

C H A P T E R - I I I

R.V. SABNIS AND KOLHAPUR STATE

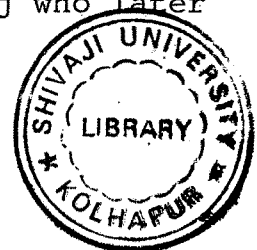
(Early Phase)

The year 1893 was a memorable and important because in this year Sir Raghunathrao was appointed as a native Tutor to H.H. Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and entered in the State Service which continued upto his retirement from the post of Diwanship in 1926. Thus he spent many fruitful years in the State service.

While he was appointed as tutor to Shahu Maharaj in 1893, 'Dhananjay Keer', the famous biographer writes aptly about Sabnis as follows :-

"Sabnis came of a family belonging to the Kayastha Prabhu Community which was well known in Maratha history for its loyalty, intelligence and ability in civil and military administration. There was a keen rivalry between the Brahmin politicians and the Prabhu politicians during Peshawa rule and the later suffered Socio-religious persecution at the hands of the Peshawas. The Brahmins of Kolhapur tried to dissuade the Maharaja from appointing Sabnis to the high post but failed. Sabnis shared Shahu's Social views and outlook and he proved to be a loyal able and up bright statesman in years that followed".<sup>11</sup>

Sir R.V. Sabnis was a philosopher guide teacher and lifelong friend of Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj who later



on became the great Social reformer of modern India. Here it is essential to see some back history of the Kolhapur state. After the death of Rajaram in 1870, Shivaji IV became the Chhatrapati of Kolhapur. This Shivaji IV was unfortunately became insane and Britishers sent him to the fort of Ahmadnagar where he died on 25th December, 1883.<sup>2</sup> While he was quarrelling with British Soldier. The Kolhapur throne was vacant therefore Bombay government approved the request of Kolhapur Darbar and Anandibai the widow of Shivaji IV adopted Babasaheb alias Yashwantrao the son of Abasaheb Ghatage as the next Chhatrapati of Kolhapur. The adoption ceremony took place on 17th March, 1884 and Yashwantrao who was born in July 26th, 1874,<sup>3</sup> at Kolhapur was renamed as Shahu Chhatrapati. Thus at the time of adoption, Shahu Chhatrapati was 10 years old when he became the Chhatrapati of Kolhapur Bombay Government made arrangement for his education and appointed Sir S.M. Fraser I.C.S. as the European tutor to Shahu Maharaj S.M. Fraser was liberal and was one of the life long friend philosopher and guide of Shahu Maharaj. Shahu's first native tutor K.B. Gokhale wishing to retire and proceeded on leave therefore British Government was in search of another native tutor to Shahu Maharaj. At this time Sir Stuart Fraser was his

guardian at that time, he wrote to the Director of Instruction of Bombay province to suggest a tutor for Shahu Maharaj Sir Raghunathrao was thus selected. He tutored Shahu Maharaj for a year or so. Thus in January, 1893 Government appointed another Indian tutor, Raghunath Vyankaji Sabnis and his studies continued now under Sabnis."4

The official record narrates the Appointment of R.V.Sabnis in the following way :

"S.M.Fraser I.C.S. the tutor and Guardian to his highness was assisted by a native tutor Mr.Krishnaji Bhikaji Gokhale since 1889. But in 1895, Mr.Gokhale went to long leave for two years and Mr.Raghunath Vyankatesh Sabnis B.A. of the Bombay University, Acting Head Master of the Thana High School whose service were lent to the state by Government, was appointed in his place. He joined his new appointment in January, 1893 at Dharwar. This new native tutor remained life long friend and trusted Diwan of the Maharaja in later part of his life Maharaja remained at Dharwar up to 15th November, 1893 the date of the end of his tutelage".5

S.M.Fraser, the chief guide and guide and guardian are remained holding the same position. By disposition Sir, Sabnis was serious, truthful and genial as also methodical in his work and well versed in English and Sanskrit. He had a deep regard for the life and mission of Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj and was a strong supporter of the cause of the Untouchables.

