

C H A P T E R - I V

R.V. SABNIS AS A DIWAN OF KOLHAPUR STATE

(1898 - 1926)

Sir R.V. Sabnis was a lifelong friend and trusted Diwan of Shahu Maharaj. Sabnis not only served under Shahu but he was remained Diwan under Rajaram, the successor of Shahu. He was Diwan of Kolhapur from 1898 to 1926. Sir Raghunathrao's role in development and progress of Kolhapur State was great and vital. 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 a one of the builders of the State.

Chhatrapati Shahu (1894-1922) was a one of progressive rulers and maker of modern India. Shahu Maharaj was also a great Social reformer.

Shahu Maharaj spent his whole life for the spread of education among the non-Brahmin people and also started a crusade against untouchability. Due to the work of Shahu Maharaj Kolhapur State attained great name and popularity. All plans, measures, declared by Shahu Maharaj was executed and materialised by his trusted life long Diwan of R.V. Sabnis, who worked quietly and supported the progressive social views of his master Shahu Maharaj firmly. Therefore Shahu Maharaj on many occasions publically declared that Sabnis was his Chief adviser.

Due to the Support and help from Sabnis Shahu Maharaj over came many difficulties in his life. Sabnis greatness was that he never took the credit of any great work even though he was behind that. So he was a silent worker.

In his life time Shahu had to face many problems such as vedokt controversy, recruitment of non-Brahmin men in the State Service, spread of education among non-Brahmin and backward classes, opening of carious boardings for various castes, eradicating of untouchability from his state etc. And R.V. Sabnis supported and executed all the plans and measures issued by Shahu Maharaj for Social equality. Therefore Kolhapur, owed indebtedness to Sabnis equally as Shahu Maharaj.

The backward classes had long in suffering, Socially and educationally and superstition was one of the main causes of their depression. His Highness Shahu Maharaj had therefore to introduce reforms in the State that touched not only the Social side but also affected deep rooted convictions concerning religion. The Vedokta movement and the creation of the Kshetra Jagadguruwere the out come of the intense desire of H.H. Shahu Maharaj to run the social machine on proper foundation. Thus the whole career of H.H. Shahu Maharaja

was all round a bitter struggle against rested interests both social and religious. It was a heavy uphill work and in the Mr. Sabnis had to render him loyal help and there a great part of the odium that attached to the task. His Highness Shahu Maharaj had the satisfaction of seeing his work put on unfairly sound basis.¹

VEDOKTA CONTRAVERSRY AND ROLE OF R.V.SABNIS : (1900-1905)

Unfortunately Rajashri Shahu Chhatrapati was compelled by the circumstances to devote all his energies from 1900 to 1905 A.D. to firmaly establishing his right to observe the Vedic ritual, in place of the then current Purinic ritual, in the performance of all religious rites and ceremonies in his family whichwas openly and veneman- telly challenged not only by his family priest Mr. Narayanrao Rajopadhye but also by practically the entire Brahmin community of Kolhapur strongly supported by the renowned religious and Social leaders of Brahmins of Poona and other parts of Maharashtra. This situation gave rise to what is properly known as 'Vedokta Controversy', and eventually resulted in the trial of strength between Rajarashi Shahu Chhatrapati the ruler of Kolhapur, on one side and the herarchy of Brahmin community of Kolhapur, and the Deccan on the other. This socio-religious struggle of a very intensive nature ultimately came to an end in

1905 A.D. with the declaration of the final decision by Lord Curzon the Viceroy and Governor General of India which strongly upheld the stand taken and measures adopted in the Vedokta issue by Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati.¹ In this Vedokta controversy Sir. R.V. Sabnis extended all type of support to Shahu Maharaj. He also gave moral support to Shahu Maharaj which was essential to Shahu Maharaj. There is one very important letter written by Shahu Chhatrapati in his own hand writing to Diwan R.V. Sabnis about the Vedokat case which was going on that time. This indicate how Shahu was rely upon R.V. Sabnis on a delicate and important matter. The letter is in Marathi and interesting to read in original form. Therefore, I give here this letter.

