Chapter Two
CHAPTER TWO

Dr. V.T. Patil And Rayat Sabha

The Indian National Congress had started the movement for the integration of princely states with Indian Union particularly after the formation of Indian federation under the act of 1935. Under the Chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru it set up an organization called Praja Parishad within the Congress. Its work was to set up princely State-wise organization of Praja Parishad under the leadership of local leader and carry-on the movement of merger of the princely states with Indian Union, so that there can be a strong united Indian democratic state. As a part of this movement they had set up an organization of Praja Parishad in Kolhapur. Bhai Bagal & Ratnappa Kumbar were the local leaders of praja parishad in Kolhapur.

Upto 1922 Kolhapur was ruled by revolutionary social reformer-Shri Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj. He was a great champion of free & compulsory primary education & had launched the programme of emancipation of backward classes from the clutches of Brahmanical tyranny and carried on the banner of social revolt throughout the Country and therefore, Kolhapur had produced a niche in the heart of the people particularly of lower classes in India. This tradition of people's love for Kolhapur state continued even after the death of Shahu. Therefore, when the question of merger of Kolhapur state came to the forefront some people supported for maintaining its existence as an autonomous state within the Indian Union.

Kaka was one leader who was always sympathetic with the Kolhapur
state. Therefore, when praja parishad launched its movement for merger some leaders
to counter it formed an organization called Rayat Sabha in Kolhapur. Kaka took a
leading part in its formation. Thus the Rayat Sabha was founded on 16th March 1939 in
a village Chikhali of Karveer Tahuka. Kaka was the president of Ilakha Panchayat
which was looking after the administration of Kolhapur state. Kaka’s view was that the
rulers of Kolhapur were the direct descendants of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and the
rulers of Kolhapur had served the people well. Therefore, the Kolhapur state should be
treated differently. It is because of this he gave his helping hand to the cause of the
Kolhapur state. He took lead in founding the Rayat Sabha to serve this cause.

His opponents criticized him branding him as reactionary but his answer
was that how can I become a reactionary by supporting Kolhapur Chhatrapati who was
never branded as reactionary. Some of the congress leaders went to the extent of
calling him as impotent in his politics but Kaka, firmly believed that all those congress
leaders that have attained prominence in Maharashtra coming from the rural base owe
their debt to Shri Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur. It is Shahu’s movement that
made the rural Maharashtra conscious of its right as well as its backwardness.

It appears from the contemporary documents that Rayat Sabha was
started by a few people in Kolhapur state among whom Dr V.T Patil was the most
prominant member. In fact the history of Rayat Sabha had historical background in
Kolhapur itself and this history goes back to the year 1884. Before Chhatrapati Shahu
became de-facto ruler of Kolhapur there was a Regency Council which carried on the
administration of Kolhapur state. This Regency Council was brought into existence by
a Government Resolution of 13th March 1882. The Regent was given a council of three members which was comprised of the Diwan, the Chief Justice & the Chief Revenue officer. Thus in reality all the power was vested in the Regent. Many times the Regent & his Council did not attend the problems sincerely & equitably. As a reaction to it some well educated & thoughtfull minded people in Kolhapur state came together in 1885-86 and formed an organization called “Lokpratinidhi Sabha” in the State. Only anomaly in the formation of this Sabha was that all its members were upper class people particularly the Brahmins. They were mostly the advocates, medical practitioners & landlords. Some of its prominent members were Rashingkar, Pangu, Altekar, Kale, Ruikar, Gune, Vijapurkar, Apte & Deval. All these were politically & socially conscious. The first important issue was the additional charges levied on the citizens of Kolhapur. This was the attempt to collect money from the people as charges incurred on the construction of Kalamba tank. The Lokpratinidhi Sabha raised it’s voice against the charges and the Regency Council which was too weak to resist accepted their demand and the matter ended there. The significance of this Sabha was that the foundation of Indian National Congress & the Lokpratinidhi Sabha almost co­incided in their foundation.

