CHAPTER I
MARATHI WOMEN: NATURE, CULTURE AND CHARACTER.
INTRODUCTION:-

Marathi speaking land is generally known as Maharashtra and historically this part is very rich as other parts of India. Culturally, Maharashtra has no independent identity except, some social and religious peculiarities. But she had made her headway through the great deeds of her people from ancient times. And people in Maharashtra influenced the people of other parts of India right from the Satvahanas to the days of Maratha Power, Chhatrapati Shivaji the Great founded in 1674. The Maratha Power and Marathi people contributed to the might of India and upheld the banner of freedom loving people in our country. When the East India Company Government was trying to consolidate its power in the all far reaching corners of India, Marathi men proved their mettle in joining the revolt of 1857 against the Company and proved their mettle in sharing the struggle for independence.

Raja Rammohan Roy, the father of modern India, introduced the modern era and reformation in Bengal and it is because of inspiration from him and his disciples like Keshav Chandra Sen, Maharashtrians turned to join the new movement of renaissance and reforms. However, without having any direct connection with Raja Rammohan Roy, and his movement or his disciples, Jotirao Phule alias Mahatma Phule started new
era of emancipating women and untouchables in Maharashtra. Then, a galaxy of reformers like Balshastri Jambhekar, Lokhitwadi, G.G. Agarkar, Justice M.G. Ranade and others had used their respective mights to bring reforms in the society. As such, the 19th century Maharashtra saw many reformers and patrons of reforms in day-to-day life of Marathi people and reconstruction of old dogmatic way of society.

The need of either of reconstruction or modernisation of our society in the past was felt as a need of time by the early native scholars, who got English education in the early 19th century. In their contemplation, national tragedy in India was due to our socio-religious life and water-tight compartments of the society, so also, the principles in the Hindu scriptures. Thus, a new window of new thought and thinking was opened to study our society and its drawbacks and to remove those drawbacks on the basis of modern outlook of egalitarian society. Against this background, it is to be seen, as to how Marathi women played their role in the Struggle for India's Freedom and shared the pride of winning India's freedom.

THE PEOPLE IN MAHARASHTRA:-

The people in Maharashtra have a rich history and worthy heritage. From early times they are known for their valour, independence and self-respected way of life. About the origin and early history of the very name of Maharashtra and
her people, who speak Marathi language, seems to be ancient one, and scholars differed on that issue due to lack of original written sources. However, it is general contention that Maharashtra was a dominating land and played a decisive role in shaping the history and culture of India from the early times. In regard to Aryan domination over Maharashtra, R.G. Bhandarkar told that, she was the last country which became subjugated by Aryans at last. After the continuation of Aryan domination, Maharashtra, which was earlier known as Deccan, went under dramatic change and accepted the way of Aryan life. Naturally, the total life of society in Maharashtra became united one with the life in northern India or the Aryavarta.

In Ramayana, Mahabharat, Puranas and even in the early Buddhist literature, there are references about the land and the people of Maharashtra and while giving the origin of the word "Maharashtra," attempts were made by the scholars like R.G. Bhandarkar, S.V. Ketkar, G. Yazdani and others and there is acceptable unanimity on the contention of those scholars. According to them, the earliest word which denotes the name- Maharashtra and her people- Marathas, is

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., P.10.
known as "Ratta" or "Ratha" and this word according to D.B. Diskalkar expresses the name of a community or a group of people. In the course of time, the word "Ratha" became known as Maratha, to denote the people who stayed in Maharashtra at various places like that of Berar, Konkan, proper Maharashtra, and even some bordering parts of Karnatak and Telgu lands. In fact, they were scattered in almost all parts of Maharashtra.

From the ancient time till the domination by Muslims over Maharashtra, generally, there was one society known as Hindus. Of course, there was in a very negligible form of Jainism scattered all over Maharashtra in a sheer minority. Then from the 12th century, a new cult of Basaveshwar known as Lingayat was also spread mostly in southern Maharashtra, although, some of them were migrated to other parts of Maharashtra on account of their business and contacts. But in practical life either the Jains or the Lingayats remained very conservative and followed, as if, it was the way of conservative Hindu form. In fact, so far pollution of the people in the lowest strata of the society was concerned, there was no difference between the higher caste Hindus and the Jains and the Lingayats. Similarly, the attitude of the Jains and the Lingayats towards their women was not indifferent than that of the higher caste Hindus and the Hindu traditions.
The whole society was divided into the four rank system or "Chaturvarnasamstha". The system has very been clearly described by Manu, who is supposed to be the first codifier of India. Manu says that there are four varnas, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra and the first three are dwija, i.e., twice born, who have right of going through the ritual of the thread ceremony. In the course of time Manu's four rank system was modified in certain respects. And at the time of the advent of the British in India, the Chaturvarnasamstha in Maharashtra was as described by Dr. Irawati Karve in her famous book namely, "Hindu Society- An Interpretation". She described the changes in Marathi society thus-

