

CHAPTER FIVE:

EPILOGUE

Though the Leftist Movement in its economic connotation became evidentially marked only after the second decade of the 20th century the history of its background goes back to the beginning of the second quarter of 19th century in India. Nineteenth century indigenous movements of Socio-economic nature which were the product of British rule in India undoubtedly provided the background for more marked peasant-labour movements of 20th century. This assertion is universally so in Indian context, and, therefore, the Western India of British period also did not remain uninfluenced by it. In the first chapter of this dissertation, the forces released in Maharashtra by the Western contact due to the establishment of British rule have been briefly narrated.

After the defeat of Peshwa in 1818, Britishers established their own network of administration which was of English model. This had two results - one, it was noticed that the administrative bureaucracy was hierarchical governed by the laws of the government. This feature was unknown in the past both under Hindu and Muslim rulers. The second result was that the Indian village which was the basis of Indian economy, was brought into interaction with the new government by new land-laws and the new administration. It needs no saying that among all the forces the British administration of rule of law proved to be a pioneering force of social change in 19th century Maharashtra. The idea of rule of law has

more effectively worked in the field of judiciary. In India of Pre-British days there existed no meaningful, positive judicial system. But British courts in India functioned on the ideal of equality before law and this created indirectly a new awareness among all classes of people in India. It can be asserted that the European principle of equality before law was a pioneering idea that helped creating consciousness for positive rights. It also made lower classes conscious at least of their legal rights though not very effectively in the early stages.<sup>1</sup>

The inroads were also made into the village affairs by introducing new system of assessing and owning the land. In early years of British rule in 19th century land revenue was the main source of State income; therefore land assessment from time to time acquired importance under the new rule. The land system called ryotwari was applied to Maharashtra, according to which individual holdings were assessed separately. The private ownership of land was recognised, giving ownership title to the land-owner. This made land a marketable commodity, farmer could mortgage or sell the land. This peasant proprietorship of land gave rise to capitalist landlords in the subsequent period of 19th century. This also produced a class of land tilling tenants, who remained an exploited class by and large. Under the Ryotwari system the ryots directly paid the rent to the state. Rent was revised and the government demand was excessive in ryotwari areas.

In 1860s the Government assessment was very high in Bombay

Presidency due to American Civil War as more area was brought under cotton cultivation. This temporary sign of prosperity was taken as permanent by the officials. After the end of the Civil War in America the situation reversed and the demand for the cotton was declined as America once again began to export her cotton to England. Prices and wages fell in India. Cultivators in the Deccan were unable to pay the new enhanced revenue. Even money lenders refused to lend money to the cultivators. It is in this circumstance what is known as 1875 Deccan Riots occurred burning shops and houses of the money-lenders.<sup>3</sup> This was not an organised effort of the peasantry but was an outburst of the hard-pressed economic burden imposed on them in their land-tax. The new system and circumstance, it must be admitted, drove the peasantry to an organisation of unrest and this was something of a rare outburst of its kind. The peasant riot expressed itself its anger against Government's enhanced assessment for land-tax and also against the squeezing by indigenous money-lenders' class. As a result of this outburst Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879 was brought into being.<sup>4</sup> The Revenue Code of 1879 clearly affirmed the cultivator's rights of inheritance and transfer in respect of their holdings but the code gave no protection against undue enhancement and no security against excessive assessment.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, by way of conclusion it can be asserted that the British rule and its land policy pursued altered the status and economic position of various classes. Its policy of land revenue

worked to benefit the Government and the land-owners, whereas tenants and sub-tenants remained at the mercy of landlords. The pressure of population and the laws of inheritance, wide spread indebtedness and the prevailing poverty, all led to sub-division and fragmentation of holdings, producing larger and larger number of marginal farmers in the village side. In the late 19th century many farmers who were below the margin of subsistence either sold the land or mortgaged it and migrated to the cities, where mills were making their headway. Thus, it can be noticed from the 1st Chapter that in the field of agriculture, the new changes released economic forces and affected the minds of small and marginal farmers.

