

II

SOURCES IN KOLHAPUR RECORD OFFICE ON
CHHATRAPATI SHAHU OF KOLHAPUR.

By

V. S. KADAM,

Department of History, Shivaji University, Kolhapur.

I

Chhatrapati Sambhaji II of Kolhapur was assassinated by one Sayaji Mohite on July 16, 1821 at noon and in the palace.¹ He was only 30 years old. This was followed by the treaties of 1826 and 1829 by which the military power of the Kolhapur State was reduced by the British; its two important talukas were snatched away and even its civil administration was, to a large extent, controlled by the British.² The risings in 1857 in Kolhapur, and its suppression by the British led to the further weakening of the State; Chimasahab, the brother of the ruler of Kolhapur, because of his suspected lead in the risings, was deported to Karachi by the British.³ In the nineteenth century, the Kolhapur State was sinking low in a whirlpool of regency rules, court intrigues, rebellions and financial chaos.

The nadir was reached in 1883. On the Christmas Day of the year, Chhatrapati Shivaji IV of Kolhapur was most inhumanly kicked to death by Private Green in the fort of Ahmednagar.⁴

To succeed the ill-fated Shivaji IV, the dowager queen Anandibaisaheb adopted Shriman Yashwantrao Jaysingrao (age 9 years), the eldest son of Shrimant Jaysingrao Abasaheb, the Chief of Kagal (Sr.), on 17th March 1884, as His Highness the Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj.⁵ Within a year, unfortunately he lost his natural father.⁶ His education, however, continued unhindered first at Rajkot and later at Dharwar, under the guidance of Mr. (afterwards Sir) S. M. Fraser, I. C. S.

H. H. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, who was invested with the full powers of his office on 2nd April, 1894, was the greatest ruler that ever ascended the Kolhapur throne. Not

1. Gujar M. V. : *Karveer Chhatrapati Gharanycha Itihasachi Sadhane*, Vol. VI. No. 168, p. 148.
2. Modak : *Kolhapur Prantacha Arvachin Itihas*, Part-II, p. 5.
Major Graham : *Statistical Report of Kolhapur*, pp. 570-572.
3. S. M. Garge : *Karveer Riyasat*, p. 406.
4. S. M. Garge : *Op. cit.*, p. 439.
5. A. B. Latthe : *Memoirs of His Highness Shri Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj of Kolhapur* (Bombay 1924), Vol. I, p. 81.
6. A. B. Latthe : *Op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 35. The date of the death of Regent Abasaheb : 20 March, 1885.

only did he extricate the State of Kolhapur from the financial and political chaos but also made use of his power and position to educate the masses and to uplift the depressed classes; and, by his work and example, he became, without knowing it, a great active leader of the social movement in India.

II

The biography of Shahu Maharaj, written by Professor A. B. Latthe, was published two years after his sad demise in 1922. The memories and anecdotes of the Maharaj were published by Shri Bagal, and Tophakhane. His important speeches, edited separately by Shri Jadhav and Shri Yedekar have been published. All these volumes^{7a} contain useful sources on the life and work of Shahu Maharaj.

Yet, the sources in the Kolhapur Record Office deserve special mention. In the office we have the following sources.

1. *Letters* : There are forty rumals, containing original letters written to Shahu Maharaj or copies of letters sent by him. There are even private and confidential letters. One interesting aspect of the letters sent by Shahu Chhatrapati appears that he usually wrote the letters in his own hand. While writing to Mr. Fraser, he says, "One of my dogs has bitten my hand and I am so sorry it has prevented me from writing this letter myself. It is written for me by my brother as you will know from the hand".⁷ In his letter to the ruler of Akkalkote and the son-in-law of his brother, inviting him to come for shooting, he sought to be excused for sending a type-written-letter, as he could not sit to write because of his illness.⁸ These letters, mostly written in English, reflect various activities of Shahu Maharaj, viz. sports, social reforms, educational and economic progress.
2. There are journals, written in Marathi, containing orders from the Huzur Office. They are classified according to the different branches of administration.
3. Kolhapur Government Gazettes : These are in English and in printed form. Most of the important orders and events are included in the Gazettes.
4. The Reports on the General Administration of the Kolhapur State are also written in English and are in printed form. These reports give information about financial, medical and educational matters.

