CHAPTER-I

MAHARASHTRA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE

20TH CENTURY
KESHAVRAO Marutrao Jedhe (1896-1959) was one of such prominent leaders who made remarkable contribution to the socio-political developments in Modern Maharashtra. His influence was felt in all the important spheres of public life in his state for over four decades of the present century. He was closely associated with the Non-Brahman movement, the national freedom movement, the establishment of the Peasants and Workers Party of India and also the agitations for the formation of Sanyukta Maharashtra and Liberation of Goa. As his contribution is essentially of socio-political nature a review of the socio-political conditions as they existed in Maharashtra at the beginning of the 20th Century has been attempted in the following few pages. This study will no doubt, acquaint one with those conditions which formed the background of Keshavrao Jedhe's work and enable one to understand the significance of his work.

The socio-political conditions which existed in Maharashtra at the beginning of the present century was the outcome of development caused in the Maharashtrian society during the latter half of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century Maharashtra was passing through "Tilak era.
Since 1895 Tilak's influence in the public life was fast increasing. Tilak and his followers gave top priority to national freedom. Therefore, political reforms out precedence over social reforms in Tilak era. On account of several reasons social reform movement in Maharashtra suffered a great setback in that period. Justice M.G.Ranade who, in a number of ways sought to modernize the age old Maharashtrian society and who is truly regarded a maker of modern Maharashtra passed away in 1902. Due to his death a great chamoian of social reform movement was lost. Even before Justice Ranade's death the social reform movement in Maharashtra had started receiving setbacks. In 1890 Mahatma Jotiba Phule, the father of social revolution in Maharashtra, died. The year 1895 proved to be a turning point in the history of social reforms in Maharashtra. Prin.Gopal Ganesh Agarkar an ardent reform supporter of the social reform movement died prematurely in that year. In the same year national social conference was separated from the congress. Bal Gangadhar Tilak who was oposed to social reform movement brought the 'Pune Sarvajanik Sabha' under the control of his group and thereby checked the progress of social reforms in Maharashtra. Consequently at the beginning of the present century two trends of national freedom movement and social reform movement were seen moving on along the parallel lines in Maharashtra. There was, however, an honourable exception to this and it was of Maharshi Vittal Ramji Shinde. It was V.R.Shinde who regarded both the national freedom movement
and social reform movement equally important and sincerely tried to unite them.

Since the last decade of the 19th century progress of social reform movement was blocked for sometime. The field of social reforms looked somewhat deserted. At such critical time Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve and Pandita Ramabai silently worked for the emancipation of women. However their activities were confined to the urban centres and their work proved useful only for the upper stratas of the society. Maharshi V.R. Shinde, Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil were the three great leaders who tried to awaken the illiterate masses and organize them. To end the exploitation of the rural masses, to make them conscious of their natural rights, to bring about social transformation so as to ensure social equality were the important aspects of the work done by these social reformers in rural Maharashtra.

Political Scene:

In politics three groups were working in Maharashtra. The Moderates and the Extremists were working within the frame work of congress. The leaders of both the factions in the congress belonged to Maharashtra. Hon'ble Gopal Krishna Gokhale led the moderates while Bal Gangadhar Tilak led the extremists. Though aim of the both moderates and the extremists was the same their methods were different.
Besides these two groups one more group of the terrorist revolutionaries was also active in Maharashtra. Workers of this group received inspiration and guidance from a great revolutionary Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Moderate Nationalists:

