

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION



CHAPTER-I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

- i) SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN THE 19TH CENTURY IN MAHARASHTRA
- ii) SATYASHODHAK MOVEMENT
- iii) SHAHU MAHARAJ ASSUMED THE CHARGE
- iv) SHAHU AND VEDOKTA
- v) SHAHU AND NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT
- vi) SHAHU AND DIFFERENT REFORMS
- vii.) SHAHU MAHARAJ AND MODERN MAHARASHTRA
- viii) PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

I) SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS
IN THE 19TH CENTURY MAHARASHTRA :

Shri Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur was born on July 26th 1874 in the royal family of Ghatges of Kagal. He was adopted by Anandibai (Maharaja of Kolhapur) the widow of late Shivaji-IV on 17th March, 1884. He assumed powers of administration on 1894. When Shahu Maharaj ascended the throne, three social forces were working in Maharashtra. These three forces were as follows :

The social reformers led by Agarkar and Ranade was the first force. The Satyashodhak Samaj founded by Jotirao Phuley was the second force and third the nationalist faction of the congress led by Tilak constituted the third force.

The group of social reformers was preaching and promoting the cause of social reforms among the upper castes of Hindus as they asked the upper castes to adopt western science and the education for their uplift and to give up the outdated and irrational customs and traditions. This group of social reformers did not launch any movement for the uplifting of down troddens. Sometimes they stressed

equal rights for the poor and attacked orthodoxy in the Hindu religion and social evils such as child marriage of saving of widows from being tonsured and so on.¹

Thus these social reformers stressed on social justice but did not start any movement for it.

The second school which was working in Maharashtra when Shahu Maharaj assumed the charges was the followers of Mahatma Phuley or the Satyashodhakaitis. The Satyashodhakaitis worked for the upliftment of the lower classes, peasants and workers. They were preaching the cause of equality and wanted to promote universal education liberty and fraternity. The goal of the Samaj was to liberate women, workers and peasants from dominancy of the priests and bureaucrats in different fields such as religion education and administration. Followers of Phuley not only preached liberty equality and fraternity but also launched social movements against the social evils. They emphasised the need of social justice and equality and condemned the cruelty and inequalities to which the untouchables and women were subjected.

The above two forces aimed at social reforms and wanted social reforms to precede political reforms. Agarkar, Ranade and Phuley believed in necessity of the British Rule. They thought India could make progress only under the British



Rule to achieve freedom at any cost was not their principal aim.

The third school was led by Chipalunkar and Lokmanya Tilak that vehemently attacked the British Government as well social reformers who attacked the orthodoxy of Hindu religion. This nationalist were of the view that, the attack on Hindu religion would ruin the cause of Nationalism and damage to Hindu culture social structure and self-confidence. They held Britishers responsible for poverty and ignorance of the poor people. They sought to make India free. They mobilised Indians against the British Rule. The base of mobilisation was the rich traditions and pride of Indian culture. According to them, political reforms are more important for realisation of social equality than social reforms. Thus the history of social reforms in Maharashtra is a history of the interactions between these different forces. Tilak and his followers bitterly opposed social reforms advocated by social reformers and laid more stress on political reforms. They were insensitive to the rising of the lower classes of the society.

Due to peculiar colonial situation the Marathi society was completely dominated by Brahmins as after Britishers they alone possessed privilege power and prestige. Loss of Peshavai was made-up by the ample opportunities

available in the British bureaucracy. It is rightly pointed out by Mr. Gulavane, the historian of Brahman Sabha, "Although all power is vested in the British, the Brahmins have succeeded in capturing many important posts and an account of their success in this field, the non-Brahmins are fuming and chafing."²

Brahmins were officers money-lenders and priests. Satya Shodhak Samaj movement emerged as a reaction to the dominance of Brahmins. The Brahmins were exploiting non-Brahmins in many respects. The administration of the law during the 19th Century was partial, unjust and full of malpractice and corruption. While administering in the law the Brahmin officers decided cases in favour of Brahmins. In educational field, non-Brahmins could not learn the vedas and religious books. The society was dominated by the concept of Chatur Varna.

II) SATYASHODHAK MOVEMENT :

The Satyashodhak Samaj was established by Mahatma Phuley in 1873 and after his death, the main objective/the Samaj was kept alive by his followers. The Samaj caught the imagination of the people in rural areas and it was ably supported by the peasant masses of the State. The Samaj stood for the establishment of castless and egalitarian

society. The movement was spread by Lokhande Bhalekar and several other followers of Phuley. By the beginning of this century the movement spread to different parts of State following were the aims of the Samaj.³

- i) To make provision for educational facilities to the masses.
- ii) To liberate the Shudras Varna from the slavery of Brahminic dominence.
- iii) To improve the social and economic conditions of the exploited peasant class.
- iv) To oppose and break the varna system.
- v) To attack the Brahminic ideology which believed in superiority of castes, varna system etc.
- vi) To make reforms on religious and social fields.

