CHAPTER VI

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The present study of 'social reforms and politics in 19th century Maharashtra' is an attempt to understand and analyse the process of social transformation and its impact on the political process in Maharashtra of the last century. The scope of this study is limited to western Maharashtra region of the present Maharashtra State. This part of the state was a part of erstwhile Bombay Presidency. Vidarbha and Marathwada, two major regions of the present state were not parts of Bombay Presidency during the British rule. They were parts of C.P. and Berar and Nizam's dominion of Hyderabad respectively. They had different historical and cultural background. Therefore, the developments in these two regions are not taken into consideration in this study.

The present study is mainly historical in its approach and analytical in nature. It covers approximately a period of eighty years of British rule in beginning in the region from 1818 A.D. onwards. This was the period which was the beginning of over all changes in this region. With the change in the political
power the society also began to change. The period under study witnessed the process of social transformation through various social reform movements. However, this is not just a chronological account of different social reform movements that took place in Maharashtra in the last century. It is an attempt to understand the dynamics of the social reform movements and its linkage with the politics in the region, in the form of British response to these movements and their impact on the awareness and mobilization of the people in social and political field.

The word 'Politics' used in the title of this thesis is used in this limited sense and not in sense of democratic politics of present day's context.

This study addresses itself to some important questions about the social reforms movements in 19th century Maharashtra. They are as follows:

(i) What were the factors instrumental in encouraging social reformers in traditional and orthodox society to set in motion the movement for change in the society?

(ii) What methods were adopted by the reformers?

(iii) What was the response of British rulers?
(iv) To what extent the efforts of the reformers succeeded in achieving desired changes.

(v) What was its overall impact on the society?

The information and the material presented and discussed in earlier chapters help us to arrive at certain conclusions in regards to the beginning, development and the achievements of the social reform movements in 19th century Maharashtra. These findings can be summed up as follows.

1) British Rule as an Instrument of Social Change:

The advent of British rule was an important factor in the beginning of social reform movements in 19th century Maharashtra. The end of Peshwa rule and beginning of British rule was a major political change. This event was of a far-reaching consequences. British brought with them their language and through it new ideas and ideals of the west.

The society in pre-British period was quite static. Religion was the dominant factor. Fatalism, ritualism and burden of age old traditions and customs were its features. The majority of the people were illiterate, poor and with no voice in the political process. Some of the traditions and customs were
cruel and inhuman, and the whole society was prisoner of this set up. Neither the people nor the Peshwas felt anything wrong with this social structure and evil practices. Naturally any thought of changing them was out of question.

With the emergence of British rule the situation began to change slowly. The new rulers streamlined the administration, which not only created sense of security and safety among the people but also provided their support and legitimacy to it. The British rulers introduced changes in the educational system which exposed the people to new ideas and ideals of the west. As a result the first generation of English educated elites, began the reassessment of the existing social condition afresh. Had there been no change in the political field, it is doubtful whether the process of social reforms could have been started by the people at all.

Thus, it can be argued that the political change in the first quarter of 19th century was mainly instrumental in creating favourable atmosphere for the social changes, which in the course of time strengthened the social reform movements in the region. That way tradition of social reforms in Maharashtra dates back to the teachings of the Saints and on set of Bhakti move-
-ment from 13th century onwards. But this was an exercise with spiritual overtones rather than bringing changes in the material conditions of the people in the society. The British rule was the major breakthrough in this regard.

2) **The Dynamics of Social Reforms: its contents, methods and approaches**

The whole course of social reforms movements can be divided broadly in two phases, viz: pre-1857 i.e. period of East India Company's rule and post-1857 period of rule by British Crown. The social reform movements underwent considerable change in its contents, methods and approaches.

In the beginning of the first phase the Christian Missionaries played an important role in this regard. The main objective of Christian missionaries was spread of Christianity. For that purpose they published books on Christian religion, established educational institutions to educate the people and thereby introducing them to new religion. They discussed the absolute character of Hindu traditions and customs with the people. They started writing about these matters in their periodicals. The educated elites who came in their contact began to think about the need of reforming
the society to counter the challenge of Christian Missionaries. Thus though it was not the objective of Christian Missionaries to reform Hindu society, they contributed indirectly to this process. The Christian Missionaries also started periodicals to achieve their objective by discussing the social condition through these publications which also had impact on the new generation of educated Maharashtrian elites.

