwarayya who were all serving in Dhule for some time. These three men became great later on and they had good relations with each other. Shri S.V.Chitnis P.A. to R.V.Sabnis narrates these meetings in the following way.

While working as head Master at Dhulia Sir Raghunathrao came in contact with Justice Mahadeo Govind

Ranade and Sir M.Vishweshwarayya. The period was between May 1879 to January 1881. Ranade was 1st class Sub-judge while Sir Vishweshwarayya was working there as Civil Engineer. His meetings with Ranade were occasional, but he was greatly influenced by Ranade's approach towards life. Both men had some common qualities. They lived a non-attached life amidst so many attachments. Both were very gently and never used harsh language. Both were by nature compromising and always tried to reconcile opposite groups. Sir Raghunathrao used to relate one particular incident very often. Ranade was once asked to preside over meeting in which men of conservative (Sanatani) and socially progressive (Sudharak) were represented. Ranade was by nature a social reformer. But in that meeting he made such a compromising speech which pleased both the conservatives and socially progressive.

Sir Vishweshwar was not so compromising. He was a hard taskmaster and saw to it that everything is carried to his full satisfaction. He was rather stern in his behaviour. But in spite of his nature, Sir Raghunathrao could be friend him. His attitude towards Ranade was more of reverence and admiration than friendliness, but with Sir Vishweshwar Ayya he formed deep

friendship which was to last to the end. There was perfect communication between them. I remember one interesting incident. Once Sir Raghunathrao on his birth anniversary received 'Knights of the Round Table', by Oliver Wendell Holmes. There was no mention from whom the gift had come. But Sir Raghunathrao from whom the gift had come. He wrote back to Sir Vishweshwar Ayya a humourous letter. The fact was that both of them had read the book, had enjoyed reading it and sweet memories of that very famous book had lingered in their mind even after nearly sixty years. Ranade was Prarthanasamajist, while Sir. Raghunathrao was not a follower of any particular cult. But both of them profoundly admired Swami Dayanand Saraswati the founder of Arya Samaj. Of course, they may not have agreed with his philosophy in toto. But they accepted much of his philosophy. They accepted Dayanand's Philosophical insistance on the independent reality of the material world. To Dayanandji nature was not an illusion or hallucination. Nature has a reality of its own. Hence, social and political action and material prosperity have a significance and worth. Dayanandji advocated Social reforms. His gospel of equal rights at all including the untouchable had a great national meaning. Besides Dayanandji's stress on character-

building, moral education, purity and chastity was immensely appreciated by these two stalwarts, who were men of spotless moral character. In 1885, Dayanandji visited Poona and Ranade devoted much time looking after him and attending his lectures.

Ranade and his friends had arranged to take Dayanandji in procession in planning on elephant. When the procession was about to start, the diehard sanatains began to shout anti-Dayanand slogan and incessantly threw mud on the procession. Ranade was among the processionist. His clothes were mudsoiled. Sir Raghunathrao when read about this incidence in newspaper immediately wrote touching letter to him condemning the hooligans who had done this. Ranade wrote back a philosophical letter with a tinge of humour in it. I do not remember the exact wording of the letter as told by Sir Raghunathrao. But the wording was something like this. "I was glad that they did not spare me. I was a part of the procession. It was to the credit of the hooligans that they treated all with equality. They did not think of whether an individual in the procession was big or small ? I think, personal prestige is not involved in this matter."

Sir Raghunathrao served in the educational department for 14 years i.e. from 1879 to 1893, in the

capacity as head master at Dhulia, Poona and Thana. He taught English and Sanskrit to higher standards. He was very methodical in his work. He was always available to the students to solve their difficulties. Many of his students rose to be eminent leaders, men of professions and social workers. Sir Cowasji Janhageer (Sr.) who was one of his student, always spoke very highly about his teaching abilities. Sabnis moulded me into what I am today he used to say. I had an occasion to meet yet another student of his, Kirtankar Athavale. He spoke about Sir Raghunathrao in a voice charged with emotions. He said, "I was one of those students, who neglected their studies. But Sabnis Guruji gave a personal attention to me and slowly developed into me a liking for studies."¹⁸

Thus after serving 14 years in the educational department finally Sir Raghunathrao Sabnis was selected as tutor to H.H. Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur which was turning year in the career of Sir R.V.Sabnis.

RAGHUNATHRAO'S FAMILY :

Before we discuss his work in the Kolhapur state as a great administrator it is useful to see his family

history. We already narrated that Raghunathrao was married with Janakibai in 1872. In all Raghunathrao and Janakibai had 8 children. Their first child was female which died in infancy. The second female child Anusayabai was born in 1882. The third male child Rambhau was born in 1883. The fourth female child Manutai was born in 1884. The 5th male child Gajananrao was born in 1887. After that Janakabai gave birth to one male and one female child that died in prematurely. Their last child was Laxmanrao alias Baburao whose birth took place in 1903.¹⁹

Thus the family life of Raghunathrao was satisfactory and truthful. He was glad to join as the tutor to H.H. Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur because he belong to Kolhapur state and well connected with Royal family since his childhood. This was opportunity to serve Kolhapur state which we will narrate in the third chapter.

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