The movement got added support when Rajarshi Shahu decided to back Samaj when he started his struggle against Brahmins. It is rightly said by Y.B. Chavan that due to the great work done by Shahu Maharaj that we could correctly understand Phuley.⁴ But before we turn to Shahu's social reforms let us study the conditions that entailed Shahu to follow the path of social reforms.

III) SHAHU MAHARAJ ASSUMES
THE CHARGE :

Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj assumed the charge of Kolhapur State on 2nd April, 1894. When he was only twenty years old in presence of Lord Harris, the Governor of Bombay. Before he acceded to the gadi, he was trained by Fraser in village and district police system. He was trained in Indian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. Also he learnt the old and existing system of land revenue and administration. In addition, the system of village revenue accounts and the elaborate accounts kept in 'Khagasi' Department had also been studied. At the same time important subjects of general education were not entirely left out.⁵

The year before the accession, Shahu undertook a tour of the State alongwith his brother and the teacher. He visited and inspected nearly all the taluka stations. He inspected offices, schools and dispensaries in his own Districts and studied the life of his people at first hand. He learnt a lot about their suffering and poverty. In his tour he wanted to see whether the Government offices were functioning according to these principles taught in books.

Shahu had to restore order to the administration and finances of his States. He had to avoid unwanted

expenditure and maintain economy and efficiency in the administration. Education was to be spread among the masses, public works were to be started, corruption and malpractices were to be curbed and the rural conditions were to be improved. To remedy these evils caused by the successive minority rule, Shahu embarked on a constructive and progressive policy.⁶

The assumption of the reins of Government was notified to the subjects by proclamation which read as follows.

"It is our earnest desire, that our subjects should always be happy and contented that their welfare should increase from day to day and that our State should go on prospering in all its respect. In promoting the welfare of the subjects, we rely on the most loyal and hearty co-operation of our Jahagirdars, Relatives, Sardars, Mankaris, Inamdars, Kamdars, Mercantile classes of all ranks and all other subjects."⁷

IV) SHAHU AND VEDOKTA :

Shahu was not a great reformist until the Vedokta controversy took place in 1900. The different measures adopted by him had already affected the interests of the Brahmins and as a result a confrontation was developing itself. The controversy of the Vedokta took place on the

banks of Panchaganga river in October 1900. When Shahu had gone to Panchaganga for his morning holy bath, the practice was that while Shahu Maharaj took ritual bath a Brahmin uttered the mantras. In October 1900 when Shahu Maharaj was having bath in the Panchaganga the priest without himself taking bath was reciting puranic hymns and not vedic hymns. The angry Maharaj asked the priest why he had not taken a bath before hand and why was he not reciting vedic hymns. He promptly replied that it was not necessary for him either to take bath before hand or to recite vedic hymns as the persons to be blessed were Shudras and not the Kshatriyas. This was an insulting reply to Shahu Maharaj and he told him that he was a Kshatriya's of noble blood, who was consecrated with due vedic rites the priest replied that so long as the Brahmin community did not accept his Kshatriya's status he would not consider him better than a Shudra. The rude shock received by Maharaj aroused active interest in him about the necessity of social reforms and his resolved led to a conflict between Brahmins and Shahu.

After the Vedokta controversy Shahu decided to end the Brahmin dominance though he gave every opportunity to Brahmins to rectify their mistakes. The Vedokta affair assumed serious proportion when Lokamanya Tilak got himself

involved this local issue by supporting the orthodox Brahmins. Tilak acted as a leader of orthodox Brahmin community.⁸

In October 1901 Shahu Maharaj ordered that all functions in the palace he performed according to vedic rites and warned that those who failed to carry out the order would be suspended from the service. The Rajopadhya avoided carrying out the order and at the same time was secretly collecting sources to prove that Shahu Maharaj and others were in fact Shudras. Shahu Maharaj asked the Rajopadhya to show cause to this lapse and he asked from why should he be deprived of the Inam lands granted to him as payment for his religious services. When there was no response to this from the Rajopadhya, Shahu Maharaj confiscated his lands in May 1902. The controversy got deepened when the Shankaracharya of Sankeshwar rushed to the defence of the Rajopadhya. The Maharaj did not look behind and carried out his reformist activities by exhorting the people to follow vedas and by establishing the office of the Kshtra Jagadguru.

One of the important results of the controversy was that Shahu Maharaj decided to join Arya Samaj as it promised the vedic rights to all irrespective of his caste and creed.