Sir R.V.Sabnis joined as tutor in January, 1893 and at this time Shahu Maharaj along with his brother Bapusaheb were taking education at Dharwar. Therefore, the new Indian tutor R.V.Sabnish went to Dharwar and joined Royal party in 1893. After the usual work at Dharwar during term time which was only broken for a short while by the visit to the Chinchali, fair and cattle show opened by Lord Harris. the party spent their Summer holidays at Mahabaleshwar. His Highness returned to Kolhapur on the 19th May where the final ceremonies in connection with the marriage took place about the end of that month. The second term of this the last year of the Maharaja's tutelage ended on November 15th. At the end of this term the Maharaja started to make a tour through his own districts. The Government had already indicated its intention to invest the Maharaja with the full powers of his position and it was but natural that he should have now on the eve of his accession, desired to see something of his state with his own eyes.<sup>6</sup>

During this last year (when R.V.Sabnis was Indian tutor) of his tutorship Fraser gave his Royal pupils some knowledge of the general principles of Government and legislation and of more important laws regulating the Chief branches of administration. The final phase of the allround training began in right earnest, Shahu and Bapusaheb, having been furnished with notes and lectures on the village and district place system and a Summary on the Indian penal code and criminal procedure code, both attended the court of the chief Judge. In addition the system of village revenue accounts and the elaborate account kept in the Khasagi Department had also been studied. At the same time important subjects of general education were not entirely left out. Thus came to an end the training which had begun nearly 4 years earlier. This was really a good type of education and training for a ruler. The kind-hearted Fraser prepared the Royal pupils for the great task that lay before them. They learn several virtues from their tutor. Sir R.V.Sabnis also took the studies of Shahu Maharaj and performed his duty satisfactorily.<sup>7</sup>

In 1894 Shahu became major because he completed 20 years. Therefore, Bombay Government invested Shahu Maharaj with all powers. The ceremony of investing full power was celebrated on 2nd April, 1894. By Lord Harris

Governer of Bombay. The investiture ceremony took place in a Darbar held for the purpose at the hands of Lord Harris, the Governer of Bombay. The investiture ceremony was attended by the Chiefs and Saradars and Officers of the Kolhapur state and a large number of European and Indian guests.<sup>8</sup>

After Shahu Mahraj was invested with full powers, on the recommendation of his guardian S.M.Fraser, Raghunathrao Sabnis was appointed 'Huzur Chitnis' the new post created by Shahu Maharaj in 1894.<sup>9</sup> Huzur Chitnis means Private Secretary to H.H.Shahu Chhatrapati.

#### CREATING OF THE HUZUR OFFICE:

On the 14th April, 1894 i.e. within a fortnight after his installation His Highness Shahu Chhatrapati speacially created a new office called the "Huzur Office" or the Secretariat for the supervision of the entire executive work of the state and a new post of principal Officer, in charge of the office designated as Huzur "Chitnis" or the Chief Secretary. In addition, the experienced persons from the state service known for their efficiency were transferred to the "Huzur Office" Further all orders passed by His Highness were to be issued under the signature of Huzur Chitnis who had to sign in the name of "By order of His Highness the Maharaja"

Raosaheb R.V. Sabnis, former native tutor to Maharaja was appointed first Huzur Chitnis and he began to function as Huzur Chitnis from the 14th April, 1894. This was the major remarkable measure taken by His Highness Shahu Chhatrapati since the office ultimately succeeded in curbing to a great extent the powers of the members of the council of Administration.<sup>10</sup>

Prof. A.B. Lalthe narrates as follows :-

"His Highness fully realised this difficulty and at the very outset of his career, when he had to select his secretary, the choice was made in consultation with Mr. Fraser and fell upon Mr. R.V. Sabnis who had then been with the Maharaja for more than a year. A staff consisting of picked men from the state Service was placed in the now Huzur Office.<sup>11</sup>

Thus actually when Shahu Maharaj attained majority Sir Raghunathrao's work as tutor was over but Shahu Maharaj wanted him to stay and Sir Stuart Fraser also wished that he should not go back in Bombay provincial service. He recommended to Shahu Maharaj that Sir Raghunathrao may be appointed as Huzur Chitnis. (Personal Secretary). The suggestion was readily accepted by Maharaj.