Indian National Congress which spearheaded the national freedom movement in India was founded in 1885. Sir A.O.Hume is regarded father of Indian National Congress. This organization was dominated by the moderate nationalist during the first two decades of its existence. Justice M.G. Ranade, W.C. Banerjee, Justice Telang, Dadabhai Nowrojee, Pherozshah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale etc. moderate nationalist guided and controlled all the congress activities in the early phase. They regarded British rule as a divine dispensation. They had firm belief in British sense of justice and fair-play. Therefore, the moderates chose to co-operate with the British administration in this country. In order to solve the problems of Indian people and also to get their grievances redressed the moderates followed constitutional methods. They tried to solve their problems by means of petitions, prayers and persuasions. They also believed that the British government would certainly concede the demands of the Indians when they became eligible for self rule.
From 1885 to 1905 Congress under the moderate influence brought about political awakening, represented peoples' grievances and imparted political education to the people. Hon'ble Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1865-1915) was a famous leader of the moderate nationalists. He was a staunch disciple of Justice M.G.Ranade. He started his public career as a school teacher in 1885. He was also associated with a number of social and educational institutions. For a few years he acted as Secretary of the English Section of Prin.Agarkar's bilingual weekly named 'Sudharak'. G.K.Gokhale was a life member of the Deccan Education Society, Poona. In 1899 he was elected for the first time to the Bombay Legislative Council. Again, in 1902, he was elected to the Central Legislative Council of which he was a member till the end of his life. Gokhale became President of the Congress Session held at Banaras in 1905. In the same year G.K.Gokhale founded the 'Servants of India Society'. Spiritualisation of politics was his motto. He insisted upon purification of public life and gave preference to moral values in politics. The aim of his society was to produce honest, loyal and selfless social and political workers to serve the motherland. In 1905, he led a deputation to England to give evidence before the Welby Commission. During the fifty days of his stay in England he delivered about 45 speeches in which he described the miseries of the Indians. He, by his powerful oratory, influenced the British public opinion. As G.K. Gokhale was a national leader he always spoke and wrote in English and so his thoughts could not reach to the masses at
large. Consequently he could not win sympathy of the masses and could not organize them.

In the initial phase the moderates politely submitted to the British Government many genuine demands of the Indians. They asked for the expansion of legislatures with enlarged powers, increased representation of the Indians to the legislative councils, Indianization of administration, more powers to the local self government, reduction in the administrative expenses, freedom of press etc. Some of these demands were conceded.

Congress under the moderates gave vent to the social and economic grievances of the people. It also paid attention to the problems of the Indians living abroad. It was also demanded that salary of the Secretary of State for India should be paid from British treasury. The moderate nationalists fostered among the Indians spirit of nationalism and laid the solid foundations of the future Indian freedom movement.

The Extremists:

In the last decade of the 19th century, due to a number of causes there emerged a group of the Extremists within congress. This group was organized and ably led by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpatrai and Birinchandra Pal. The extremists declined to co-operate with the British government authorities. As they believed in philosophy of resistance, they were ready to fight against the British for political rights of
the Indians. They had no faith in constituent methods. They did not like political mendicancy. They always said that we should not beg for our rights but we should fight for achieving our natural rights. For the purpose of forcing the British government to concede natural rights to the Indians the extremists aroused and organized the people.

The Tilak Era:

Politics in Maharashtra was dominated by Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) since about 1895. Tilak exercised tremendous influence in Maharashtra politics till the time of his death. Therefore, the period between 1895 and 1920, in the history of Maharashtra is described as 'Tilak Era'.

It was Lokamanya Tilak who made the famous slogan "Swarajya is my birthright and I shall have it". He was a fearless patriot. He started his public career as a school teacher. He was of the view that in order to bring about awakening and to arouse the patriotic feelings among the enslaved Indian people; it was necessary to impart national education to the Indians. With this end in view Tilak, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar and Vishnushastri Chiplunkar came together and founded the New English School in Poona in 1880. Later on in the year 1881 Tilak and Agarkar started publishing two newspapers named 'Kesari' and 'Maratha'. They believed that newspaper would be more effective instrument for awakening the masses and shaping public opinion. Tilak and his colleagues
founded the famous Deccan Education Society in 1884. This educational institution did a remarkable work of spreading western education among the natives in Maharashtra. The Deccan Education Society started the Fergusson College in Poona in 1885 for the spread of higher education among the natives. However Tilak and Agarkar could not work together for a long time. There arose sharp differences between the two on the issue of social reforms and some other points. On account of differences Agarkar resigned the editorship of 'Kesari' in 1887 and Tilak left the D.E.Society in 1890. Thereafter Tilak entered politics and dedicated himself to the cause of freedom of motherland. Very soon he became a popular political leader. He levelled merciless attacks on British imperialism through his speeches and newspapers.

Tilak started a large scale public celebrations of Ganesh festival in 1894 and Shivaji festival in 1896. However, it should be noted here that some other persons had given 'Ganesh festival' a form of public festival a couple of years before Tilak. Tilak started these festivals with the intention of awakening the people, creating among them hatred for the British rule and preparing them for fight against slavery.