पत्रिका

छत्रपती महाराजा ऑफ कोल्हापूर

(इंग्रजी मध्ये)

जय भवानी जयश्रीवशांकर
क्षेम क्षेम क्षेम

जयलक्ष्मी

मुक्काम - दाजिपूर

रा. दिवाण साहेब यांस³

पत्र लिहण्यास कारण की, आपण सिमल्यांस पोहचलाच असाल.

दिल्लीत असताना कर्नल फॅरीस साहेबांचा

लॉर्ड कर्झननी असा

निरोप कळविला होता की राजापाध्यांचे कामात आपण स्ट्रॉंग राहिले असता आमचा सपोर्ट आहे.

ही गोष्ट अतिपरायाने व युक्तने मे. फ़ेजा साहेब यांचे कानात घालावी. कर्नल साहेबांनी पुना ती गोष्ट रिपीट केली व ते असे म्हणाले की लॉर्ड कर्झनना ही गोष्ट माहित आहे करीता कशाही प्रकारची काळजी नाही.

आपणांही मे. फ़ेजर साहेबांना असे म्हणावे की आम्हांस राजोपाध्यायि केस विषई मुळीच काळजी नाहीकारण ही गोष्ट लॉर्ड कर्झन यांस माहित आहे व दिल्लीस असताना कर्झन साहेबांनी स्टॅंग राहिल्यांस सपोर्ट करु आमची पॉलिसी सपोर्ट करणेची ठरली आहे. कर्नल साहेब यांनाही विचारले असता त्यांनी माझो जवळ हीगोष्ट वरील खरी आहे असे ते कबुल करतील अशी माझी पूर्ण खात्री आहे. ही करीता गोष्ट सुचविण्यांस हरकत नाही जरूर सुचवावी.

आज लॉर्ड ल्यामि गर्व्हनर यांची शिकार फ़र उत्तम झाली एक वाघ व दोन अश्विने पावली.

We are all well and hoping you do the same.

ब.का.लि.लो.क.

सही मोडी-शाहु छत्रपती

(संपूर्ण पत्र महाराजाच्या स्वतःच्या हस्ताक्षरात आहे)

EUROPE TOUR : (1902)

A very remarkable event of far reaching significance in the royal career of His Highness Shahu Chhatrapati was his three and a half months foreign tour of England and other countries of Europe from the 17th May, 1902 to 31st August, 1902. In 1902 Shahu Maharaj went to England to attend the coronation of King Edward VII. He left

Kolhapur with his brother the Chief of Kagal (Sr.) and the Diwan Sir. R.V.Sabnis on May 14th 1902 from Bombay and then set sail for England on 17th and landed there on 2nd June, 1902. The grand coronation of his majesty King Edward VII, Emperor of India was celebrated in England on the 19th of August, 1902, and Shahu attend this function. There he had the honour of being introduced to his Majesty the King Emperor and member of the Royal family, the visit gave him an opportunity moreover of cultivating personal relations with some of the ministers at the head of the British Empire, peers of the Realm and members of Parliament. His Highness was able also to visit many important places in England and on the continent. He was cordially welcomed everywhere, what is more important ? was that the University of Cambridge conferred on him the honorary degree of LL.L. The Royal Agricultural Society of England did not fail to mark the appreciation of the Keen interest His Highness took in Agriculture and therefore it made him its honorary member. His Highness started his return journey from England on 14th August, 1902 after the coronation was over and arrived safe at Kolhapur, on 31st August, 1902.⁴