Sir R.V. Sabnis joined this new appointment as Huzur Chitnis from April 14th, 1894. The work of Huzur



office was to supervise the executive work of the state. "All Orders" announced the Gazette, passed by HisHighness issue under the signature of the Huzur Chitnis who signs by order of His Highness the Maharaja.<sup>12</sup>

R.V. Sabnis worked well as Huzur Chitnis for one and half year only and Shahu Maharaj was very much pleased with the work of Sabnis. Therefore Shahu Maharaj promoted R.V. Sabnis on June 24, 1896 to the post of Chief Revenue Officer in place of Vaidya who had retired.<sup>13</sup>

The Administrative report for the year 1896-97 gives the following account regarding the appointment of Chief Revenue Officer.

"Rao Bahadur Balwant Narayan Joshi, B.A., LL.B. Chief Judge, was absent of privelege leave of 2 months from 1st June, 1896 and Raosaheb Vishwanath Ballal Gokhale B.A. LL.B. assistant Judge was appointed to act fo for him, during his absence Raosaheb Dattatraya Sitaram Ghalakar, Sadar Amin was in charge of his office in addition of his own duties.<sup>14</sup>

Right from the beginning Shahu Chhatrapati desiring to raise the standard of efficiency in administration was in search of good officers who could be helpful to him in his administrative work. Diwan M.K.

Taraporewala left uneasy and started to go on leave now and then.

Anxious to pick up clever and able young men for the administration. The Maharaja appointed Bhaskar Vithoji Jadhav probationary Assistant Sarsubha, from June 1, 1895, Jadhav was a brilliant scholar of Bombay University, and came first in matriculation examination in 1888. Born in 1863, he obtained a first class in his B.A. And M.A. Examination in 1892, and 1894 respectively. Jadhav was appointed but was asked to join after completion of his studies.<sup>15</sup>

The interested group and the Brahmin news papers began to criticise the Maharaja for appointing non-Brahmin officials of his choice. Jadhav's appointment awakened the curiosity of Justice Ranade. He enquired of Sabnis who knew him well, for both of them were once serving at Dhulia, whether Jadhav could work as well as Sabnis and he would do. This showed how even a liberal and broadminded leader like Ranade failed to recognise unreservedly the ability of non-Brahmin to work as efficiently as a Brahmin.<sup>16</sup>

It was Shahu's firm belief that a mixture of different cast in the administration would hold the

balance properly. As a Sarsubhe (Chief revenue officer) Shri Sabnis did a great work and increased the income of revenue of the Kolhapur State. Shahu was much impressed by the personality of Sabnis, who was calm, astute and expert in administration.

When Sabnis was Sarsubhe in 1896, Maharajibhai Taraporwala was working as Diwan of Kolhapur State.

Shahu Maharaj was not happy with his Diwan. Though Taraporewala was a perfect gentleman he was just like a square peg in a round hole. He was alien to the state. Moreover, he being a choice of the Bombay Government, Shahu Maharaj was averse to a choice being thrust upon him. He wanted to appoint his tutor, friend, guide and philosopher Sabnis as the Diwan of Kolhapur. He submitted to the Bombay Government that his state being a small state and financially in bad condition, he may be allowed to appoint Diwan on comparatively a small salary. As Tareporewala also was not keen to continue as Diwan, he resigned on grounds of health and Sir Raghunathrao was duly appointed as the Diwan of Kolhapur.

But his appointment created a furore in the Brahmin community. They were reconciled to a Parsee or for that matter to a Diwan from any other community.

But they were all against the appointment of Non brahmin Diwan. Such thing had not happened since the days of the Great Shivaji. A Kshatriya King should have a Brahmin Prime Minister was their line of thinking. They with the help of Kesari group carried a character assassination campaign against Sir Raghunathrao. They adopted the meanest tactice and tried to impress upon Shahu Maharaj that Sir Raghunathrao was a spy of the Bombay Government broughtto keep a watch on him. Shahu Maharaj treated all the slanderings with utter contempt. He challenged them to prove the charges, which the slanderers could not. Sir Raghunathrao was to get a salary of Rs. 500/- per month i.e. nearly 33% p.c. of what Taraporewala was getting. Shahu Maharaj deliberately fixed such a low salary.<sup>17</sup> He wanted to convey to the Bombay Government that he could not afford to give higher salary to his Diwan. This was to avoid any other choice being foisted on him by the Bombay Government. But he was also aware that he was giving much less salary, than his Diwan deserved. So Shahu Maharaj arranged to give some other facilities to him in order to compensate the low salary in addition to a specious he was provided with three or four vehicles for transport and a post of servants. Besides Shahu Maharaj arranged to send daily milk, vegetables and other some household items. After