Gradually Tilak's political influence increased considerably. He attracted a large following. Due to several reasons the group of the extremists within congress became very powerful. At the time when the national freedom movement
was growing formidable. Viceroy Lord Curzon announced on 20th July 1905 his infamous scheme of partition of Bengal. The announcement soon gave rise to a strong anti-partition agitation which quickly spread all over Bengal. Tilak spontaneously extended his support to this agitation. Very soon the agitation against the partition of Bengal spread all over the country. In the same year Tilak organized within Congress his separate group and named it as 'Nationalist Party' Tilak's group adopted the four point programme of 'Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott of foreign goods and National education'.

Surat Split (1907):

Tilak and his followers tried to intensity the national freedom struggle and make the freedom movement both effective and aggressive. They were eager to snatch the congress organization from the moderates and use it as an effective instrument of winning swaraj for India. Therefore, a tug of war was fought between the moderates and the extremists continuously for three years i.e. in 1905, 1906 and 1907. In 1906 in the Congress Session held at Calcutta a resolution embodying the four point programme of the extremists was adopted. The Calcutta session of the Congress was presided over by Dadabhai Naorojee. This veteran Congress leader declared 'dominion status' as the goal of Indian Freedom struggle and supported the four point programme of the extremists. In reality the moderates who dominated the Congress at that time were indifferent to the new programme and tried to avoid its actual
implementation. On the other hand the extremist group was growing suspicious about the sincerity and motives of the moderates regarding the implementation of new programme. Subsequently their differences became acute and conflicts within Congress became serious. Under such circumstances the Congress session of 1907 was held at Surat. In this session the Congress faced an open split. After the Surat split the extremists were ousted from the Congress and the moderates continued to dominate the Congress till about 1915.

Tilak's Imprisonments:

Tilak was a fearless patriot. He bitterly criticised the British government and exposed to the people the true character of British imperialism in India. He was thrice tried under the charge of sedition. At the very beginning of his public career in 1882 Tilak along with Prin. Agarkar was sentenced to four months simple imprisonment in connection with the famous Kolhapur episode. These young editors had severely criticized Mr. Barve the then Diwan of Kolhapur State for torturing the Chhatrapati.

In 1897, Tilak was tried for the first time under the charge of sedition. In June 1897, Chafekar brothers murdered Mr. Rand the Plague Commissioner of Poona and his assistant Mr. Ayerst for mishandling the relief operations and causing hardships to people. As the government committed many atrocities while trying to apprehend the real culprits Tilak bitterly
criticized the government through his newspapers. In this connection he was tried in the court and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. However, he was released from jail after a year only.  

Around the year 1908 the British government authorities in India were determined to send Tilak to jail under some pretext. In April 1908 Muzzafurpur bomb explosion case took place. In that case two young Bengali nationalists made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Mr. Kingsford the magistrate at that place. In connection with this sensational case Tilak wrote a few articles in his newspapers. This was sufficient ground for the government to try Tilak in the Court. Accordingly he was tried and sentenced to six year imprisonment.

The Father of Indian Unrest:

During the period of Tilak's imprisonment nationalist movement in Maharashtra became weak and ineffective. In 1914 he was released from Mandalay jail. Soon after his release two great Congress leaders Hon'ble G.K. Gokhale and Pherozshah Mehta died in 1915 and so a great vaccum of leadership was caused in the Congress. In 1916, the Congress session was held at Lucknow. Tilak and his followers re-entered the Congress and attended the Congress session. A grand welcome was accorded to Tilak there. At this session the extremists, the moderates, the Hindus and the Muslims came together on the Congress platform and made a common cause against the British imperialists. The motion demanding Swaraj was unanimously passed in the
session. Tilak took a lot of trouble to bring about the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the League. Thus Tilak became the undisputed leader of the Congress and remained so till his death. He inspired the youths and the revolutionaries, boycotted foreign goods and thereby intensified the freedom struggle in the country. The political observer of the 'London Times' Sir Valentine Chrdl described Tilak as 'the father of Indian unrest'.

Home Rule Movement:

When the British were engaged in the first world war, Mrs. Annie Beasant launched the Homerule movement in Madras Presidency in 1915. In 1916, Tilak started it in Maharashtra. He started the Homerule movement with a view to keep up popular enthusiasm as well as to organize strength of the people. Soon this movement became very powerful. In order to check the growing agitation government authorities filed a case of sedition against Lokmanya Tilak. However, he was acquitted by the Bombay Highcourt.