All these four different types of sources are primary in nature and, as such, their importance cannot be overestimated. The information contained in these primary sources will have to be accepted as dependable unless and until some different information is gained from equally reliable primary sources from other quarters.

7. a) Latthe A. B. : *Memoirs of His Highness Shri Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj of Kolhapur* (in two volumes) (1924).
 - ii) बागल, माधवराव खंडेराव (संपादक व संग्राहक) : शाहू महाराज यांच्या आठवणी (कोल्हापूर, १९५०)
 - iii) तोफखाने, वा. द. : राजर्षि श्री. शाहू छत्रपति यांचे अंतरंग (कोल्हापूर, १९६३)
 - iv) येडेकर, दयाम ना. (संपादक) : राजर्षि शाहू छत्रपति यांची भाषणे (कोल्हापूर, १९७१)
 - v) जाधव, भ. बा. (संपादक) : राजर्षि श्री शाहू महाराजांची भाषणे (कोल्हापूर, १९७१)
7. Kolhapur Record Office (Hereafter referred to as KRO) Letter No. R-1887, dated 15-1-1902.
8. K. R. O. letter No. R. 4061, dated 1-1-1911.
9. Op. cit.

These sources were, to a certain extent, used by Prof. A. B. Latthe in his above-mentioned two-volume biography of Shahu Maharaj, which was published in 1924. And, after half a century of negligence of these sources by research-scholars, the Shahu Research Institute, under the guidance of Dr. A. G. Pawar, the first Vice-Chancellor of Shivaji University, has started the work of selecting and copying these sources with the intention of publishing some of them in 1974, the year commemorating the birth-centenary of Shahu Maharaj.

III

With the help of these sources, the biography of Shahu Maharaj could be rewritten. In the following pages, by making use of a few unpublished documents, I have made an attempt to give new information regarding :

1. The Poison Case of Col. Wray
2. The Vedokta controversy
3. The patronage to the D. E. Society, Poona
4. The uplift of the untouchables and
5. The Character of Shahu Maharaj

1. The Poison Case of Col. Wray :

Prof. Latthe has used the seventh chapter in the biography to describe an attempt to poison Col. Wray, the Political Agent at Kolhapur, in 1899 and all the developments arising out of it.¹⁰ He says, "In this Chapter, the whole history of incidents concerned cannot be related at the present stage and hence I have omitted many portions of it, although the whole history was written out by me in the usual course. The omitted portions are indicated by asterisks and may have to await publication for some years to come."¹¹ According to my inquiry, neither Professor Latthe (d. 16th May, 1950) nor any other scholar has, to this day, provided any information regarding "omitted portions." However, there are hardly any letters in the Record Office which would throw light on this episode except an extract of a letter by Mr. Nugent which runs as follows:—

"I have not seen nor spoken to Mrs. Wray since her arrival here a month ago. They are both very angry with me. Because I never believed that there was any truth in the alleged plot to poison and said all along and because I was strongly in favour of Mr. Bruin being sent to Kolhapur as desired by Your Highness. Mr. Bruin came to see me yesterday. He is up here writing his report to be sent to Your Highness through the Dewan. His view entirely agrees with that which I have held from the beginning, namely that there was no bonafide plot to murder or injure Col. Wray but that the whole affair was a conspiracy to ruin Fernandes and secure his removal from Kolhapur. He also believes that the butler Phillip was the prime in the conspiracy, but greatly doubts whether any evidence to prove this will be forthcoming."¹² The Governor, in his discussion with Shahu Maharaj, pointed out the failing health of Col. Wray and "promised that Col W. shall be going on long leave on 9th March next and would not return."¹³

10. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 115 to p. 124.

11. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 115.

12. Extract from letter dated 10-11-1899, addressed to His Highness by Mr. B. N. Nugent.

13. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 123. A letter of Shahu Chhatrapati quoted by Prof. A. B. Latthe.