When these two classes of landlords and landless labourers were created by government's land settlement, a middle-class was also in process of formation, consisting of the owners of landed estates and urban property, merchants, traders and members of various professions such as lawyers, doctors and journalists.

It is the East India Company ( Trading Company ), that completed the conquest of India by the end of the second quarter of the 19th century and the Company Government in India felt the dier need for constructing roads and rail-lines to use modern European means of communication for establishing effective administrative control over India and for milking the trade of the land. In the middle of the century the public works department was established and with the various financing agencies trunk

roads were constructed and railway lines were installed. By the end of the third quarter of the 19th century country's major cities and ports were connected with roads and rail-lines.

The improvement of communications thus had far reaching effects on socio-economic conditions of India. It facilitated internal movements. The increasing mobility of labour became possible as village no longer remained isolated. Improved means of communication made commerce and industry gather speed. A city like Bombay began growing industrially attracting artisans and labourers towards it from the country side.<sup>6</sup>

With rapid expansion of railways industries like jute and cotton also began expanding rapidly, and British capital began flowing into India on large scale. The British capital began to be invested in jute manufacture, tea gardens, banks, shipping etc. In Bombay, spinning and weaving mills began coming up from 1853. By 1861 there were ten mills in Bombay and the number grew to 94 in 1890. This would mean the inflow of labour to Bombay from country side enormously and majority of the 19th century labour for Bombay mills was supplied from Konkan, Kolhapur and Satara districts. Thus the improved means of communication fostering the growth of mills and other industries in Bombay, introduced mobility among the village workers.

Among all the 19th century forces of change English education was one which proved to be a force of far reaching significance

for the change in the Indian society. The decision, therefore, of English government to impart English education in 1853 has been rightly considered as a decision of civilization-making in India. After Wood's despatch of 1854 education in India became a state responsibility, and the Government introduced the three tier education system, primary, secondary and higher in the country by establishing required educational institutions. Therefore, in the latter half of the 19th century we noticed a marked awareness among the educated Indians regarding the need of social reform and also solution over certain new economic and administrative problems that cropped up due to British rule in India. Uniformity in administration, common code of law, common system of taxation, improved means of communication, with growing trade, commerce, industry and English education worked as great unifying forces in awakening people in economic, political and socio-religious spheres. All this produced a band of workers in the latter half of the 19th century who raised their voice against the socio-economic and religious evils of the society.

The first band of such social workers who advised especially the Brahmins to give up their rigid social conservatism and take to modern learning and western thought were Balshastri Jambhekar, Bhau Mahajan, Nana Shankarsheth, Dadoba Pandurang and Gopal Hari Deshmukh. Their teaching mostly remained addressed to the upper class, namely, the Brahmins.

But most notable among the 19th century reformers was Jotiba Phule who himself came from lower stratum and felt the need of educating the lower strata of the society. His establishing schools for untouchables and women was the great revolutionary act in modern Maharashtra. He was of the view that the Brahmin priesthood had imposed wrong traditions in the name of religion. In his book 'Priestcraft Exposed' he explained the economic exploitation of the Shudras and Atishudras by the priests.

In order to propagate his point of view he founded 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' (Truth Seeking Society). The aim of the society was to liberate the Shudras and Atishudras from the influence of Brahminical scriptures and the Brahman priests; in other words to liberate them from mental and religious slavery.<sup>8</sup> His main attack was upon the caste system and idol worship. The first principle of the Satya Shodhak Samaj was that all men were the children of God. Here he proclaimed the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of all men. In his second principle he denied the need of the priest as an intermediary and the religious scripture as the authority. The membership of his society was open to all.