Although Tilak was radical in politics he was very conservative in regard to social matters. He, throughout his life, opposed both the social reforms and the social reformers. Lokmanya Tilak passed away on 1st August 1920 and with that the Tilak era came to an end.
Terrorist Revolutionaries:

Besides, the Moderates and the Extremists a group of young terrorist revolutionaries was also active in Maharashtra since the last decade of the 19th century. Vasudev Balwant Phadake is, however, regarded the first Maharashtrian revolutionary. These firebrand young nationalists believed that British imperialism in India was based upon brute military force and therefore, it was necessary to take to arms in order to drive out the British from India. At the beginning of the 20th century Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and his brothers were in the forefront of the terrorist activities in Maharashtra.

Abhinav Bharat Society:

In 1899, V.D. Savarkar, Mhaskar, Page etc. founded a secret revolutionary organization which was named as the 'Rashtrabhakta Samuh'. Since January 1900 this organization began to function openly and was re-named as the 'Mitramela'. Later in 1904 V.D. Savarkar re-named the Mitramela as the 'Abhinav Bharat Society' and also expanded the scope of its activities. In 1906 V.D. Savarkar received a fellowship awarded by Shāmjī Krishna Varma and S.R. Rana and went to England for higher studies. During the period of his stay abroad his brother Ganesh Savarkar looked after the activities of Abhinav Bharat Society.

Shri Ganesh Savarkar used to sing patriotic songs in the 'Ganesh Melas' organized by his group. His songs greatly
inspired the youths to take part in freedom movement. Therefore, he was tried under the charge of treason and was awarded life imprisonment. As a reaction to it Anant Laxman Kanhere, a young worker of Abhinav Bharat Society, shot dead on 21st December 1909 Mr. Jackson the magistrate who had awarded the severe punishment to Ganesh Savarkar. Because of this event the 'Nasik Conspiracy Case' came into light. As the Pistols used by Kanhere was one of those 20 pistols which V.D. Savarkar had sent from England he was also implicated in the case. Subsequently he was arrested in England and brought to India for trial. When he was being brought to India the ship in which he travelled had halted at Port Marseilles in France to get the fuel. At this time Savarkar plunged into the sea and swam to the shore. However, the French police handed him over to the British officials. In the Nasik Conspiracy case along with V.D. Savarkar some thirty-seven other persons were involved. Out of those only eleven got acquitted and the others were given different sentences. V.D. Savarkar was sentenced to life imprisonment. On account of V.D. Savarkar's long term imprisonment the revolutionary activities in Maharashtra lost their vigour and momentum.17

Other Activities:

Besides Abhinav Bharat Society there was a good network of small and big secret revolutionary organizations in Maharashtra in the first decade of the present century.
A large number of youths were involved in the revolutionary activities aiming at emancipation of the motherland from the yoke of alien rule. Among the several revolutionary organizations 'Shivaji Club' of Kolhapur was prominent. Hamantrao Mukhibhavikar led this organization and it had about three hundred members.

Dhapare brothers of Satara founded 'Hanuman Club' and conducted a few gymnasiums in Satara city. These were actually the dens of the revolutionaries. In 1905 Shri Pandurang Sadashiv Khankhoje founded at Nagpur the 'Aryabharat Samaj'. In one of its meetings it was decided that members of the Samaj should receive training in arms instead of merely obtaining them. In this context Prof. Puransingh, Shri Khankhoje and others met Lokmanya Tilak.18

Some of Lokmanya Tilak's followers like Gangadharrao Deshpande, Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadikar, Vamanrao Joshi, Govindrao Yalgi of Belgaum, Hanamantrao Deshpande and many others were attracted towards the Philosophy of armed revolt. Tilak had intimate relations with many of the revolutionaries. Govind Pandurang Bapat, Keshav Padalkar, Parsoo Sutar, Gangadhar Gokhale, Shripad Nagpurkar, Ramchandra Gadre, Damodar Joshi, Damodar Sonar, Ganesh Modak, Narayan Padhye, Sarvottam Shenolikar, Bhausaheb Ghatage, Bhausaheb Kalambe, Vasukaka Joshi of Dhom and many others were engaged in the revolutionary activities.19
Thus three distinct trends were discernible in Maharashtra politics at the beginning of the 20th century. Lokmanya Tilak, Hon'ble G.K. Gokhale and V.D. Savarkar represented those political trends. As all of them belonged to middle class and as their outlooks resembled to that of middle class their movements also remained confined to the middle class.