Thus with exposer to western knowledge through education and the missionaries and British rulers the first generation of social reformers sprang up in Maharashtra. The evil practices and absolute inhuman traditions and customs were their targets. They fought for the reforms individually. Writing periodicals, publishing the books, addressing the public meetings, appealing the British rulers for enforcing reforms through laws were their methods in this phase. However, the individual efforts had its limitations, therefore, in the second phase they turned towards organized methods. Number of organizations viz. Prarthana Samaj, Satyashodhak Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophical society, Widow Re-marriages Association, Parmhansa Sabha were established and operated for the cause of reforming the society.
The contents of the reform activities were closely related to the approaches of the reformers. In the earlier period the reformers like Balsestari Jambhekar, Nana Shankar Sheth worked for changing the outlook of the people. They criticised the cruel and inhuman traditions and appealed the people to abandon them. Introspection of our social conditions was their stand in this regard. The issues like spread of education and challenging orthodox and evil Hindu traditions and customs was their main plank. Seeking government intervention whenever needed was their method. These early period reformers were greatly influenced by work of Christian Missionaries and ideals of Christianity. Almost all of the social reformers of this period came from the upper caste groups because education was their monopoly. Obviously they took up the issues which were mainly concerned with their upper caste groups. Their emphasis was on changing society by educating the masses, exposing to new ideas and ideals of the west, appealing to their reason etc.

In the second phase i.e. 1858 onwards the composition, outlook and methods of the reformers changed. Though it was dominated by upper caste leadership, the leaders from middle and lower strata of the society began to come forward. (for example Jyotiba Phuley belonged to Mali community which was an agrarian class).
The scope of reform movements also enlarged by the new generation of leaders. As a result the issue like promotion of society, equality by challenging the caste system, education to women as well as all sections of the society upto the lowest level of the social order, taking up the issues like exploitation of the masses by the vested interests like money-lenders and Brahmins were taken up in this period. This indicates change in the approach of reformers from just emotional and religious issues to more concrete, secular and materialistic issues.

However, there was a stream of revivalists who were interested in bringing changes in the society - reviving the ancient values and practices. They thought that the problem faced by the people could be solved without disturbing the basic framework of Indian society.

Despite the differences in their approaches the leadership in the second phase realised the importance of organized efforts. Most of the reform associations emerged in post 1858 period. These organizations helped the reformist leadership to muster support of the people and pressurise the government whenever necessary. In a way they were pressure groups in the social field.
Thus in course of time social reform movement in 19th century Maharashtra became stronger and institutionalised.

3) Government Response : Uneven but Positive-

The response of the British government to the increasing demands of the people for the social reforms was certainly positive uniform throughout the period under study.

In the early period the British officers were quite enthusiastic. They took active interest in the reforms of the society which they brought under their political control recently. They encouraged spread of education, banned evil practices like 'Sati' by law. Widow remarriages were legalised. Child marriages were prevented by fixing up minimum marriageable age for girls. The government encouraged 'the press'. But this enthusiasm of earlier period vanished after 1857 A.D.

As a result of revolt against the British rule, in 1857 A.D. British Government adopted cautious approach regarding the social and religious matter. The objective of this policy was to avoid any discontent in the native people and consolidate the political power to safeguard its imperial interest. This policy
of neutrality affected the progress of social reforms for the time being. Again, after 1880 the British Government's outlook changed. It adopted liberal policy towards press freedom and responded positively in respect of demands for social reforms. Passing of the Age of Consent Bill in 1891 was indicative of this change. This indicates unevenness in the British approach to social reforms.

This fluctuation in British response was the result of the British governments policy to safeguard its imperial interest and this was quite natural. But in addition to this the political changes at home also were responsible - though indirectly - for this. When conservatives were in power in England the Government in India followed stern approach. For example when Disraeli was the Prime Minister (1874), he sent Lord Lytton as the Viceroy of India. Lord Lytton adopted strong arm tactics. He curtailed freedom of press through vernacular Press Act on 1878. But when liberal party came to power Gladston became the Prime Minister and Lord Ripon a liberal Viceory adopted liberal poli-
cies. He repealed vernacular Press Act. Though these positions had political consideration they certainly affected 'states' response to on going social reform movements of the time.
The British response in the field of social reforms was positive in a sense that whenever the demand for a particular reform increased the British government responded positively through legislative and administrative action. This indicates that the process of social reforms in 19th century Maharashtra was not dependent on the individual or organised efforts of the social reformers alone, but the state intervention had its share in it. Till the advent of British rule the state intervention in social matters was absent. But the situation changed and the people's expectations of states role in the matter increased. This gave rise to controversy between pro-interventionists and anti-interventionists; and question of priority to social reforms or political freedom. Thus the question of social reforms entered arena of politics.

4) **The Achievements and Limitations:**

The process of social reforms continued even beyond the 19th century. But by the end of the century it certainly led some achievements at its credit.

First and foremost achievement is the spread of education. During this period the educational spread was quantitative as well as qualitative. The number of schools and students strength increased. But more
than that the important achievement from social point of view was that the reforms activists and the government opened door of education to women and people from lower castes who were deprived of it for centuries together.

Educational institutions like Colleges and Universities on western pattern were set up to impart education at higher level. This qualitative improvement in the education was an important factor in providing leaders with rational outlook to take up the cause of social reforms.