This Sabha congratulated and honored Chh. Shahu on his assumption of power in 1894. The work of the Sabha continued further. In 1906 the Sabha convened a meeting in Shahupuri, Kolhapur. The meeting was attended by 101 representatives. In the meeting the following momentous resolutions were passed.

1) Agriculture and industry in the Kolhapur state should be given encouragement.
2) The people should be made familiar with the modern agricultural implements and fertilizers.

3) In order to educate the people night schools should be started.

4) The people of the state should have the right to change the Government.

5) The administration of the Kolhapur Municipal Council should be overhauled to cope up with the demands of the people. The members of the Municipal Council should have the right to elect their president.

The meeting of 1906 seems to be the last meeting of the Sabha perhaps it became prominent during the Vedokt controversy which started in 1902 with the confiscation of Rajopadhay’s Vatan. The members of Lokpratinidhi Sabha were sympathetic to the cause of Rajopadyay but the Vedokt controversy was over in 1905. Shri Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj established his grip over the administration of Kolhapur state. He also did not support the Congress movement in Kolhapur for the reason that the leading congress men in those days were by and large social reactionaries and Shahu championed the cause of those who were socially suppressed and economically & socially backward. Another reason may be that the rulers of the princely states were not tolerated by the British Paramountcy if they supported the political movements.

CHHATRAPATI RAJARAM MAHARAJ – (1922-40): Chattrapati Shahu died in 1922 and his son Rajaram succeeded him. Rajarama Maharaj ruled the state upto 1940 and his rule of 18 years was very much eventful period in the life of Kolhapur. It is during his period the Indian National congress made its entry in
Kolhapur. It is during his time the Praja Parishad Movement was started in Kolhapur on 6th February 1939. The Kolhapur Municipal council was abolished and the state passed the Kolhapur Nagarpalika Act. According to which the 40 members of municipal council were to be elected & 20 to be appointed by the state Government & additional 2 members were to be the representatives of the untouchables. The president of municipality will be elected by the people. In this way Rajaram gave responsible administration in the municipality. Rajaram also passed Ilakha & Grampanchayat act in 1927, with the object of introducing representative institution in the state. The panchayats were divided into three categories, such as the Ilakha Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat and the village Panchayat. The panchayats were entrusted with the duties of regulating health, medical aid, Sanitation, Pramary education and other works of Public utility.

At the time of inauguration of these panchayats Rajaram said that 'Local self Government was the basis of Swarajya. People would get more rights gradually to administer these Panchayats & Subsequently Lokpratinidhi Sabha would be established.'

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had criticized this Panchayat system as there was no representation to the untouchables in it.

Rajaram had appointed Latthe as a Diwan of Kolhapur. Shri Latthe prepared a scheme of Legislative body of 21 members among whom, five members were to be nominated by the state government, 8 members were to be elected by the people, 8 members were to be the state government officials and were to be appointed...
by the ruler. Bombay government rejected the plan & Kolhapur remained under the rule of one man.8

About the rule of Rajaram, Donald B. Rosenthal writes, ' If Shahu was inveterate activist and reformer, his son Rajaram was not.' Rajaram continued many of the policies his father had introduced but he neither associated himself with the political movements that arose during the period of his reign (1922 - 40), nor did he move to enhance his personal stature by making his own innovations.9

Though Rajaram had introduced political reforms like Panchayat, there was no sign of responsible Government here. At the same time the freedom movement in British India was in full swing. Gandhi started his Dandi March in 1930. It affected the whole nation. Kolhapur state was no exception. Foreign cloths were burnt, Prabhat Pherris were arranged by the people of Kolhapur. At this time Madhavrao Bagal entered into the freedom movement. This movement naturally secured the sympathy of the people. At this time state policy such as taking away lands from the peasants & giving it to state officials & to their relations made the government unpopular. People were also forced to work some time without wages & were also taxed heavily. These Government Policies made the people unhappy. The Prajaparishad was becoming popular.10

It is in these circumstances Shri V. T. Patil who was the president of Kolhapur municipality from 1933-38 & after 1939 the president of the Ilakha Panchayat, sided the cause of the state to counter the Prajaparishad. Shri V. T. Patil and such others founded Rayat Sabha by bringing most of the farmers together in the
In the Meeting Madhavrao Bagal was appointed as a president & Ratnapanna Kumbar as secretary of Praja Parishad.