Almost all the castes with exception of the Brahmins were denied the right of thread ceremony and thus made into Shudras. Among the Shudras a sub-rank was in existence. This sub-rank was made up of certain castes, whose not only touch but even their shadow was held to be polluting- this was the untouchable rank. In literature people wrote about the age old four-rank system, but in effect there were two Varnas, viz. Brahmins and Shudras and later a third one was added- the untouchables. And it is well known fact that the Maratha caste which was the particular caste in western Maharashtra was not considered as Kshatriya till the coronation of Shivaji.
On the plateau of Western Maharashtra, there used to be two main agricultural castes— the Maratha and the kunbi—who were separately enumerated till the census of 1911. Besides, there are many castes and sub castes having their specific hierarchical positions and restrictions of their own.

Even after the commencement of British rule and introduction of English education in Maharashtra, little change had come to the society. And it was only after 1850, a new wave of thinking to bring social change and reforms began. It was thus, the society in Maharashtra till the mid of 19th century lived the life as was dictated by the Hindu scriptures, and ruled by the Brahmins.

**WOMEN LIFE THROUGH THE AGES:**

Although, the role of women in ancient time is glorified and eulogised by number of scholars like Mr. R.C. Dutt, Mr. P.L. Bhargava, and others, the whole account of women life seems to be darkened by the rigidity and conservativeness forced upon them under the orders and dictates of the religion. It is always said that equal status was given to them and they were free like men in the society. But evidences to accept this contention are not available in the number as they are required. Only very few extractions, names and

examples are cited to show that women were at liberty and were enjoying equal status to men. Even in the ancient literature very few names are there, of the eminent women like Gargi, Maitreyi, and others. Considering the length and breadth of India and the vast population she had in all the corners of country, there should have been thousands of names of women, if at all, there would have been scope to women in ancient India. Whatever eminent scholars feel and whatever efforts are made to take the ancient past as an era of equality between men and women might be true, but historical records are not in abundance to say like that and only few examples of eminent women can not prove that the ancient period was glorious so far women life was concerned.

Even in Maharashtra, ancient history of this land does not give many more names of eminent women and their careers. No doubt, the name of "Lopamudra" is often referred by scholars to prove that there was good life for women in Maharashtra. However, except her name, one can not find any other name of great women in Maharashtra. And till the times of the period of Satvahan, there were no evidences to show that women were at liberty to live and consume their lives. The mention

12. Lopamudra was princess of the King of Vidarbha and wife of sage Agasti- Bhandarkar, R.G., Op.Cit.
of some great women like Nayanika, Gautami in the house of Satvahanas made it clear that those ladies played important role to art and culture, as queen Nayanika donated grants to carve a cave at Ajanta and Karle. But in the political life as well as in the social life, the law of Brahminical religion prevailed to regulate and control social life. In the time of Chalukya of Badami and even after that till the end of Yadavas in 1318 very few women like Vijaybhattarika, Kurikumdevi, Akkadevi are seen playing their important role ably and confidently. It is but that they did not represent the women society as such and their roles could not held to understand general life, so also, relationship between male domination and women life. In a way, even after digging of old material sources relating to social life and life of women in particular, one has to admit that instead of treating that period as a glorified one, it is to be accepted that it

15. Vijaybhattarika was the queen of Chandraitya, the elder brother of Vikramaditya I, issued two grants in her own name. A reminiscence of her former short glory lived as the chief queen of a reigning king. She was a poetess who won high rank in the esteem literary critics-Annual Report of south Indian Epigraphy 1934-35. P.118 quoted by G.Yazdanî, Op.Cit. P.234.
16. Kurikumdevi, the younger sister of Vijayaditya, who ruled Maharashtra was present with him in the camp at Kundinpur in 705 A.D. and took the initiative in getting her brother to make the gift to a village, to a learned Brahmin. Ibid.
17. Akkadevi, who even ventured to command troops and to take part in wars and seiges, is most well know women among the house of Chalukyas of Kalyani- Ibid.
was a kind of dark-age and very few women and specially women in the royal houses played decisive roles and all others had to carry a traditional life of remaining in seclusion and far away from the activities of social and general life.