Secondly, the success of these movements can also be found in the form of removal of evil practices in social life like Sati, Keshwapan, women's infanticide, ban on widow re-marriages, child marriages etc. Appropriate laws were enacted by the government for this purpose. As a result of growing pressure of public opinion in their favour. Without initiative of the educated and liberal minded leadership and organizational efforts done by them this change could not have been achieved.

Thirdly, social reform movement basically changed the outlook of the people. The masses were introduced to the ideas and ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity, social justice, secularism, democracy and concept of
social welfare. All these ideas directly and indirectly created social consciousness and national-awakening in the minds of the people.

However, the reform movement in 19th century Maharashtra was not free from certain limitations.

Many a time one notices the gap between the 'thoughts and actions' or "words and deeds" of the reformers. It seems that they had limitations of the time. They were few in number against the majority of orthodox and traditional masses. Hence they were helpless some times and could not go against the popular thinking prevailing in the society. Of course that does not in any way affect the sincerity by which they work for bringing changes in the society.

Secondly, the reforms advocated by the reformers and organizations did not percolate to the lowest strata of the society where they were actually needed. This situation was mainly due to the composition of leadership of the movements. Even though the leaders from lower castes came forward in the latter half of the 19th century, by and large the field was dominated by upper caste leaders. Naturally they had their own limitations of perception and activism.

Despite these limitations the efforts of the reformers cannot be underestimated.
One has to admit that the movement had considerable success in the context of the time and situation in which they were working. The reformers and the leaders and the voluntary organizations founded by them, created favourable social outlook in the minds of the people.

5) Political Impact:-

Political awakening among the people in the latter half of the 19th century can be regarded as direct impact of these reform movements. This awakening proved very useful in mobilising the people for political struggle against the British rule in this country. Tilak and Gandhi two stalwarts of Indian national freedom movement mobilised the people for the political cause in 20th century and made freedom movement as a mass movement.

Secondly, these reform movements brought in sharp focus the role of state in this field. People realised the importance of the state intervention as an effective instrument to bring even social changes. Despite the popularity of individualism and limited state interventions in the west, the social reform movements in 19th century Maharashtra bring to our notice the need of state intervention in the backward and traditional societies. The dependence of the people on the state
support for better life paves the way for their mobilization and consciousness regarding share in political power. Even today the people in these areas largely depend upon the state machinery for their welfare and progress. The experience in this regard in 20th century also presents the same picture. The post-independence period witnessed the enactment of various laws to promote social welfare. For example legislation concerning removal of untouchability, prevention of child labour, ban on bonded labour, factory acts for benefits of the workers, prevention of dowry acts and equal share of woman in the property of her father, all these legislation directly promote the cause of welfare of neglected sections like untouchables, workers, women for which the 19th century reformers and leaders struggled for near about 80 years.

Thirdly, various social movements in 20th century had their roots in the social reform movements of 19th century. The social consciousness created by the reform movements in the last century served as a favourable frame of mind to support and encourage various activities of welfare in socio-economic field. Various dalit movements, spread of education, special facilities to S.C. and S.T. students, special programmes for development of tribals, encouragement to rural development,
activities for the welfare of women, widows, orphans and age old persons which are undertaken on wider scale in Maharashtra today have their roots in the pioneering work done by social reformers in the last century.

Lastly, one more area in which the impact of the 19th century movement felt is the press. The realisation on the part of social reformers of 19th century, about the press as an important instrument of social and political awakening prompted them to fight for its freedom. In fact the press has played very important role in spreading the message of social reforms. But it also provided to be effective instrument to organize people for political cause. It is through the press the new values of nationalism and democratisation were inculcated among the people. This led to creating political awakening on the large scale. Both the streams i.e. social reforms and national freedom movement were moving parallel to each other. Contribution of 'the press' in both the movements was very significant.

To sum up it can be stated that the social reforms movement in 19th century Maharashtra are responsible for creating social consciousness in the initial period and further led to mobilization of the masses in the
national freedom struggle. Large scale political awaken-ing in Maharashtra since the beginning of the 20th century had its roots in the spread of education that began since the last century. It is also instrumental in setting up a new tradition of social reforms in the state and provided a chain of selfless social workers and the enlightened leadership in the field. The relatively egalitarian nature of society in present Maharashtra in comparison to other parts of India is the result of the relentless work of social reformers of the past century. Therefore, the study of social reform movements in 19th century Maharashtra is important to understand socio-cultural and political movements in present Maharashtra.

The process of social change and reforms is an ongoing process. In case of Maharashtra also it is still in progress, and will continue in future. The study of its past helps us to understand the dynamics of the change and its socio-political implications in its proper perspective. The present study of social reforms movements in 19th century Maharashtra reveal that even if social reforms and politics appear to be distinct on thinking level they are quite dependent on each level in practice and almost unified on the analytical level.