The reception committee of the Praja Parishad met on 25th February 1939 at Jayashinpur. Shankarrao Dev a prominent Congress leader of Maharashtra, addressed the meeting & appealed the people not to raise Brahmin-Maratha controversy. We are not apposed to the Chhatrapati of Kolhapur, our struggle is against the form of Government. Shankarrao’s Speech attracted thousands of people towards the Praja Parishad. Shankarrao Deo wrote an article in Daily Lokshakti Congratulating Madhavrao Bagal & Criticizing Kolhapur Government.

SUPPRESSIVE POLICY OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT: After the arrest of Madhavrao Bagal on 6th February, the government promulgated section 144 on 7th February, 1939. Madhavrao Bagal’s speech at Herle was adjudged as treacherous by the government and state government filed a suit against Madhavrao Bagal under treason. Barrister Nariman pleaded Madhavrao Bagal’s case. He defended Madhavrao Bagal’s point of view in a six hour speech in the court. But this was all
Madhavrao Bagal was made guilty under Indian penal code, section 124-A on 27th March 1939. He was sentenced for 2 years rigorous imprisonment and one thousand rupees fine failing which the period of imprisonment was to be extended by six months. Then Madhavrao Bagal was taken to Central Jail in Kolhapur. People protested against Madhavrao Bagal's imprisonment. There was a Hartal for three days in Kolhapur.

**DECCAN STATES HITWARDHINI SABHA:** The Deccan states Hitwardhini Sabha was founded by Mr. N.C. Kelkar and Vamanrao Patwardhan on 24, 25th May 1921, meeting in the Sarvajanik Sabha's Hall, Pune. Mr. Kelkar and Patwardhan both were the subjects of a princely state. Both of them were journalists and were fully knew the nerves of the rulers. They were fully aware of the merits and demerits of the rulers. Both of them were connected with the working of Indian National Congress. They knew that in the states the political atmosphere was not conducive for political upsurge. Therefore, they founded the Hitwardhini Sabha in British India.

**All INDIA STATES PEOPLES CONFERCNE:** It was the congress of people of Indian states. It was the idea of N.C. Kelkar, Abhyankar and Vamanrao Patwardhan. They were the promoters of Deccan states Movements in the deccan. They arranged the meeting under the Chairmanship of barrister Shukla on 5th March, 1922 at the meeting hall of Bharat Sevak Samaj, Bombay. Forty representatives from various states attended this meeting. After the meeting on 17th and 18th Dec. 1927 important meeting of All Indian States Peoples Conference was held under the Presidency of M. Ramchandraro. It was the beginning of All Indian States Peoples Movement. In the
same year i.e. 1927, this conference sent a deputation to All India National Congress at Madras, and as per the suggestions of deputation Congress passed an important resolution by which Congress demanded the responsible Governments in the Indian princely States.17

RAYAT SABHA: The emergence of Praja Parishad definitely endangered the existence of the princely state. Therefore, the supporters of the state thinking that the progress of the Rayats can only be done by the ruler & the Rayat must support him. Both came together on 16th March 1939 under the chairmanship of Shri Todkar, a practicing Lawyer, at Chikhali and established the Karveer Ilakha Rayat Sabha18 The first resolution that the Sabha had passed was the congratulation of the Chhatrapati of Kolhapur for exempting the farmers from the land tax and expected from the farmers that they should pay their agricultural lone to the Government.19

This Sabha approved the temporary constitution the provision of which was as follows and to implement the constitution the following office bearers were appointed.