Diwan R.V. Sabnis accompanied this tour to England and Europe and saw western system of education western

culture, industrial progress, in England. During this visit His party paid a visit to Parice also thento Italy. In Italy the party did not fail to pay a visit to Florence where H.H. the late Shri Shahu Maharaja's grand father Rajaram Chhatrapati Maharaja breated his last during his tour to Europe. The visit to theStatue errected there in his honour on the banks of the river Arono naturally stirred feelings of deep emotions at the right of the statue in a foreign land Mr. Raghunathrao Sabnis was most deeply moved owing to his personal relations with the departed Maharaja. He studied withthe later before his adoption to the Gadi of Kolhapur in what was the called Sardar School.⁵

TITLE RAOBAHADUR SHIP (1905) :

The year 1905 was very important in the life of R.V. Sabnis because he received the title of 'Rao Bahadur' from British Government.⁶ The Darbar of Kolhapur was glad and happy about the victory. Ferris held a Darbar on June, 26th 1905, on the birthday of his majesty, the king-Emperor. While conferring on Bapusaheb Ghatage a certificate for his C.I.E. Fernis decribed him as a faithful brother, subject and Sardar of Shahu Chhatrapati. While paying glowing tributes to Diwan Sabnis, Ferris said that "His marked abilities and clear intellect have contributed to

bring the Kolhapur State through the years of difficulty and to place it, as it is now in the position of one of the best administered native states of Indian Empire."

"Mr. Sabnis," Ferrs concluded, "lhas worked single mindedly and unselfishly and with no eye self-aggrandizement."

**"THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATION
AMONGST THE UNTOUCHABLE CLASSES" :**

The problems of untouchables were very dear to the heart of Maharaja. In the month of February 1908, he founded an educational Society with the object of spreading education among the untouchable classes of the Kolhapur State. Rao Bahadur Sabnis was the president and Shri G.K. Kadam, and A.B. Olkar, B.A. were its secretaries. They had at that time secured an annual subscription of Rs.300/- and the society expected a substantial help from His Highness Shahu Chhatrapati. Major Wodehouse, then political agent also took a deep interest in the Society and became a first class member of it.

The immediate object of the society being to help some of the promising boys of those classes to complete their secondary and higher education in the local Rajaram High School and college. They founded a special class to coach-up some boys in their vernacular studies. 10 students were attending the class. One of the secondary

objects of the Society was to raise these to a higher level of Social life. Special prizes were awarded to clean boys in the coaching class and four such scholarships had been awarded to pupils of the untouchable classes at Kolhapur.

Again a course of lectures had been arranged by this Society to foster a desire for education among these classes and small but numerous prizes were proposed to be awarded to deserving students belonging to these classes studying in the primary schools in the state.⁷ Later on in 1908 Miss Violet Clerke De Press classes Boys Hostel was started and Sir R.V. Sabnis was one of the member of the managing committee of this boarding. Because right from the beginning Sabnis was against the practice of untouchability. Therefore, A.B. Latthe says that, the Miss Clerke Hostel for the so called untouchable classes in Kolhapur occupies a very prominent place on this side of the Maharajas, enlightened activities.⁸

GRANT OF PATIL-WATAN AND GOLD MEDAL : (1911)

On June 22, 1911, George V was crowned in London Shahu could not attend the coronation ceremony as his visit would have put a great pressure on his purse. But he duly sent a congratulatory address, through the

Government of Bombay. On June 22, Shahu held a Darbar declaring his loyalty to the King-Emperor.

On the day of Darbar 22 June, 1911, Diwan Bahadur Sabnis was presented with a gold medal and a grant of Patil-Watan.⁹

KAYASTH PRABHU BOARDING (1912) :

In the year 1912 Shahu started Kayastha Prabhu Boarding for 'Prabhu Community' Shri Shahu doneted a small building besides an annual grant of Rs. 50/-, Rs. 500/- were paid as donation by Rao Bahadur R.V.Sabnis on the auspicious occasion of the threed ceremony of his youngest son.¹⁰ In 1915 Shahu Maharaja donated a sum of Rs. 500/- to this institution and gave it the name of his trusted Diwan, Rao Bahadur Raghunathrao Venkaji Sabnis."