Mahatma Phule made the man, socially and economically exploited, as the centre of his thinking. He raised his voice against the grievances of the farmers, workers and the poor classes. In his writings and speeches he threw a clear light on the frauds committed by money-lenders against agriculturists. He supported Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879. His



lieutenant N.M. Lokhande organised the workers and millhands in Bombay and placed the grievances of the workers' to the forefront in his paper 'Din Bandhu'. He was the member of the Satya Shodhak Samaj. Jotirao addressed several workers' meetings in Bombay. Thus, Jotirao goes down in history as a pioneering man in the workers' movement in India. In this way his socio-economic thoughts continued to be most influencing and dominating the posterity in the 20th century. The district of Satara of 20th century did not remain immune to the influence of his teaching.

M.G. Ranade who was a noted economist of his time also wrote on British land revenue which was excessive and unbearable to the farmers. He attributed the case of 1876 famine to the excessive land revenue imposed by the Government.<sup>9</sup> Excessive land revenue compelled the farmers to borrow from the money-lenders who mercilessly collected a high rate of interest from the farmers. Ranade also wrote on the British trade and commerce and its effects on India. But he appeared, more or less, to be a theoretician whose movements had no activating effects on either the workers or the farmers unlike Mahatma Phoolley. Same can also be said of Agarkar, who very rightly visualised that labour would one day rise to fight for their rights and from it a class struggle would arise. Agarkar was a step advanced when he advised railway employees to organise themselves to fight for their rights.<sup>10</sup>

But the man who contributed much in the first quarter of

the 20th century towards the left leaning ideas was Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur. In his career of more than 25 years he launched his agitation against caste system, practice of untouchability and against ignorance in the society. His was practically a crusade against illiteracy and untouchability. He also supported the cause of working class in India. He openly sided the cause of Bombay workers by declaring that capitalist was an anti-thesis of labour. He also praised Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 and asked the Bombay workers to derive inspiration from it to add the strength to their union against industry owners. His assertion was a direct contribution to leftist movement in Maharashtra as he clearly visualised that the industry owner is the exploiter of the worker.

Next to him among the reformers and social revolutionaries was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who actually organised the untouchable labour in Bombay, formed political party known as Labour Party and sided the cause of labour in legislature. His movement also made impact on the workers movement in Maharashtra in general and Satara district in particular.

The work and thinking of Shahu Maharaj was effective in Satara district in the form of Bhaurao Patil. Inspired by Shahu Maharaj, Bhaurao took the cause of spreading the education in the masses by introducing the schemes like earn and learn, establishing hostels, primary schools, high schools and colleges. In his institution he successfully kept aside the caste differences and

put the touchable and untouchable students together in his hostels. This act was itself revolutionary in the caste-ridden society of India, when compared to Gandhiji's failure in such an experiment at Sabarmati Ashram. Bhaurao Patil's educational institutions produced many noted workers in Satara district who worked for the upliftment of the masses. From time to time he sided the cause of workers and peasants whenever there was an unrest among them.

Nineteenth century awakening in all walks of life, and the modern means of communications provided the favourable background for the beginning and growth of industries in the latter half of the 19th century India. India's contact with Europe brought India into world trade and European goods poured into Indian markets, helped creating skill of entrepreneurship among the natives in India. Bombay traders like British, Parsees, Bhatias, Gujratis, Jews etc. who developed themselves as commercial communities in 18th and 19th centuries were accumulating capital since long. They especially multiplied their capital in the years 1861-65. Textile mills, therefore, began coming up in Bombay in 1851. From 1851 to 1950, number of textile mills went upto 96 in Bombay, with 1,12,000 workers working in the industry, and the number of mills and workers went on increasing unabated.

After the establishment of railways in the middle of the 19th century, engineering and railway workshops, iron and brass

foundaries also grew in course of time, other allied industries connected to road and transport producing small machineries also made headways.