Field of Social Reforms:

In the history of Modern India 19th Century is regarded the century of social reforms. The social renaissance movement in Maharashtra began in the latter half of the 19th century. Lokhitvadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Justice M.G. Ranade, Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar, Prin. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Jotirao Phule etc. belonged to the second generation of social reformers. Most of them advocated the cause of marriage reforms and tried to improve the conditions of women in the age-old Hindu Society. Social reforms movement in those days remained confined to the cities and the urban upper class. However, Mahatma Jotiba Phule was such a reformer who tried to break new ground in the field of social reforms. He is truly regarded the father of social revolution in Maharashtra. Last decade of the 19th century proved to be unfavourable for the progress of social reforms. In that decade two currents of political reform and social reforms got separated from each other and began to move on independently. On a number of occasions those two groups
clashed against each other over the issue of social reforms. Deaths of Jotiba Phule, Prin. Agarkar and Justice M.G. Ranade produced adverse effects on the progress of social reforms. Thus in the last decade of the 19th century social reform movement in Maharashtra suffered many setbacks. Consequently at the beginning of the 20th century the field of social reforms looked almost deserted. The only outstanding personalities working with vigour and enthusiasm in the field were Pandit Ramabai, Prof. Dhonde Keshav Karve and Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur State. Another important social reformer Shri Vithal Ramji Shinde made the beginning of his career around 1905.

Emancipation of Women:

Both Pandit Ramabai and Maharshi Karve made rich contribution towards emancipation of women. Pandit Ramabai (1858-1922) was such a reformer who dedicated herself to the cause of emancipation of women. As she was well versed in Sanskrit she acquired mastery over the Vedas and other Hindu scriptures. After the passing away of her parents she and her brother Shrinivas travelled all over India for six years and finally went to Calcutta. There she mastered English language also. Thus Pandita Ramabai first revolted against the caste rule of the Hindus which inhibited women to receive education. At Calcutta she got herself married to Babu Bipin Bihari who belonged to a lower caste. This was her second
revolt. However, unfortunately she lost her brother in 1880 and her husband in 1882. So, later on, she shifted to Poona. Leaders like Justice Ranade and Dr. Bhandarkar were surprised by her learning and oratory.

In the traditional Hindu Society Shudras and women were the two weaker sections which had to suffer many disabilities. Many restrictions were imposed on those weaker sections. Pandita Ramabai disliked the restrictions imposed upon Hindu women. Therefore, she revolted against Hindu orthodoxy in order to bring about the emancipation of women in India. As she got fed up with the orthodox Hindu religion she got herself converted to Christianity. In Christianity also she had to fight against religious orthodoxy. However, her conversion did not come in her way of social service. She founded the 'Arya Mahila Samaj' in 1882 for promoting the welfare Indian women. Later Ramabai visited the U.S.A. and there she collected funds for promoting the cause of women education in India. After her return from the U.S.A. she founded 'Sharadasadan' at Bombay in 1889. In this institution free lodging and boarding arrangements were made for the homeless widows and female orphans. It also provided for education of women. 'Sharada Sadan' was, later on, shifted from Bombay to Poona in 1890. For expanding the scope of her activities related to emancipation of women, Pandit Ramabai founded one more institution named 'Mukti Sadan' at Kedgaon a village near Poona in 1896. In Muktisadan also free arrangements for education, lodging and boarding of girls and women
were made. This Mukti Sadan soon became the centre of all her activities. However, it was alleged that Ramabai forcibly
converted to Christianity the women living in Muktisadan.
Thus Pandit Ramabai served thousands of cursed and down-
trodden, fallen and deserted and also the lowborn women in Maharashtra for over 30 years.24

Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962):

He was a great champion of women education in India.
Only after Jotiba Phule he did a lot of work for promoting
the cause of women uplift and women education in Maharashtra.
As there was to be no improvement in the condition of women
unless they were educated and as there was to be no real
progress of society unless conditions of women were improved,
Maharshi Karve dedicated himself to the cause of female
education.25 For encouraging the practice of widow remarriage
he founded the 'Vidhava Vivahottejak Mandal' in 1893. He was
a staunch advocate of widow remarriage. Not only did he preach
but he also practised what he preached. After the death of his
first wife Maharshi Karve himself got married to a widow
named Godubai alias Anandibai. During subsequent period he
also helped bring about a number of widow marriages in
Maharashtra.26