In September 1915 the Prabhu Hostel was named after Rao Bahadur Raghunathrao Venkaji Sabnis by the organizer as a mark of the great contribution Sabnis had made towards the success of the Hostel Sabnis was praised for his loyalty, ability and uprightness not only by the people of Kolhapur and by high Government officials but also by a student of economics. Writting from Godhra, the student of Economics observed. "You are perhaps the only Diwan who had the fortune of enjoying the Diwanship for

the state and it will not be too much to except your name to be permanently associated with the Economics Progress of the State.' Sabnis was indeed the man behind Shahu and his policies. Donating an amount of six thousand rupees and a building with the land, Shahu said that whatever success he had achieved, he owed to Diwan Sabnis. Indeed, Diwan Sabnis stood loyally and irrevocably by his ruler in every delicate and dangerous situation and handled it patiently, diligently and in a statesmanly way, besides cherishing the same aim as his master, the elevation of the Backward and Depressed classes.¹²

RAJKUMARS AND R.V. SABNIS :

When the first world war broke out Shahu's two sons were studying in England, where they returned to Kolhapur (1915). For some time they had joined the Ewing College at Allahabad to prosecute their studies in agriculture, but as the climate of the place did not agree with them, they had to leave the place after putting in only a year there. After completing their studies at Allahabad they continued receiving instructions in administrative work in the different departments of the state under Rao Bahadur R.V. Sabnis, Diwan of Kolhapur.¹³

Thus prince Rajaram was working enthusiastically under the guidance of Diwan Sabnis. After much experience and encouragement, prince Rajaram in September 1918 praised him as the ablest minister, a friend of the Royal family and one to whom his father have fatherly respect.¹⁴

C.I.E. :

Mean while in the new yeas honours (1914) Diwan Sabnis was made a C.I.E. It was a further recognition of his great ability and, steed fast devotion.¹⁵

ARYA SAMAJ AND R.V. SABNIS (1919) :

The Rajaram High School and College, the premier education Institutions in the State were finding financial difficulties. On the advice of R.V. Sabnis Shahu handed over these two institutions to Arya Samaj in 1919.¹⁶ The family record runs as follows :-

"It was Sir Raghunathrao who took initiative in handing over the administration of the Rajaram College and Rajaram College to Arya Samaj. Though Sir Raghunathrao admired Satya Shodhak Samaj, he did not like the abuses and Vituperative out burst of the then Satya Shodhak Samaj leaders. He felt that the leaders lacked discipline to administer constructive work. So he advice Shahu Maharaj

to hand over the two institutions to Arya Samaj. Both the Institutions were administered very efficiently by the Arya Samaj. But Rao Bahadur Latthe who succeeded Sir Raghunathrao as Diwan took over the administration for reasons to him.¹⁷

SHAHU MAHARAJA'S OPINION ABOUT R.V. SABNIS :

But the most important opinion expressed by Shahu Maharaj about his Diwan was as follows :-

In his correspondence dated 11th February, 1922, Sir John Wood, secretary Foreign and Political Department, Government of India His Highness Shahu Maharaj expresses his appreciation in connection with the helpful services rendered by R.V. Sabnis. He says : "Mr. Sabnis has been my wise and sobre councillor and my Chief prop in the administration of my state. He concludes that "I consider myself very fortunate in having such a Diwan."¹⁸

Diwan was in the administrative system of Kolhapur was next to Chhatrapati. Diwan was a prime minister of the State. Sir R.V. Sabnis was a successful Diwan and superwise all the administrative work of the State. Besides the Diwan R.V. Sabnis controlled matters Judicial, Political and feadutory of Police, Finance Educations and medical and of jail, Leper Asylum etc.¹⁸

DEATH OF SHAHU MAHARAJ (1922) :

The most tragic event in the year 1922 that plunged the whole population of the states into profound grief was the sudden and premature demise, of His Highness Cal. Shri Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaja G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., L.L.D., M.R.A.S., at Bombay on 6th May, 1922.¹⁹

