

CHAPTER VI

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The history of Social Reforms in Maharashtra points out to two broad strands which developed side by side. The first was the work of " Social Reforms ". from the Urban education upper - class and upper - caste strata represented by personalities like justice M.G. Ranade, Prof. G.G. Agarkar and Maharshi D.K. Karave. The Second movement parallel and contemporaneous which attempted to tackle problems of Social Reform among the rural low income, lower caste and untouchable groups prominent among, the leaders of this movement in Maharashtra were Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and Maharashi Vitthal Ramji Shinde.

Mahatma Jotirao Phule occupies a very prominent and important place in the history of Social Reform movements in Modern India. He rendered great services to the Shudras, Ati - Shudras and common man. To redeem the shudras and Ati-Shudras from the influence of Brahminical scriptures and to abolish intermediary between the God and the Man and to teach them their human rights and to liberate them from mental and religious slavery; Mahatma Jotirao Phule founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873 in Poona. This was an outstanding event in the Socio-Cultural History of Modern Maharashtra. The Satya Shodhak Movement in 19th Century was essentially a Socio-religious reform movement which was transformed by Shahu Chhatrapati into a powerful

Non-Brahmin or transformatory movement which sought to bring about a change in the power structure. The Satya Shodhak movement is identical with Non-Brahmin movement.

During the life time of Mahatma Phule the Satya Shodhak Samaj had taken many activities which were essentially social in character and were in the interests of the down trodden classes of the Society. It's activities were confined to Socio-religious field. The followers of Satya Shodhak were not taking part in the political affairs.

After the death of Mahatma Phule this Satya Shodhak movement was called as Non-brahamin movement which was interfering in political affairs. Mahatma Phule left behind him his ideas and his organisation of Satya Shodhak Samaj for carrying on the banner of the Social Reform ahead. But the movement started by Phule received great impetus only when Shahu took up reform movement on his shoulder made ceaseless efforts to awaken the masses towards change.

After Mahatma Phule the man who could catch the imagination of the masses in the field of reform was Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur. Born on July 26, 1874 he was adopted by the House of Chhatrapati of Kolhapur. Educated at Rajkot and Dharwar. Shahu toured the country extensively in his student days.

On April 2nd 1894, Shahu Maharaj took over the administration of Kolhapur and ruled the State for over 28 years.

Chhatrapati Shahu championed the cause of education for the masses. He opened many hostels in Kolhapur. He also donated money even outside Kolhapur, for hostel purpose. He opened many Schools in his State and propagated the cause of education knowing that education can be the only panacea for all social evils.

The Chhatrapati also carried on crusade against untouchability. He appointed many untouchables in the Administration. He openly dined with them freely mixed with them and in the end advocated the idea of casteless society for India. It was his policy that the various social forces should be equibalanced in the politics and administration of the nation. It was for this reason that he declared his revolutionary decisions of reserving 50% of the services from his Kingdom for the Backward Classes.

When Shahu's own priest refused to perform ceremonies using vedic recitation, Shahu confiscated his land which he enjoyed as State Priest. Shahu then promoted the cause of Satya Shodhak Movement and launched the non brahmin movement in his State and outside. From 1910 to 1917 the Maharaja led the Non Brahmin movement in a story way.

The Satya Shodhak Samaj, Kolhapur was came into existence in 1911 . Shahu Maharaja encouraged this movement by extending all kinds of help such as monetary, land etc. The first office bearers of this Samaj were B.V.Jadhav, A.B., Latthe, M.G.Dongre, Haribhau Chavan and Vitthal Biraji Done, who were the persons serving the high post of Kolhapur Darbar.

DR. BALAKRISHNA
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Shahu's encouragement gave an added impetus and vigour to the activity of Satya Shodhak Samaj all over the Maharashtra.

After the demise of Mahatma Phule, the Social work of Satya Shodhak Samaj was paralysed through the absence of eminent leadership.

Shahu Maharaja came to the rescue of the Samaj and revived it. He by extending every help including monetary aid, spread and propogated the thought of Mahatma Phule all over Maharashtra including Vidarbha. Kolhapur became a powerful centre of Satya Shodhak Samaj and its activities owing to the free educational facilities including Boarding houses and various others. A large number of students from outside flocked at this centre. After completing their education, they returned to their native places and carried on the banner of Social movement of Jotiba and Shahu throughout Maharashtra.

The Satya Shodhak Movement later on known as the non-brahmin movement and leaning towards political field. After the death of Shahu Maharaj on 6th May 1922 the Satya Shodhakites like B.V.Jadhav, Dongre, Latthe, Haribhau Chavan, Dasaram; Shripatrao Shinde, Khanderao Bagal and Madhavrao Bagal carried out the Mission of Mahatma Phule and Shahu Chhatrapati. A vast Satya Shodhak literature had published between 1911 to 1930. They published many books, pamphlets and periodicals written by the members of the Samaj to propogate the Satya Shodhak ideology helped the cause of Satya Shodhak movement. These books played a very important role in spreading the Satya Shodhak principles and Satya Shodhak ideology.

About 1930 Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, undertook the cause of masses. The programme of Satya Shodhak were partly adopted by Congress. Many leading Satya Shodhak leaders became the members of congress party and Satya Shodhak movement lost its existence.

It is rightly said that - The non-Brahmin Party lost its influence on the mass because of the rising tide of nationalism. They forgot their social idealism. Madhavrao Bagal said in his autobiography. It lost the broad perspective of Phule. Its followers respected only Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Ambedkar. But in practice, their behaviour was against their teachings. They became hypocrites. The word ' Satyashodhak in their mouths became deceptive.'