some years he raised his salary was Rs. 600/-.<sup>18</sup>

The appointment of Mr. Sabnis as a Diwan or Prime Minister of Kolhapur was not liked by the Brahmins. Because whatever the official position which Mr. Sabnis occupied, he was his Chief adviser in all his work for the non-Brahmin cause. The Brahmin oligarchy of the minority period fully realised the dangers of an astute non-Brahmin politician like Mr. Sabnis being by the Maharaja's side and tried their utmost to remove him. Three influential Brahmins, Mr. Tilak, who was then a member of the Bombay Legislative Council, Mr. B.N. Joshi who Chief Judge of Kolhapur and Dr. Dhondopant Borkar who was then the trusted physician of His Highness urged upon His Highness the necessity of sending Mr. Sabnis back to British Service on the ground that they had evidence of his being a tutor to the Maharaja himself. The Maharaja asked them to produce it which they never could do and the attempt only strengthened his confidence in Mr. Sabnis.<sup>19</sup>

Col. J.W. Wray was appointed political Agent on January 18th, 1897 'Wray' was young and experienced to start with he was on cordial terms with the Chatrapati, the friend of his father. Wray's methods however, provoked opposition. Wray clashed with principle Candy too.

Wray's relations with Diwan Meharajibhai Taraporwala was not good also. This Diwan went on long leave for one year from September 5th, 1898, Prior to retirement and R.V.Sabnis finally was appointed Diwan of Kolhapur from that day (September 5th, 1898).<sup>20</sup>

"Khan Bahadur Maharajibhai Kuvarji, C.I.E. Diwan was absent on privilege leave for 3 months from 14th March, 1898 and Rao Bahadur Raghunath Vyankaji Sabnis B.A. Chief Revenue Officer was appointed to act for him.<sup>21</sup> Further on 26th August the Government notification regarding the appointment of Khansaheb Rustomaji Palanji, the Chief Police Officer as the Officer on special duty in the Diwan Office from 21-6-1898 to 25-8-1898.<sup>22</sup>

As a Diwan or Prime Minister of Kolhapur State Raghunathrao Sabnis worked 1898 to 1926. His tenure of Diwanship withnessed many ups and downs. During this period (1898 to 1922) his master and pupil Shahu Maharaj had to confront many difficulties. But Sir R.V. Sabnis supported the progressives policies of Shahu Maharaj and firmly stood behind Shahu Maharaj in hours of need and difficulty.

It is really difficult to access the Raghunathrao's role properly in development and progress of the Kolhapur

state. Due to his unattached and unassuming nature he never tried to take credit for any thing, which he did for the state. But it cannot be denied that he is one of the builders of the Kolhapur State.

He wholeheartedly co-operated in Shahu Maharaj's policy of Harijan uplift movement. He was one of the main architects in making the education a mass movement.

In addition to Diwan Shri R.V. Sabnis was worked as famine and plague commissioner, from time to time whenever there was necessity. As a plague and famine commissioner Sir. R.V. Sabnis introduced many new measures to prevent famine and plague, in the Kolhapur state.<sup>23</sup>

Close on the heels of famine a terrible epidemic of plague broke out early in 1896 in Bombay. From December 1896 spread over to Karachi, Bivandi and Poona. The Kolhapur Darbar had to forearm itself against the advent of this calamity which raged almost through out the year 1896. In village belonging to the British districts of Satara and Belgaum and to the Southern Maharashtra States lying on the northern and eastern boundary of the Kolhapur State. Precautionary measures were adopted by the state against its invasion of the Kolhapur state so far the measures had proved largely successful. This

all work was carried on by Sir R.V. Sabnis.<sup>24</sup>

In 1899 there arose the danger of plague and famine in Kolhapur state also. Plague had spread in Kolhapur. There was little of no, rain that year and the crops had failed. Water became scarce and prices soared. Bhaskarrao Jadhav, was appointed Assistant plague commissioner from September 4th 1899, and from January 1st, 1900, he was made also Assistant Famine Collector.