History of industrialization in old Satara district dates back to 1910 when Kirloskar brothers established their factory at Kundal-road in Tasgaon taluka, which later came to be known as Kirloskarwadi.<sup>11</sup> In 1916 a glass manufacturing factory was established at Ogalewadi. In the same year the electricity generating plant was also established.<sup>12</sup> A groundnut decortivating factory was established in 1928 and a Sugar Factory in 1933 at Phaltan. Sugar factory was a landmark as it gave employment to both skilled and unskilled workers and gave impetus to the sugar-cane cultivators.<sup>13</sup> Slowly the co-operative sector grew in the state and the number of sugar factories grew to four. The factories maintained permanent as well as seasonal labour. There were five engineering units among which the Cooper Engineering Works at Satara Road was biggest. It produced oil engines, spare-parts, machine tools, power looms and agricultural implements. The Kirloskar Engineering Works which was established in 1910, grew enormously in subsequent years. In 1910 the number of workers engaged was only 50 but it rose to 1700 in 1960.<sup>14</sup>

There is a factory producing glassware at Ogalewadi started in 1916. Subsequently it began to produce safety stoves and stainless steel utensils. It had more than Rs. 40,00,000 capital in 1958, with the total employment of 1,644. Between 1947-1957

there came 11 oil-mills into being in Satara district, about 60 persons were employed in these mills. In addition to all these there were many small-scale industries like plastic industry, printing and book-binding, powerloom weaving, tanning, leather works, oil crushing, handloom weaving, hand-made paper etc. They were on very small scale.

Industrial workers in India in the initial stages came from the lower stratum of the traditional village society. Especially during the famine time rural migrants were pushed towards the city. This migration was slow, until the industries expanded at a faster rate. Most of them were seasonal workers who returned to the villages during harvest time. After the First World War industrial progress in India became more marked. Indian workers became settled in industrial towns. Thus, the formation of permanent proletarian class took shape.

Workers in the cities faced problems of inormous magnitude. Economically their problems related to health, housing welfare, hours of work, conditions of work etc. The concentration of industries in a few urban centres has been instrumental in giving prominence to workers in the Indian labour movement. Bombay remained the spherehead of the Indian labour movement because Bombay is the most industrialised city with largest working force in 1960.<sup>15</sup>

In 1874, Major Moore, the Chief Inspector of the Bombay

Cotton department pointed out that in Bombay cotton factories women and children were employed in large number, that many of the children were hardly eight years old, that all of them had to work from sunrise to sunset with only half an hour's recess and that they had no periodically recurring day of rest.<sup>16</sup> Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, a co-worker of Mahatma Jotiba Phoolley, organised a conference of workers in Bombay and drew up a memorandum signed by some 5,300 workers and presented it to the factory commission. This was the beginning of the modern trade unionism in India. The memorandum submitted and adopted at this meeting demanded a weekly rest, half an hour recess, compensation for disablement, payment of wages not later than 15th of the month, limitation of the hours of work from 6.30 a.m. till sunset.<sup>17</sup> Lokhande also established Bombay Millhands' Association and started a paper called 'Din Bandhu' on behalf of the workers.

A large number of labour associations were started after 1890. Society of Railway servants of India and Burma in 1897, Printers' Union in Calcutta in 1905, the Bombay Postal Union in 1907, the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha and the Social Service League in 1910 were prominent among them. These associations were not trade unions in the real sense of the term, they relied on constitutional method for getting their grievances redressed. They co-operated with the Government in various schemes and their leadership relied upon making representations. Therefore, the strikes were rare upto 1918.

After the First World War the cost of living steadily increased and wages lagged behind. This situation created discontent among the workers and also class consciousness among them. It prompted labour to organise to try collective action. Russian Revolution of October 1917 had also favourable effect on trade union movement here. The non-cooperation movement under Gandhiji was also effective, and had political influence on workers. Therefore, trade unions which were economically conscious and politically motivated were organised in the second quarter of the 20th century. In 1920, All India Trade Union Congress with 64 trade unions affiliated to it with membership of 1,40,854 was formed.