President - 1. Shri. D. S. Mane

Vice Presidents - 1. Shri. D. R. Mohite.
2. Shri. M. S. Todkar
3. Shri. D. S. Banne
4. Shri. Dr. G. B. Shinde
5. Shri. B. A. Patil (editor Satyawadi)

Genral Secretary - 1. Sarjerao Krishnarao Mane.
2. Shri. Sarjerao R. Patil
3. Herlekar Vakil,

Joint Secretary -

1. G. K. Kurhade (Panhala)
2. Shirke (editor-Garud -paper)
3. P. N. Kambale

Treasurer: -

1. B. A. Mahagaonkar.

Members –

1. Shri K. D. Mane (Vakil) (Shirol)
2. Shri V. T. Desai (Gargoti)
3. Shri. Danvade (Vakil) (Radhanagari)
4. Shri Atmaram P. Sawant (GaganBawada)
5. Shri. Chimasheb Bagal (Hatkanangale)
6. Shri. Bhausaheb Nanasaheb Patil
   (Hatkanangale)
7. Shri. D. A. Patil (Vakil)
8. Shri. K. B. Patil (Bhudargad)
9. Shri. Bhosale Vakil (Radhanagari)
10. Shri Rendale (Gadhinglaj)
11. Shri. G. L. Mane (Vakil)
12. Shri. Suryawanvasi (Vakil)
13. Shri. Ganpatrao Salokhe
15. Shri. Sakharam Mali

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This organization was named as Karveer Ilakha Rayat Sabha and the area that it covered was the whole of Karveer Ilakha.

In the meeting it was also resolved that this Sabha firmly affirms its unflinching faith in the Chhatrapati & in his Gadhi. Its flag would be 'Bhagawa Zenda.' The aim of this Sabha was the economic, social, educational, religious & political progress of the Bahujan Samaj. Its work would be 1) To organize the workers. 2) To secure land for the tenant on easy terms. 3) To secure the fundamental right to the people of Karveer state. 4) To support to revive the village professions like cloth viver, textile maker, Shepherd etc. 5) To secure the human right to the untouchables. 6) To secure the help of the state to free the farmers from the lones. 7) Open the schools & dig the wells in the villages. 8) To spread the knowledge of modern developments in the agriculture among the farmers. 9) To free the farmers from the unhealthy traditions & Practices. 10) To make efforts to promote industry &
commerce in the state. 11) To demand the responsible government through the proper means.

Thus the committee was appointed for the Rayat Sabha.22

However the tragic part of the Rayat Sabha was that it lasted only for about a year & collapsed with the death of Rajaram in 1940.23

But during one year of its life the leaders of the Rayat Sabha were very active. They were well educated men. They toured the princely state visiting almost every village organizing public meetings. They awoke the masses in the villages towards existing reality & founded the branches of Rayat Sabha in the villages. Their main attack was on the leaders of Congress who were mostly the Brahmins & were not interested in the social and peasants problems. They also criticized the congress leaders as the leaders not belong to the Kolhapur state but were outsiders who instigate the subject people against the chhatrapati.24

Though the work of Rayat Sabha became moribund soon but the work of Praja Parishad continued though there was also a disunity among the leaders of Praja Parishad.25

With the death of Chhatrapati Rajaram the existence of the Rayat Sabha dwindled away & this left no opposition to the Praja Parishad organization and this paved the way for the merger of the Kolhapur state in the Indian Union.26

About the Praja Parishads position in the beginning & establishment of Rayat Sabha, Donald B. Rosenthal Writes, "In sum, the reforms initiated under Shahu and continued by Rajaram made it difficult for the Praja Parishad to reach over

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the heads of the rulers to the Maratha and lower status Hindu rural masses, though the parishad did reach sections of the Jain and Lingayat communities in the rural areas and some of the urbanised Marathas particularly in Kolhapur city. At least in the early year of the Parishad, the state was unwilling to accommodate the management and the Parishad was not strong enough to challenge the region’s base. Instead the regime made use of the more established Maratha class of land owners and non-Brahmin Government servants to run the administration and to hold the elective posts filled by narrow franchise for the Kolhapur municipality and the Kolhapur State Assembly. Rajaram did attempt in 1939 to counter some of the appeals of the parishad by creating Rayat Sabha (Peasant’s Association) to act as an Organizational front for the regime and Sabha went so far as to forward a few demands which would have modified the Governmental arrangements slightly. Among its request was an end to nominated members in the state assembly and in the Kolhapur municipality. A suggestion was also made that greater resources be invited in cooperative institutions by Kolhapur Government. However the sabha was not able to take an independant stand. The Sabha lasted only about a year and collapsed with the death of Rajaram in 1940”.