2. The Vedokta Controversy :

The dawn of the twentieth century failed to shake the Brahmin orthodoxy which not only opposed the performance of religious functions in the Chhatrapati's family according to the Vedokta rites, but also went to the extent of excommunicating the farsighted and learned Brahmins like Narayan Bhat Sevekari who was willing to perform them.

In his letter to Mr. Edgerley, Shahu Maharaj says, " It seems the other side has represented their case to you. You can see what strength there is in their arguments. Every one knows that no distinction is made between a natural born and an adopted son, but that does not seem to be their point. Their objection is apparently based on the fact that the Ghatge family from which I am adopted is not a Kshtriya family, but there are records which clearly disprove such an assumption. That family has always considered itself to be of true Kshtriya origin. In days gone by they have even gone the length of excommunicating my family ancestors, and their names are found among those five Kshtriya families that exist. As regards my attempt to pull through other Maratha families, I may say I have no concern in the matter. Of course the Maratha families are really Kshtrias. I do not know how they can be prevented from putting forth their claims. But the present question is only concerning, me, and I never asked the Rajopadhye or any other Brahmin to perform Vedic Ritual in any other Maratha families."¹⁴

Even this limited demand was not accepted for obvious reasons. Different objections were raised and different methods were employed to intimidate the ladies in Chhatrapati's family. As an example of the venomous attack on Shahu Maharaj, an article in *Gurakhi*, which was one of the newspapers especially started for the purpose, could be cited in parts:

" The Chhatrapati Maharaja of Kolhapur thought of giving his daughter in marriage to a boy of the family thus newly purified (family of Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda) and it is learned that he expressed his desire about the matter. Shrimant Sayajirav Maharaja showed his ready compliance with the wish of the Chhatrapati, and we learn that he sent a reply that the proposal would be accepted, when he (Chhatrapati Maharaj), was likewise purified, by the encouragement of the foolish fad in Kolhapur. In this way, it is said, the Maharaja contracted the mania. Under the influence of the madness, he confiscated (lit. set fire to), at the time of his departure, the inams of the Rajopadhe and made an exhibition of his wisdom before all the Maharashtra. And why this ? It is for the Vedokta affair. And the Vedokta fad was wanted for the purpose of making the son of the Gayakwad his son-in-law : In fine this will show how the Native Princes are losing their Heads... We do not know how this mania will spread. We think that it will certainly be beneficial for the press, to carry on agitation in this matter".¹⁵ In his letter to Diwan Sabnis, Shahu Chhatrapati says, "A large number of houses in the town and in certain villages are marked with red—some say it is blood—the motive and agency of these marks is yet unknown and inquiries have been set on foot. It looks just like the marking of trees in Bengal and Behar some years ago."¹⁶

14. K. R. O. letter No. R. 1948, dated 12-5-1902.

15. K. R. O. letter No. R-1968, dated 13-6-1902. Translation in English of article, " The Vedokta Mania" in the "*Gurakhi*".

16. K. R. O. letter No. R. 2029 dated 23-9-1902.

"The object (of marking the houses in red) is clear. Your Highness is too manly to be influenced but they hope to frighten the ladies and so get them on their side to try and persuade you to forego your rights rather than anger the caste that claims it as a right to degrade you. I hope Your Highness will keep firm. Ill luck and misfortune cannot come to you at the bidding of any one, much less of such people," wrote Political Agent W. B. Ferris.¹⁷ The wish of the Chhatrapati prevailed and religious functions in his family continued to be performed in the Vedokta manner.¹⁸

But Shahu Maharaj was not satisfied with his personal gain. He wanted that the right of Vedokta religious functions should be enjoyed by others also. Therefore, he ordered the appointment of a Maratha Priest in the Palace and installed Kshatra Jagadguru at Patgaon and started the Shivaji Kshatriya Vedic School on July 6, 1920.¹⁹

3. The Patronage to the D. E. Society, Poona :

The Vedokta controversy did not make Shahu Maharaj hostile to all the Brahmins, and therein lies his greatness. He was ready to help self-sacrificing and dedicated Brahmins in the field of education.