Shahu's death was a shock to all but it was severest blow to Diwan R.V. Sabnis. Sabnis was very sad because he served, Shahu Maharaj from 1893. Earlier he was Shahu's tutor and later on became his trustful Diwan and life-long friend and philosopher and guide. Therefore, the day on which Shahu's death took place was the blackest day in the life of R.V. Sabnis

MEMORIES OF SHAHU CHAHATRAPATI :

After Shahu's death Rajaram became the next Chhatrapati of Kolhapur who ruled from 1922 to 1940. R.V. Sabnis continued as a Diwan upto 1926. His first great task was to write a biography of Shahu Chhatrapati. Therefore Diwan R.V. Sabnis and Rajaram Maharaj selected Prof. A.B. Latthe for writing biography of Shahu Chhatrapati. Prof. Latthe was earlier in the state service and Prof. of English in Rajaram College. Diwan Bahadur R.V. Sabnis extended all types of help to A.B. Latthe, who wrote

Memories of Shahu Chhatrapati into two Vallumes and published in 1924.

While Latthe was writting a biography of Shahu Chhatrapati there were correspondance between Latthe and Sabnis regarding many points. The following two letters written by R.V. Sabnis to Latthe are available in Latthe's collection in Sangli. These two letters are important and interesting to read in origin.

No. 341
Kolhapur Lodge
4 Todiwalla Road
POONA.

2nd Sept. 1923.

My Dear Mr. Latthe,

I am in receipt of your telegram dated Yesterday will you kindly let me know, if you here received back the Prof. Copy sent to Sir Stuart Fraser, with his remarks? It would be desirable to send if to Mr. Adam after it is, returned from Sir. Stuart Fraser.

On hearing from you I shall write to the Times Press in the matter of the Prof. copy to be sent to Mr. Adam.²⁰

Yours sincerely

Sd/-
(R.V. Sabnis)

No. 89
Kolhapur

13th March, 1923.

My dear Prof. Latthe,

I am in receipt of your letters, dated the 2nd and 7th instant you may know that, His Excellency the Governor of Bombay is going to pay a visit of this place, and we are all very busy in preparing our selves for it. So there is a little delay in repaying to your letters.

I have asked Mr. Mathure to send to the Times Press the Photos to be inserted in the Book and they will soon be sent there.

I have already sent you the letter, I have received from the manager of.....Rashtraveer Press for your opinion. After receiving if; from you I shall arange to send him advance money proposed by you in your letter.

His Highness is pleased to comply with your request as regards your putting up at one of his Bungalow in Bombay and he approves of your suggestions about inserting sepretaly photoes of Shri Bapusaheb H.H. the Maharaja Saheb of Dewas and his Highness hemself.

As regards the information you require about his Highness companions at Hendon it will shortly be sent to you.

I have requested Mrs. Irwin to send her reminiscences of her pupils in India and in England as well of his late Highness. Her reply will not be received for about two months at the earliest. I wonder if you are waiting till then. I am also writing by next mail to Sir S.M. Fraser informing him that you are desirous to get the memories printed, if possible, by the end of April next and that to may kindly send his reminiscences and other matter to be printed as soon as he conveniently can.

I enclose herewith same notes I have received from Dr. Tengshe. You may avail yourselves at them for your work.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-
(R.V. Sabnis)

Prof. A.B. Lalthe completed his memories of Shahu Chhatrapati into two volumes and admitted the help and co-operation received from R.V. Sabnis to him. In

the Authors Prefatory Note Prof. A.B. Latthe writes about R.V.Sabnis in the following way.