V) SHAHU AND NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT :

The Vedokta controversy pushed Shahu to play a central role in the history of non-Brahmin movement. After Jotirao Phuley Shahu had a set of determined aims and ideals, he firmly believed that unless all people in India men and women - were educated a nation would never be free, united and strong. He devoted his entire life to fight against Brahmin dominance to strengthen the non-Brahmin movement.

Though, Shahu was not an active participant in non-Brahmin movement from 1894 to 1913. He was busy with his own administration problems and social reforms. But the events such as the Vedokta ceremony and the hurdles put in his way of reforms by the Brahmin bureaucracy and the press involved him deeply in strengthening the non-Brahmin movement. Shahu was very cautious and guarded in his approach to the non-Brahmin movement. Shahu felt that the politics of the extremist was nothing but Brahmin politics and a strong non-Brahmin political movement is necessary to counter the selfish politics of the congress leaders. Shahu encouraged young non-Brahmin leaders like Bhaskarrao Jadhav and A.B. Latthe to go ahead and fight the cause of non-Brahmins. He extended all possible help to non-Brahmin movement and Britishers also had some sort of soft corner for the movement.

Shahu tried to get rid of the inference of the Brahmin bureaucracy in his administration. He made valiant efforts to bring solace to the non-Brahmin communities. He laid down the educational policy by which all the backward classes were provided with facilities of the education. Shahu was always sympathetic and generous towards all the non-Brahmin associations and extended support to their meetings and conferences.

In short, it can be concluded that Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur played a major role in Non-Brahmin movement. He was of opinion that Marathas or Kshatriyas should take lead in eradicating the caste system.⁹

VI) SHAHU AND DIFFERENT REFORMS :

Shahu carried out many social reforms and sought to discontinue the dominance of one caste and wanted to establish an egalitarian society based on equality, liberty, fraternity and social justice.

Shahu had a definite programme to spread the principles of the Satyashodhak Samaj. To bring the principles of the Samaj in practice, he tried to implement the following ideas :

- i) To fight caste and
Communal Prejudices :

Shahu followed such policies by which prejudices based on caste and communalism were removed.

- ii) To establish schools
and hostels :

To provide educational facilities to all the depressed classes and non-Brahmin classes, he established schools and hostels.

iii) To encouraged inter caste marriages to eradicate untouchability.

- iv) To remove evil practices
of Brahmins :

Shahu provided ample opportunities of jobs in administration to the depressed classes. He made such rules by which the provision of punishment was made for those who followed evil practices against the down-trodden.

When Shahu felt that the Satyashodhak Samaj failed to progress new ideas about religious systems to serve the needs of Hindu society, he supported the Arya Samaj that followed rational attitude in attacking evil practices followed by the Brahmins. Besides, like Satyashodhak Samaj, Arya Samaj also believed in abolition of untouchability. His reforms can be divided into five.

1. Caste System
2. Education
3. Administration
4. Agriculture and economic development
5. Social Activities.

1) Caste System :

Shahu was against the caste system and superiority of a man based on caste or birth was not acceptable to him. He tried to awaken the masses against the caste system and fought against the untouchability. In the conference of the depressed classes held at Nagpur on 16th April, 1920. He said, "The social differences are based upon mere accident of birth and there was no sanction from any religion to it. It is a matter of disgrace that our brothers should be regarded as untouchables and maltreated."¹⁰

In the well-known Mangaon Parishad on 20th March, 1920 Shahu Maharaj said, that "Except in India there is no caste among men in any other country but unfortunately in India the casteism is so severe that we treat our brothers and sisters lower than cat, dog and even cowdung." He added, "we do not want talkative leaders but there should be such leaders who would work actively to abolish casteism and treat us like man."¹¹

From his above talks it can be said that Shahu considered casteism as the main hindrance in the development of our country. The abolition of untouchability and casteism was necessary for the unity and integrity of India. According to him the casteism spread hatred and jealousy among the Indians. He wanted to abolish classless and casteless society.

2) Education :

Shahu tried to spread universal and compulsory education, irrespective of caste and creed. He was a pioneer in providing educational facilities to all communities. He started numerous hostels in Kolhapur for the students of all castes. He encouraged drama, music, arts and sports. He was against the principle of the survival of the fittest in social field, hence the aim of his educational policy was to take care of the weak.

When the new Governor of Bombay, Sir George Lloyed visited Kolhapur in 1919. Shahu explained his educational policy to him. He said that, he was working hard to offer special facilities of education to the down-trodden classes. He encouraged different castes to have their own hostels. According to him different castes needed different sorts of institutions as revenue was collected from all the classes hence it should be spent for the benefit of all the classes.

He said that free and compulsory education was essential for progress in every branch-industrial, commercial of life. He made it clear that he was making primary education free and compulsory to all George Lloyed said that he was impressed by Shahu's educational work.¹²

He transferred education from a monopolisted private good to social good and looked at education as an instrument for social development.