In Satara district Satara Postal and R.M.S. Union was the only one formed in August 1919. The number of members was 404.<sup>18</sup> In 1920s congress leaders like N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri and Diwan Chamanlal advocated strongly for the integration of labour union like AITUC with Congress movement.<sup>19</sup>

During the years 1922-23 the trade unions of AITUC were also brought under the influence of young communist leaders who had just made some inroads among the workers.<sup>20</sup> Some of the Communists were tried at Kanpur by the Government under conspiracy charge but this did not curb the influence of communists among the workers. Notable young communist workers at this time were S.A. Dange, R.S. Nimbkar, K.N. Jogalekar, S.S. Mirajkar and S.V. Ghate. There were strikes and the strike movement reached a high

water mark in 1928. Leftist orientation of workers movement became more and more marked thereafter.

From 1926 onwards efforts were also made to ameliorate the condition of workers through legislature. Thirtyeight seats were allotted to labour in Provincial Assembly and 10 in Federal Assembly by India Act of 1935.

Due to differences in ideology among the trade union leaders there occurred a rift among the trade unions between the years 1929-1938. It is only in the year 1940 that differences were mitigated and unity was achieved.<sup>21</sup>

In Satara after the First World War there came up some industries, such as 1) Cooper Engineering Works, Satara Road, 2) Kirloskar Brothers Ltd., Kirloskarwadi, 3) Ogale Glass Works, Ogalewadi, and 4) Phaltan Sugar Works, Sakharwadi. In the beginning there were no labour organizations here. In 1936 V.D. Chitale the first communist worker began his work in Satara district. He organised Satara Road workers in 1942. In 1939 under the leadership of Govindrao Khot first workers' strike occurred in Kirloskarwadi factory. This was the first strike in Satara district. Under Govindrao Khot, Kirloskar Kamgar Union was started in 1940 and was registered in April 1944. Workers demanded wage increase, leave with pay etc. on 16th December, 1944 insisting that these demands, if not considered within a fortnight, the union will resort to strike.<sup>22</sup> Government



appointed an award with the late Dadasaheb Mavalankar as its arbitrator and most of the demands of the workers were accepted. There was another strike of Kirloskar Factory workers which continued for 45 days in 1946. By the agreement the workers' pay was increased and the strike was called off.

At Satara Road factory of Cooper Engineering Works, workers similarly organised themselves in 1941, under the leadership of V.D. Chitale. Their first strike took place on 12th June 1943. Strike was a complete success for the workers, not a single worker was on duty. Workers' wages were increased. Cooper Engineering Ltd. Kamgar Union was registered on 4th Feb., 1943. Again in 1946 another strike was launched, workers got the dearness allowance, new pay scale and provision for leave. Chitale also started a union at Ogalewadi Glass Factory in 1943. But this did not become powerful.

After independence communist workers tried to organise workers in Sugar factory into union but could not succeed in making the union strong.

The working class movement in Satara district was more active in post-independence period especially in Satara Road and Kirloskarwadi while other centres were comparatively passive. The labour for the industries in Satara district generally came from the district itself as the factories were located in the areas within the reach of large number of workers. Their problems were of a lesser magnitude than the problems of workers in the

cities like Bombay. Worker in the factory of Satara district, therefore, was not completely cut off from his family in his village, or from his land if he had any. These socio-economic factors moulded their attitude and the intensity of bitterness between the management and workers was lesser. It is for these reasons again that the communists could not succeed notably creating class consciousness among the workers of Satara district.