Measures were adopted to check the plague and the famine. Arrangement were made not only to sell grass on cheap rates but also to provide fodder for those animals which could not be cared for by their owners. Suspension of land revenue, too was granted liberally.<sup>25</sup>

The Chhatrapati ably pulled his State through plague and famine. He stayed at Panhala so that the people from the different villages could come directly to him and speak to him of their difficulties. During the terrible famine days Shahu opened cheap grain shops and established houses for the poor. To increase employment he started works at places where water supply was good. He also sanctioned the grant of 'Tagai' to farmers in times of plague and intimes of cholera the villages were kept clean. Drinking water was preserved from contamination and medicines were distributed freely.



All pilgrimages were banned. Reports of plague cases were rewarded, observation camps were opened and food was supplied to the poor and weak. Sabnis worked day and night to see and to implement these measures to prevent famine, Cholera, and plague.<sup>26</sup>

Sir R.V. Sabnis as a plague commissioner issued some important notification in which the strict rules were made to follow the subject of Kolhapur for preventing plague. The following are some important and worth while for quoting notification which one can study.

**RULES FOR THE PROTECTION OF PANHALA FORT :**

In view of the out break of plague at Kolhapur and adjoining villages it being thought most desirable to keep Panhala Fort which is the only health resort for people on this side free from infection, the following rules are made and published under His Highness' orders for the information and guidance of the Plague Officers and the public :-

- (1) Plague authorities specially appointed for this purpose by the Plague Commissioner Kolhapur are authorised to prevent the entry of any persons who upon medical examination are found to exhibit any suspicious symptoms

of plaguee into the hill station of Panhala and to order the detention of such persons in a place of observation for a period not exceeding ten days and to make necessary arrangements for the disinfection of their clothing, baggage etc.

(2) So long as he remains under detention in a place of observation under rule 1 no person shall be allowed except with the permission of the Plague Officer in-charge of the camp to communicate with any persons outside the limits of the said place; and he shall obey such orders as may be issued from time to time by the Plague Officer for securing the cleanliness or protection from infection of persons property or quarters of persons detained in such place.

(3) The Plague Officer Panhala is empowered to prohibit the entry into Panhala Fort of such persons who have no visible means of subsistence or reasonable prospect of employment or who are unable to give any address at which they may be found.

(4) Persons allowed to enter Panhala shall be required to record their addresses at the observation at the dispensary Panhala for a period not exceeding ten days from the date of arrival and their cloths and

baggage may be disinfected if the Plague Officer thinks it necessary. The Hospital Assistant at Panhala will if so desired, call upon such persons at quarters on payment of his fees. The Plague Officer Panhala is empowered to send for detention in a place of observation under Rule 1 any person who wilfully fails to present for such medical examination in accordance with the provisions of this rule.

(5) The following persons may be exempted from the medical examination prescribed by Rule 4 viz. :-

- (a) All persons Occupying detached bungalows,
- (b) European ladies and gentlemen and Sardars and natives of rank and respectability.

(6) Every head of a family shall be bound to give immediate information to the Plague Officer, Panhala of any case of Plague and of any case of fever and any case presenting any suspicious symptoms, which may occur in his family or amongst his servants.

(7) Servants of persons coming to Panhala from infected quarters are liable to be detained for ten days in the observation camp established near the Budhwar Peth.

(8) Persons going under a pass from the Plague Commissioner or Private Secretary of His Highness the Chhatrapati Maharaja shall be exempted from detention.

(9) Servants of persons coming from non-infected parts shall be exempted detention if on medical examination be found fit to proceed on their producing a certificate from any Magistrate to the effect that they have been staying in a non-infected locality continuously for three weeks or more prior to their departure.

(10) That every house or houses which will be infected by plague will be compulsarily evacuated and the persons occupying them will have to leave Panhala at once and go to any other place that may be convenient to them : no Plague patient will be allowed to stay at Panhala.

(11) For purposes of these rules the following officers shall be considered as Plague Officers :-

Medical Officer in charge of the Panhala Detention Camp.

Medical Officer attached to the place at Panhala.