3. Administration :

Shahu tried his level best to weed out the corrupt, inefficient and communal elements from administrations, who instead of serving the people tried to 'exploit' them. He sought to make it more popular representative and broad-based by widening the base of recruitment.

Shahu Maharaj passed a number of legislations to maintain discipline among the servants of his administration.¹³ The different provisions regarding arrival and departure of the servants, their promotion transfer, leaves administrative language were made in the acts for the eradication of out dated customs and practices.

News Papers :

Shahu helped to run some news papers to face the attacks made on him and his administration by the pro-Brahmin



news papers.¹⁴ He helped the following news-papers:
 Maratha Din Bandu, Vijayi Maratha, Vishva Bandu, Tarun
 Bharat, Bhagava Zenda.¹⁵

4) Agriculture and Industrial
 Development :

Shahu paved the way for regional planning and development by encouraging co-operative societies by building 20 tanks, by providing commercial, facilities in Shahupuri, Textile Mill, Irrigation, facilities and by employing as far as possible local people in various posts.¹⁶

The Dam of Radhanagari brought sizeable land under irrigation and laid foundation of a green revolution in Kolhapur area.

Also he encouraged co-operative movements by passing relevant legislation and also for purchase and sell of the agricultural produce. In 1920 more than 37 co-operative societies were established due to Shahu's administrative policy.

5) Social Activities ;

Shahu Maharaj built up hospitals lunatic asylums institution reformed and codified by simplification Hindu law and development of the society in Kolhapur State by

promoting equality and fraternity among all people by encouraging all sports, particularly wrestling.

From his social reforms in various fields it can be said that he was the harbinger of change; and as a Maharaj, Shahu was outstanding in his own times. His rule of 28 years from 1894 to 1922 may perhaps be described as an important phase in the history of modern Maharashtra.

VII) SHAHU MAHARAJ AND MODERN MAHARASHTRA :

Shahu Maharaj was a great social reformer who tried to advance the cause of socially down trodden & sections by initiating bold measures. Shahu was a supporter of Arya Samaj and he was not complete follower of Satyashodhak Samaj movement but by politically advocating the cause of Non-Brahmins. Shahu gave adequate scope to non-Brahmin movement.

There is no doubt that Shahu Maharaj is one of the builders of modern Maharashtra as he almost advocated the same policies and programme that were enunciated by the Sanyukta Maharashtra Samiti. This fact clearly proves that Shri Shahu seen the vision of emergence of Agro-Industrial Society in the State. Thus, he was one of greatest builders of modern Maharashtra as he provided some essentials of theory and practice of social behaviour to the Marathi speaking people.

VIII) PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE STUDY :

The thesis is an attempt to study social and political ideas of Shri Shahu Maharaj. Though Shahu Maharaj's life and activities are extensively studied, a very little attention is paid to the study of his social and political ideas that he expounded in his different speeches. Thus the main purpose of the thesis is to present social and political ideas of the Chhatrapati Shri Shahu Maharaj in a systematic and coherent manner.

The method of the dissertation is the textual analysis i.e. a critical and comparative analysis of the speeches and memorandum written by Shahu Maharaj in order to present coherent account of his social and political ideas. His social and political ideas are analysed through the historical perspective.

R E F E R E N C E S

- 1) Keer, Dhananjay : Shahu Chhatrapati - A Royal Revolutionary, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, January, 1976, p. 37.
- 2) Ibid, p. 38.
- 3) Gail Omvedt : Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976, pp. 153-154.
- 4) Chavan, Y.B. : Krishna Kath (autobiography), Prestige Publication, Poona, 1984.
- 5) Keer, Dhananjay, Ibid, p. 42.
- 6) Ibid, p. 94.
- 7) Ibid, p. 94.
- 8) Ibid, pp. 94-95.
- 9) Jadhav, B.B. : Rajarshee Shahu Maharajariche Bhashane (Marathi), Rajarshee Prakashan, Kolhapur, 1971, p. 87.
- 10) Ramesh Dhavare (Ed.), Mangaon Parishad, Sixty First Smruti Mahotsava Special Number, March, 1982.

- 11) Ibid, p. 62.
- 12) Ib id, p. 163.
- 13) Bagade, D.R. : Rajarshee Shahu Maharaj and Kayadekanu,
Kolhapur, 1982, pp. 21-53.
- 14) Bhosale, S.S. : Kal Vichar and Karya, Kolhapur,
April, 1975, p. 391.
- 15) Vaidya, G.N. : Shahu Chhatrapati - A Royal
Revolutionary, Shivaji University Publication,
5th August, 1974, p. 64.