In February 1939 Government had declared a concession in revenue by that concession large deficit was to be expected. But Chhatrapati had not proposed any reduction in his private expenditure. More than 24% of the total budget of the state was spent on the private expenditure of the Chhatrapati. It is showed by the ‘Servants of India’ with the support of the administrative report of 1937-38 of
Kolhapur Government. The ‘Servants of India’ explained on 24th April 1939 that ‘The Administrative report of the Kolhapur State for the year 1937-38 far from weakening the criticism provides stranger justification for it. During that year the net revenue of the state went down from Rs. 55.5 Lakhs to less than 54 Lakhs and yet the Palace expenditure rose from merely Rs. 11 Lakhs to about Rs. 11.75 lakhs, a rise of about Rs. 75,000. The budget provisions under this head has uniformly between Rs. 8,60,000 every year. One searches the report in vain for some explanation as to how and why the budget provisions came to be exceeded. But explanation or no explanation, one could not escape the conclusion that to spend Rs. 11.75 Lakhs out of a net revenue of Rs. 54 Lakhs which works out at nearly 22% on the upkeep of the Maharaja and his family was to show a callous disregard for the welfare of the people of the state. Besides, if we find other provisions of expenditure one lakh rupees were for the Maharaja, means total expenditure for palace was 24%.^\textsuperscript{28}

MERGER OF KOLHAPUR STATE & DR. V. T. PATIL: The Mood of the whole nation after independence was Pro-merger of the Indian states in the Union. All states of the Deccan Regional Council except Kolhapur were merged in the Bombay province before 8th March 1948. The Public opinion in Kolhapur was somewhat different from the public opinion in other princely states. The ruling house of Kolhapur had given leadership to socio-political movement like Non-Brahmin movement in Southern India. Brahmanism, which imposed the system of caste hierarchy on Hindus and had suppressed socially, religiously, educationally, economically & politically the entire non Brahmin community from centuries together,
was opposed and very vehemently fought against it by the Chhatrapati of Kolhapur, Shri. Shahu from 1894 to 1922. His son Rajaram also continued that tradition which had sufficiently awakened the Non- Brahmins in Maharashtra generally & in Kolhapur princely state particularly. Therefore, it was thought that in Kolhapur’s merger in Bombay province affairs of Kolhapur will move into the hands of the Brahmin leadership in the Bombay presidency. It is on this account there was a division even in the Praja Parishad on caste basis. The most prominent leaders in Kolhapur in those days were Bhai Madhavrao Bagal & Ratnappa Kumbar. The former was a Maratha & latter was a lingayat. Therefore, Shri V. T. Patil who was himself a Maratha & was a strong supporter of non merger remained together with Bhai Madhavrao Bagal & supported the cause of non merger. Shri Ratanappa Kumbar was a staunch supporter of merger and he had high position in the national level politics and was in constant contact with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Shri V. T. Patil Played a very Prominent role in the formation of Rayat Sabha and carried on its movement opposing Praja Parishad’s agitation for merger, supported Chhatrapati of Kolhapur for separate existence of the Kolhapur state.

Shri V. T. Patil supported not for sovereign state but an autonomous state within the Bombay Presidency. This will enable Kolhapur state to work for the betterment of peasant and workers was his view. But the dream of supporters of Princely state was shattered with the death of Rajaram in 1940. Because Chhatrapati Rajaram was the patron of Rayat Sabha, which was founded by almost all the well educated & eminent non Brahmin leaders & workers in Kolhapur with a view to arrest...
the advancement of the activities of Praja Parishad. But Kolhapur lost its cause & became helpless when the states of Deccan regional concil of which Kolhapur was a part became merged before 8th March 1948. Thus Kolhapur had no alternative except merging in Bombay presidency. Kaka reconciled with it in spirit & devotion. He was only sentimentally attached to the Chhatrapati because of the political work that Chhatrapati Shivaji had done & social work that Chhatrapati Shahu had done.34