In the field of women education Maharshi Karve made
a remarkable contribution. In 1896 he established 'Anath-
balikashram' at Poona. In 1900, he shifted his institution
to Hingane where he continued his work of women education.
In 1907 he founded 'Mahila Vidyalaya' for female education.
In his orphanage he gave asylum to the widows and destitute women. For bringing about emancipation of women and their uplift, he, later, established many more institutions like the 'Nishkamkarmamath', 'Samata Sangh', 'Vidhava Vivah Mandal', 'Prathamik Shikshan Sangha' etc. He guided through his educational institution, thousands of women including many unfortunate widows.27

Maharshi Karve founded the first women's University in this country. In 1915 he came to know about the Japanese Women's University which has been working for the spread of education among women in Japan. Karve realised that there is a need of similar University in India too. He established the Women's University at Hingane in 1916 with a view to spread education among women and to provide them higher education.28 Since 1920 it came to be known as the S.N.D.T. Women's University. It was the first University to start independent courses for women. Karve also founded 'Achyapikashala' in 1917 and the 'Pune Kanya Shala' in 1918. He made ceaseless efforts for the emancipation and welfare of women and looked after the welfare of thousands of distressed women. The inspiration of his work was his sympathy for women. The people conferred on him the title of 'Maharshee'.29 However, Karve's activities were mainly useful for the women of higher castes and remained confined to the urban areas only. His movement did not reach the poor rural women in Maharashtra.30
Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was a ruler of Kolhapur State since 1894. Eventhough he was a ruler of a princely state he was a great social reformer. He was a supporting pillar of social democracy in Maharashtra. By his ceaseless efforts Shahu Maharaj revived Jotiba Phule's work of social transformation of the rural, illiterate masses and vigorously carried it further. Therefore, Shahu Maharaj occupies a significant place in the social history of modern Maharashtra.31

On 2nd April 1894 Shahu Chhatrapati took up the reins of administration of his state. Soon after that he adopted various measures to bring about alround progress of his state. However, the famous 'Vedokta episode' proved to be a turning point in his life. In the winter of the year 1899 the Vedokta controversy took place. It insulted Shahu Maharaj and deeply hurt his feelings of self-respect. So Shahu Chhatrapati revolted against the Brahman domination and waged a war against Brahman conservatism.32

Although Shahu Maharaj was a ruler of Kolhapur State his various socio-educational reforms proved useful to the Non-Brahman masses in rural Maharashtra. He made serious attempts to eradicate the social evils like untouchability and to educate the rural poor masses. He gave equal treatment to
the untouchables and found out many remedies for the removal of untouchability. He appointed a number of untouchables to work in his palace and also as his bodyguards. Shahu Maharaj provided the untouchable youths employment in the state services and encouraged them to pursue independent professions. He used to dine with the untouchables often. Shahu Chhatrapati organized a number of conferences of the untouchables in order to awaken the untouchable masses and thereby to speed up the work of eradication of untouchability. He was the first ruler in Maharashtra to abolish the condemned 'Mahar Vatans'. Chh. Shahu tried to bring into practice the principles of social equality preached earlier by Mahatma Jotiba Phule.33

Shahu Maharaj very well understood the importance of education as a means of social change. He firmly believed that education was the only Panacea for bringing about the uplift of the illiterate rural masses. He, therefore, made various attempts to spread education among the Non-Brahman masses. First of all he made primary education fee and compulsory in his state in 1916. For encouraging the spread of education he opened a number of schools in his state and started in Kolhapur a number of boarding houses for the students belonging to different castes and communities. He liberally donated to the various educational institutions even though they were not within the jurisdiction of his state. Thus Shahu Maharaj spent from his treasury a lot of money for the spread of education among the poor masses.34
Shahu Maharaj was of the view that unless the social conditions of the masses were improved they would not enjoy the benefits of self-rule i.e., Swaraj and so he made ceaseless efforts to bring about an alround progress of the masses.