Like elsewhere in Maharashtra 19th century peasant problems provided favourable background for the growth of thinking which can be called left leaning in Satara district also in later half of the 19th century. High taxation and frequent famines reduced farmers to indebtedness in Satara district also. The money lenders exploited the peasant. There are references to the district association submitting an application signed by hundreds of people concerned on 18th December 1868 against a certain land legislation. This was followed by another association established on 26th June 1870 at a meeting held in public library at Satara. Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi popularly known as Sarvajani Kaka figures as a leader in these affairs.<sup>23</sup>

In the year 1883-84 Shri Raghunath Pandurang at Satara, Nanasaheb Vaidya at Wai and Bhausaheb Bhagwat at Karad devoted themselves to propagating advantageous aspects of the provisions of farmers Debt Relief Act for acquiring benefits for the farmers.<sup>24</sup>

After the formation of Indian National Congress its

activities soon spread to Satara district and its workers worked among the peasants, who were the backbone of the district. Workers in Satara district raised their voice by sending memorandum against the proposed increase in land revenue in 1901, during Lord Curzon's regime. In 1912, agriculture commission stayed at Satara for six days to record the evidences of the farmers for ameliorating the condition of farmers.<sup>25</sup>

By 1919 Act peasants paying annual land revenue between Rs. 10 and Rs. 50 got the right to vote to elect rural seats, and land revenue paying above Rs. 50 were termed as landlords. This gave impetus to Satya Shodhaki non-Brahmin party movements but it did not create the class consciousness among the small farmers on one hand and landlords and money-lenders on the other hand. Non-Brahmin party which championed the cause of the farmers merged in the Congress in 1930s. Indian National Congress for which the attainment of political freedom was the aim had a limited programme for farmers and workers just to have the strength for the congress. This was so in the case of Satara district too. Satya Shodhakis who were quite prominent after 1920 and who often criticised money-lending Brahmin and Bania and stressed the misery of the farmer class did not succeed in the long run to keep the poor farmer who was 56% in Satara district together to create a force, on the contrary growing cooperative sector led by mostly big land owning class helped process of industrialisation and urbanisation but killed the spirit of collective consciousness among the small farmers who are still in majority today.

Influence of the communist workers in Satara became noticeable in 1940s. A communist worker V.D. Chitale started organising peasants and tenants. Satara district Local Board increased local fund in 1938-39. Communist party organised demonstration against this fund as it was the burden on the small peasants. The Board cancelled its order. Again in 1940 under the leadership of communist workers demonstrations were organised at Derwan in Patan taluka near Chaphal. Peasants refused to pay land revenue in protest against money lenders. From 1942-44 communists agitated against fragmentation and Land Consolidation Act. But these were only isolated efforts (insufficient to create peasant force by organising them on large scale.

M.N. Roy, who was once very important leader in the international communist movement drifted away from it for his differences with Stalin and returned to India in 1929. Here in India the Communist Party had taken the stand opposite of National Congress in freedom movement. Roy began preaching supporting Indian National Congress on the one hand and also communistic ideas on the other hand. This was quite convenient for the Socialist-minded leaders within the Congress and, therefore, many of them became Royist. Royists were once important group in Satara district, though their influence proved ephemeral. Thus, in Satara in 1940s within the Congress there were communists, Socialists, Royists and Radicalists. Nath Ghanekar was a Communist, Raghunath Limaye a Socialist, R.K. Patil a

Radicalist and Atmaram Patil, Laxmanshastri Joshi and Y.B. Chavan were Royist.<sup>26</sup> These leftist workers with their leaning towards peasants and workers movements caused a new awakening among workers and peasants in 1930s and 1940s.

After 1940 Quit India Movement and Freedom movement under National Congress in Satara district assumed a formidable shape in all its seriousness. Whatever workers' and peasants' movements were launched, those were done so with a view to supporting the National Movement. Then came 1946's election and subsequently the declaration of independence in 1947. Leftist parties especially the communists continued their hold for some time in Satara district. For example, a well known communist leader of the Satara district Advocate V.N. Patil got elected to Bombay Legislative Assembly three times from Satara taluka - once in 1947, again in 1952 and in 1957. After that the leftist influence slowly waned away in the wake of new emerging land owning rural leaders through the cooperative movement launched especially after 1952.

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