Dr. V.T. Patil said Kolhapur State was the ornament of Maharasthra. I would oppose its merger even at the cost of life. It was my message to the people of Kolhapur. He criticised the opposite group and especially Ratnappa Kumbhar who was demanding merger. Madhavrao Bagal said Shri Kumbhar did not get the ministry. So he is opposing him. He was a selfish man and he was not from Kolhapur. You know him as an outsider. On 23 January 1948 he said instead of merger, Kolhapur would have friendly relations with Bombay government. Both will help each other when they so need. We want to create rule of peasants and workers in Kolhapur. On 21 February 1948 in the meeting of executive body he passed a resolution that "Kolhapur was enough big and self-contained by its area, Population and income. So it could be a self contained, self-administered state of India Federation." On 2nd March 1948 a public meeting was held. President was Madhavrao Bagal. Shankaraao Deo who was present said in the meeting in favour of merger. So people disturbed his speech. In his presidential address Madhavrao Bagal said. "We want Kolhapur to be Independent. We do not want to be ruled by Tata-Birla and Dalmiya after merging in Bombay. For the welfare of Bahujan Samaj
Kolhapur should be independent. On 26th July 1948 Madhavrao Bagal wrote to Sardar Patel that Kolhapur Praja Parishad was merged in Congress. He had decided to do constructive work henceforth. The statue of Mahatma Gandhi was likely to be completed. We wish to inaugurate it at your hands."

On 26th August 1948 Ratnappa Kumbhar wrote to Sadar Patel that "The administrator of Kolhapur had asked Chhatrapati Shahaji who succeeded Rajaram to refund Rs.65 Lakhs which were taken by him illegally. So he was afraid of it by Coyajee's enquiry. Bagal group had broken down, Jedhe and More had not given attention to Kolhapur. Here was a favourable background. So before September 1948 the merger of Kolhapur should be effected. I have discussed with Balasaheb Kher.

All states of Deccan Regional Council except Kolhapur were merged in the Bombay province before 8th March 1948. But His Highness Shahaji took the decision of merger without the consent of the people. His decision was possibility of force in love.

About merger of Kolhapur State V.P. Menon wrote, "The unique position of Kolhapur and the possibility that any precipitate action would give rise to a regional controversy decided as against the idea of a plebiscite. We felt also that without the free consent of the Maharaja no merger could take Place. The Maharaja was eventually invited to Delhi for discussion. The conversations proceeded in a friendly spirit and in February 1949 Maharaja signed an agreement merging his state with Bombay. His Privy Purse was fixed at Rs.10 Lakhs. Sometime back we received
a petition requesting the Government of India to appoint a commission to enquire into the validity of the adoption of the ruler. Shahaji was adopted by the queen of Rajaram when Rajaram died as he had no male issue. The Maharajah was aware of this and his fear that his title to the Gadi’ might be questioned may have hastened his decision.  

In this way his Highness Shahaji accepted the merger consent of Praja Parishad. The inaugural function of merger of Kolhapur State with Bombay was held on 1st March 1949 under the presidency of Balasaheb Kher the Chief Minister of Bombay province. At this time kher said “After the consent of Chhatrapati, there is no need of plebiscite. People could not be against democracy”. By the merger of Kolhapur all states of Deccan were merged in the nation.

After the merger of State, Torgal Jahagir, Katkol and Raibag Mahal joined the Mysore State. Chandgad Mahal, Kuruadwad remained in Kolhapur district. Talkonkan of Bavda Jahagir joined Ratnagiri District. In this way nearly 100 villages were reorganised and Kolhapur district was formed.

The Government of Kolhapur was pleased to declare Tuesday, the 1st March, 1949, a public holiday throughout Kolhapur state on account of the inauguration of merger of Kolhapur state with the province of Bombay.
Notes and References:


7. Weekly-Sansthani Swarajya, 12, January 1927.


13. Ibid


17. Ibid

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid
21. Ibid.
28. The Servant of India, Vol XXII, No. 33, Date 24 April, 1939, P.416.
38. Ibid., PP. 565-567.