Tarkatirth Laxmanshastri Joshi, while evaluating the contribution of Shahu Chhatrapati to social transformation in Maharashtra writes,

"If the leaders and thinkers of the Brahman society had given their support to the vedokta movement of Shahu Maharaj then the social and political history of Maharashtra would have been different. At the beginning of the 20th century Rajarshi Shahu had given the golden opportunity of giving permanent farewell to the Brahman-Non-Brahman conflict. The Brahmans regarded Shahu as their enemy. But in fact he was their benefactor. The lost opportunity was never to come again. If the Brahmans had supported the Vedokta movement then there would have been the complete end of religious and social differences between the Brahmans and the Non-Brahmans. However, the Brahmans who possessed virtues of modern education proved to be intellectually regarded. The defeat of Shahu Maharaja's Vedokta movement in a way reflected the height of the intellectual weakness of the Brahmans. Shahu Maharaja is an impressive personality in the history of social reforms in Maharashtra."
Shahu Maharaj supported the efforts made by Bhaskarrao Jadhav and others for the revival of Satyashodhak movement in 1911. As he was eager to enforce social equality in the traditional society he supported Satyashodhak movement which aimed at social change. Due to Shahu Maharaj's active support Satyashodhak movement soon became a strong mass movement in Maharashtra.

Maharshi Vithal Ramji Shinde (1873-1944):

Maharshi V.R. Shinde was a renowned social reformer who attached equal importance to both social as well as political reforms. He was well versed in the Hindu religious scriptures and modern western thought. He was Prin. Agarkar's student in Fergusson College, Pune. He began his career as a Preacher of Brahmo Samaj. Around the year 1905 he turned to social reforms. He devoted himself to the spread of higher values of spiritual culture and to the uplift of the so called untouchable masses. Eradication of untouchability was his life mission for a number of years. He claims a foremost place in the galaxy of social reformers in Maharashtra. In Tilak era political and social movements were carried on independently. There was no love lost between the two. The extremists in politics were conservative in social matters and the social reformers who made severe attacks upon social evils were lukewarm in their attitude towards the British Imperialists. During this period V.R. Shinde expressed equally progressive views about both the social and political problems. He made attempts
to take onwards both the social and political movements. In him the two trends of social reforms and national freedom movement were properly blended.

It was V.P. alias Annasaheb Shinde who first of all studied the problem of untouchability in India in all its important aspects. He brought that problem at national level. To co-ordinate the activities and efforts made for removal of untouchability in India, he founded on 19th October 1906 the 'All India Depressed Classes Mission Society of India'. There were about fourteen branches of the mission at different places such as Bombay, Poona, Madras, Manglore, Dapoli, Satara etc. He undertook different activities and adopted many measures for ameliorating the conditions of the untouchables. Annasaheb Shinde's entire family got involved in his work of eradication of untouchability. His wife and sister took good care of the untouchable children and performed deliveries of the untouchable women.

The D.C.M. society also provided vocational training to the untouchable boys and youths. Maharshi Shinde undertook an all India tour to attract people's attention to the problem of untouchability. He also organized a number of conferences to create favourable atmosphere for eradication of untouchability. It was solely due to his efforts that a resolution seeking removal of untouchability was unanimously passed in the congress session held at Calcutta in 1917. As a result of his efforts Indian intelligentsia became conscious of that problem.
Annasaheb Shinde opposed the evil custom of 'Murali' which was then prevalent in Maharashtra. He also appealed to the people to give up the obscene activities performed on the eve of Shimga or Holi festival.

Maharshi V.R. Shinde was nationalist in his outlook. He desired that national freedom movement should be made broadbased and it should be further strengthened. He also felt that for the growth of national consciousness among the masses, casteism and untouchability should be abolished. In 1917 he founded the 'Maratha National League' with a view to bring the Maratha Community in the main currents of national life. Being a true nationalist he opposed the provision of communal electorates contained in the Montford Reforms of 1919. As he was opposed to the principle of communal representation he refused to accept Shahu Maharaja's advice to contest election from a reserved constituency.

At the beginning of the 20th century the conditions of the peasants in Maharashtra were miserable. So Annasaheb Shinde carefully studied the problems of the peasants. In order to organize the peasants and also to seek the redress of their grievances he organized a number of peasant conferences. During the days of famine in 1920, he, on behalf of his mission, carried on many relief activities and helped the people who were affected by the calamity. Maharshi V.R. Shinde's personality and his work profoundly influenced the youths like Keshavrao Jedhe.
Karnavas Bhaurao Patil (1887-1959) was a true disciple of Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur. Receiving aspiration from Shahu Maharaj he did a pioneering work for the spread of mass education in Maharashtra. For the spread of education among the rural masses he founded the 'Rayat Shikshan Sanstha' in 1919. In future his work in educational field blossomed gradually. However, Karnavas Bhaurao Patil had started his educational activities long before the establishment of 'Rayat Shikshan Sanstha'.
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