Shahu Maharaj made ceaseless efforts to spread education among those people who were denied that right. It was necessary to make proper lodging and boarding facilities for the poor students desirous of taking education in Kolhapur. "The Brahmin community indeed led the way by starting a Hostel for the Brahmin boys in the high schools and the college in the year 1896."²⁰ Shahu Maharaj, so as to facilitate education among different castes, started hostels, for Marathas, Jains and Lingayats. By his initiative and special efforts, hostels were started for the backward classes and the Mahommedans. Even Daivadnya and Saraswat Brahmins and Prabhus were provided with land, grants and building-fund to start the hostels.²¹

What is not known is his patronage to the Deccan Education Society at Poona. The Deccan Education Society, as admitted by Chintaman Gangadhar Bhanu, the life-member of the Society, in his letter to Shahu Maharaj,²² was founded at Poona under the patronage of the Kolhapur State and its feudatories and especially with the generosity of the father of Shahu Maharaj. The Society, with the self-sacrificing persons like Wrangler Paranjape, aimed at making education less expensive and easily available to members of all castes.²³ Consequently, Shahu Maharaj took great interest in helping the Society by using his influence not only with the princes and chiefs in the Southern Maratha Country but also with the eighteen big and small rulers of the Indian States. In his letter²⁴, to the rulers, he says, "I am glad to introduce to you Mr. Chintaman Gangadhar Bhanu, life-member of the Deccan Education Society, Poona, founded in 1885, to cheapen and facilitate industrial as well as literary education.... Prof. Gokhale C. I. E. devoted nearly 20 years of the best part of his life in the cause

17. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 200.

18. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 208.

19. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 524.

20. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., pp. 521.

21. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 137 to p. 148.

22. K. R. O. letter No. 2919 dated 29-10-1906.

23. Ibid.

24. K. R. O. letter No. 3062 and 3063 dated 1-3-1907.

of the Society at a very small remuneration and Mr. Paranjape, the first Senior Wrangler, is also devoting his life in the same cause. Mr. Bhanu's sacrifice too is highly commendable. There are many others who have joined the Society to the prejudice of their monetary interests. But as I am very well acquainted with these three gentlemen I have alluded to their devotion to the cause of education." He ends the letter with, "I am sure you will, after giving full and patient hearing to Mr. Bhanu, do your best to further this sacred cause of education and will assist these self-sacrificing gentlemen, in carrying out their programme of supplementing the educational efforts of the British Government and the Indian States, by the introduction of a cheap and efficient agency."

4. The Uplift of the Untouchables :

While he was busy getting a dam built on the Bhogavati river, which was to bring about an economic change in the Kolhapur State, he also clearly realised the necessity of social change. Chh. Shahu's greatness as a ruler and a social reformer can be understood by studying the use of power that he made of to bring about social change. Not satisfied with the opening of hostels for backward classes, he issued an order from England (where he had gone to attend the Coronation Ceremony of King Edward VII) "to direct that from the date of this order 50 per cent of the vacancies that may occur shall be filled with recruits from among the backward classes. In all offices in which the proportion of the backward classes is at present less than 50 per cent, the next appointment shall be given to a member of those classes."²⁵ Prof. Latthe has given the English translation of the order. The translation would be acceptable but not the date of the order, which he gives as July 26, 1902. In the Kolhapur State Gazette of the year 1902, the date that is given is 28th July, 1902.²⁶

Moreover, he discontinued the Baluta System of the Maharas on June 25, 1918.²⁷ Strict orders were issued not to observe untouchability in medical institutions and educational departments.²⁸ An order was issued in 1921 to transform the watan lands of the Mahars in ryotwara.²⁹ It must be remembered that all these orders were accompanied by his personal sympathy and understanding of the untouchables. Before 1916, he appointed Mahars and Mangs as coachman, elephant drivers and gave them right to wear swords, and after 1916 he shared tea and food with them.³⁰ He even showed his willingness, in his speech at Nagpur in 1920, to abdicate the throne in order to serve the untouchables.³¹

5. The Character of Shahu Maharaj :

Shahu Maharaj was married to Laxmibai Saheb,³² the daughter of Gunajirao Khanyilkar and the grand-daughter of the sister of H. H. Ganpatrao Gaikwad, who was, by the way, his only wife. It might be mentioned in passing that she gave birth to four children.³³

25. A. B. Latthe : op cit., p. 220.

26. Kolhapur State Gazette 1902, p. 182.

27. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 496.

28. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 500.

29. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 499.

30. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 500.

31. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 504.

B. B. Jadhav (ed.) : *Rajarshi Shri Shahu Maharajanchi Bhashane*, (Kolhapur, 1971), pp. 99-100.

32. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., p. 53.

33. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., pp. 128-129.

He was perhaps the only Maharaja who was a teetotaler.³⁴ One charge, however, was repeatedly made even during his life time and that was regarding his character in relation to women. Recently, novelist N. S. Phadke has repeated it in one of his articles.³⁵ However, a letter in the Office reveals his reaction to these charges. He writes to Col. Ferris.³⁶ "Regarding the talk we had about the three ladies, it is my sincere desire that though the letter is only anonymous, you should kindly go to the bottom of the matter. It is, of course, beyond doubt that it is the work of my enemies. Such letters I know always go to Govt. but they have never asked us any question nor have they been ever so particular as they seem to be on this occasion. Even though Kaka master made an application to Govt. under his own signature making similar charges against me, still the Govt. did not, it seems, think much about it. But in as much as they have asked now, it appears they have some doubts that the story might be true. I do not at all wish that it should be so." He further says, "I have, therefore, to request you kindly to make searching inquiries into the matter. I am not one of those who think that such inquiry will take away my *abru*. You know Prof. Bijapurkar, Rashinkar, Tilak and the editors of the native newspapers who are my enemies and I do not mind if even they are allowed to help the inquiry. If you do not wish to have an inquiry you might ask them privately about the truth. You can even privately or publicly ask the guardians of the ladies." Again, he says, "If my enemies, Tilak and his party, whom I have mentioned above, say that my absence from here is necessary for the purpose I should not mind going away for some time for a trip. But my only request is that if after all inquiries the charges should prove quite unfounded, the persons who made the charges of the Tilak's party should be dealt with according to their deserts." Further in the letter, he characteristically throws out a challenge. He says, "I challenge any of the above mentioned people who, I think, are at the bottom of it, to prove charges not in these three cases alone but in any case they choose from my birth to this day." The post-script of the letter is also important. In it he says, "I would not mind if you keep this letter on the file as I think that this letter contains all that I have to say in the matter."

Would it be too much to hope, in view of his readiness to the inquiry in his absence and by his enemies and especially his desire to keep the letter on file, that the baseless charges and whispers in this matters will be stopped?

An interesting letter³⁷ was sent to Shahu Maharaj on 3rd March, 1908 by Devendranath Sen., M. A.

"O KING : RICH, Mighty Heart, that feels alike,
For rich and poor, for high-caste lords of men,
And for the low-caste Shudras, born in fen,
Of social segregation; there's no dyke
To check the sea of Mercy; thou dost strike
Terror unto the Wolf Convention's den !

34. A. B. Latthe : op. cit., 35-36.

35. G. R. Bhide and P. L. Deshpande (Ed) : Kolhapur Darshan (Poona, 1971), pp. 416-417.

36. K. R. O. letter No. R 2856 and 2857, dated 7-8-1906.

37. K. R. O. letter No. R-3261, dated 3-3-1908.

Thou seest things beyond dim Critic's ken;
True Hero! Soldier, proof 'gainst Custom's pike !
The Hindus and non-Hindus, Jains and all,
Do find a place in Halls of thy big soul !
Ev'n as a river in its seaward-roll,
Doth hold the Sun, and Night's celestial ball,
Reflected on its clear and crystal breast;
Yet there the tiny stars do sweetly rest."

Summary

In the Kolhapur Record Office, we have, among other important sources, very valuable sources on the life and work of Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur who was not only the greatest ruler that ever ascended the Kolhapur throne, but a great social reformer who made use of his power and position to educate the masses and uplift the depressed classes.

The paper gives an idea of the nature of sources in the Office and new information regarding his various activities, with the help of some unpublished documents.

* * *