"The advice and help of Rao Bahadur R.V. Sabnis C.I.E., was simply indispensable to me. If the choice had been left to me,. I would certainly have pointed out to him at the fittest person to write a biography of the late Chhatrapati Maharaja. Failing his writting if himself, I had a write to claim hisn assistance every step and I am glad to find that he was always ready to give in to me in full measure. I thank him very sincerely.²²

HONOUR OF KT. (1925) :

On the new year of 1925, British Government conferred on Sir,. R.V. Sabnis with the title of knight hood.²³

The following is the extract from the letter dated 31st December, 1924 addressed to His Highness the Chhatrpati Maharaja Saheb of Kolhapur by His Excellency Sir Leslie Wilson Govenor of Bombay.

"I am indeed glad that your Dewan has received his Knighthood as the result of my representations to the Viceroy at your request. Rao Bahadur Sabnis has served your state with great loyalty and great ability for very

many years, and it is only fitting that, towards the end of distinguished career, his services should be recognised in some conspicuous manner. He has, by receiving a Knighthood, obtained a very high honour, and I hope you will be good enough to offer to him, on my behalf, my sincere congratulations, and every hope that he will be long spared to enjoy the honour which he has so well deserved."²⁴

W.B.Ferris was the former political agent of Kolhapur and had a cordial relations with Sabnis from 1902. The following letter is written by W.B. Ferris who congratulate Sabnis on his fresh honour.

4-1-25.

88, Philbeach Gardens
S.W. 5.

Dear Sir Raghunathrao,
S

Thank you very much for the Xmas Card which showed you had not forgotten me.

Now let me congratulate you most sincerely on the fresh honour that has been conferred on you it is only a fit ending to the original distinction of Rao Bahadur that it was my good fortune to initiate more than 20 years ago. I am glad to see that whatever may

have been the short comings of Govt. they have not lost the knack of honouring the great men who work with them. Few have earned a Knighthood as well as yourself. It is not, every one knows, the difficulties and anxieties that have be set you during your phenominally long career as Diwan and the tact and patience you have had to exercise to carry on smoothly in the face of public scrutiny a position difficult at all times but the more so amid changes of Rulers and Political Officers each with their own idiosyncracies and individual views and temperaments, all of them expencting you to carry out their views no matter what forces were working against them. I saw with my own eyes for over 7 years your methods of Suaviter in mode and enjoyed the fruit of it. My work during all that time full of anxiety owing to the Govt. that was behind me would have been infinitely more so had I had to deal with a Diwan with less tact and moderation. Believe me I appreciated it. You must be tried after- your long service and be ready to enjoy a long earned rest. I shall be glad to hear that you have quitted the field of strife and hope that you may be spared for many years to enjoiy the well earned honours that have been conferred on you though I confess I am sympathetic with the young Maharaja in putting off as long as possible your retirement. When you have time write and tell me about

yourself and family and what your views are about this new delusion of unqualified indianisation.

With sincere and good wishes to yourself and kind remembrances to Lady Sabnis.

I remain, your sincere old friend.²⁵

Sd/-
W.B. Ferris.

RETURENEBT IF R.B, SABNIS FROM DIWANSHIP (1926) :

R.V. Sabnis retired from the post of Diwanship from 2nd January, 1926 after serving Kolhapur state from 1898. He was Diwan for more than 26 years. And he received full pension.

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- (18) K.R.O. letter No.R.13879-80 Shahu's letter to Sir John Wood dated 11th February, 1922.
- (19) K.R.O. Huzer order 263, dated 18-10-1918
- (20) R.A.K.S. 1921-1922 P. 1-2
- (21) R.V.Sabnis's letter to Latthe dated 2nd September 1923
- (22) R.V.Sabnis's letter to A.B,. Latthe dated 13th March, 1923.
- (23) A.B. Latthe's Prefatory Note to memories of Shahu Chhatrapati P.2
- (24) Kolhapur State Administrative Report 1924-1925 P. 165.
- (25) Letter from Leslie Wilson Governor of Bombay to Rajaram Maharaj dated 31st December, 1924.

- (26) Lwetter from W.B. Ferris to R.V. Sabnis
dated 4-1-1925.