Private Secretary of His Highness the Chhatrapati Maharaja.

Mankaries in waiting on His Highness.

(12) Rules 2,4,5,7,13 and 14 published under notification No.14 in the Kolhapur State Gazette of 28th September 1901 are made applicable mutatis mutandis to Panhala.

By order of His Highness the Chhatrapati  
Maharaja of Kolhapur.

R.V.Sabnis,  
Diwan and Plague Commissioner, Kolhapur

R.V. Sabnis by the order of H.H. Shahu Maharaj promulgated following administrative measures for giving relief to the people and catter hit by famine :-

- (I) Feeding the cattle of the poor at the expenses the state.
- (II) Selling fooder at cheap rates to the affected people.
- (III) Throwing open the protected forests of the state to the public for grazing purposes.
- (IV) Sanctioning tagai loans to the needy cultivators and
- (V) Undertaking of public works like construction of new tanks and repairs to old tanks as relief measures.

As regards combating the menace of Plague, which come to the Kolhapur State from the adjoining districts of Satara and the States of Sangli and Miraj. Sir Sabnis adopted following relief measures.

- (I) Appointment of Special Plague Commissioner for the State.
- (II) Organisation of Quarantine Camps.
- (III) Provision of medical facilities.
- (IV) Provision of Sanitation and clearing facilities.
- (V) Provision of hut settlement outside Kolhapur town.
- (VI) Supervision of house in Kolhapur town.
- (VII) Making available the services of all Government Officers.<sup>28</sup>

Thus R.V. Sabnis proved to be a most successful plague and famine Commissioner. Shahu Maharaj appreciated the work of R.V. Sabnis and his assistant B.V. Jadhav who was assistant plague Commissioner. But his service as a Diwan of Kolhapur State from 1898 to 1926 permanent impression upon the minds of Kolhapur State People which nobody forget and which we will narrate in next chapter.

REFERENCES

- (1) Dhananjay Keer : Shahu Chhatrapati : Royal Revolutionary. (Bombay - 1976) Page
- (2) Administrative Report of the Kolhapur State for the year 1883-84 Page - 2,3
- (3) A.B. Latthe : Memories of His Highness Shri Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaja of Kolhapur Vol.I (1924) Page 23.
- (4) Administrative Reports of the Kolhapur State for the year 1892-93 Page 7.
- (5) Dr. A.G. Pawar (Editor) : Rajrshi Shahu Chhatrapati Papers, Vol.I (1978) Page 322.
- (6) A.B. Latthe : Momeries of Shahu Chhatrapati Vol.I Page 78.
- (7) Administrative Report of the Kolhapur State for the year 1893-94. Page 2,5.
- (8) Dr. A.G. Pawar : Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati Papers, Vol.No.I (1978) Page 322-323.
- (9) Ibid
- (10) Dr. Vilas Sangave and Dr. B.D. Khane : Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati Papers, Vol.II(1983) Page 6,7.

- (11) dA.B. Latthe : Op.Cit. Vol.I. Page 87-88.
- (12) Administrative Report of the Kolhapur state for the year 1894-95, Page 2-4.
- (13) Administration Report of the Kolhapur State for the year 1896-97. Page 2-7.
- (14) Administrative Report of the Kolhapur State for the year 1896-97. Page 1-7.
- (15) Administrative Report of the Kolhapur State for the year 1895-96. Page 1-7.
- (16) Dhananjay Keer : Op.Cit. Page 53.
- (17) Family Record.
- (18) Administrative Report of Kolhapur State for the year 1897-98. Page 1-4.
- (19) A.B.Latthe : Memories of H.H. Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaja of Kolhapur. Page 132.
- (20) Kolhapur State Gazettee. 1898.
- (21) Administrative Report of Kolhapur State for the year 1897-98 Page 1 to 8.
- (22) Dr. Sangave and Dr. B.D. Khare Op.Cit. Vol.II



- (23) Administrative Report of the Kolhapur State  
for the year 1897-98 Page 1 to 4
- (24) Ibid
- (25) Ibid
- (26) Administrative Report of the Kolhapur State for  
the year 1900-01 Page 8-7
- (27)
- (28) Dr. Sangave and Dr. Khane : Op.Cit. Vol. II  
Page 10-11