Under the period of Satvahanas it is stated in Gatha 18 Sapta Shati that the society was divided into four major castes and other many more castes. R.M. Bhusari had given besides the names of four major castes some other fifteen sub-castes like gold-smith, cobbler, carpenter and so on. Further he told that there were many more intercaste marriages. However, to avoid intercaste marriages, strict rules were introduced by the Satvahanas and Gautamiputra Shatkarini played an important role to maintain strict observance of the caste system. It means that, whatever good names came of good ladies, no other ladies than them, that the Brahmins were permitted to educate, equality and social status. There was

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18. Gatha Sapta Shati is a poetic version composed during the first century A.D. in the reign of king Hal. It expresses the social life in ancient Maharashtra. Though, it is supposed that it was composed by king Hal, we come across names of many women who composed some parts of it.- Bhusari, R.M., Adya Maharashtra Ani Satvahan Kal, Marathi sahitya Parishad, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, 1979, P.134,144.


20. Ibid., P.19.
a joint patriarchal family system and it was supposed that because of the heterogenous nature of women there were quarrels in the families and women were the cause of family dispute and divisions. Male member was the head and owner of the house, so also ruler and dictator. Headship of the family goes to next to main male members according to the seniority. Only a Senior most male member was to be the head of the house and family. It is mentioned again that girls were allowed to grow to the age of puberty at the time of marriage and they were very eager to get married.

After the Satvahanas, the Vakatakas ruled Maharashtra from 225 A.D. to 540 A.D., for about 315 years, making no change in the social life of Maharashtra. As a result, women had to live the life, as they were living in the period of Satvahanas. Then for about 600 to 650 years, that is, from 543 A.D. to 1189 A.D., the Chalukya of Badami, the Rashtrakutas and the Chalukyas of Kalyani ruled this land. During that period, India witnessed for the first time, the arrival and the aggression of the Muslim invaders. The aggression of the Muslims was not to limit their sphere of activities to the Sind and the Punjab. They were to spread

21. Ibid., P.18.
22. Ibid., P.107.
24. Ibid.
their hazardous movement of aggression in various parts of India. Although, Maharashtra was very late to allow them to penetrate into her lands, she also became the prey of their influence and domination. During all these days, the society remained unchanged and Chaturvarna or the four caste system was kept intact. P.G. Sahasrabudhe had rightly remarked in the book "Maharashtra Sanskriti" that, "Many of the kings in Maharashtra boasted proudly in some of the grant-issuing orders as the protectors of Chaturvarna". Thus the kings in those days were the upholders and regulators of the caste system. As such, majority of the people and womenfolk were deprived of freedom and opportunities. Women were forced to follow traditional life and carry on duties. She had given no voice in the family affairs and was never allowed to mix-up in the social activities. Manu Smriti clearly has restricted conducts and behaviours of women as follows:

"By a young girl, by a woman, or even by an aged nothing must be done independently".

"In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth, to her husband and when her lord is dead to her sons, a woman must not be independent".

26. Manu Smriti., V.147.
27. Ibid., V.148, IX 3.
"Him, to whom her father give her or her brother with her father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives, and when he is dead, she must not insult (his memory)".

"No sacrifice, no vow, no fast be performed (apart from their husbands), if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that (reason alone) be exalted to heaven".

"All her pleasure, let her emaciate her body by (living on) pure flowers, roots, and fruit, but she must never mention the name of another man after her husband had died".

"But a woman who from a desire to have offspring violates her duties towards (deseased) husband, brings on herself disgrace in this world, and loses her place with her husband (in heaven)".

"She, who cohabits with a man of higher caste, for taking her own husband, who belongs to a lower one will become married woman (Para/Purva)"

All these above cited hymns in the Manu Smriti as well as some of the hymns equal them in other scriptures have laid down such restrictions on the life of women. Thus,

28. Ibid., V.151.
29. Ibid., V. 155.
30. Ibid., V. 157.
31. Ibid., V. 161.
32. Ibid., V. 163.
33. 1) Mahabharat, Anushasan Parva, 20,21.
      2) Gautam Dharma Sutra, 2,2,45, Quoted from Dharma Shastra Vichar by Kane, P.V., Manj Printing Bureau, Bombay, 1935, P.198.
since earlier times it is blindly followed and honestly practised in all corners of India. Maharashtra was also not an exception to that.

Even in the Buddhist period no where we came across that all women were free of socio-rules or religious rules. In the fold of Buddhist monks women were permitted but as Buddhism declined in later periods, women were followed the same old and rustic way. Only a few of them, who came from royal houses and upper castes, enjoyed status and dignity. But in regard to all others their duties were prescribed and no woman was to go against the rules. All the sixteen samskaras are for male members and not a single samskara is mentioned for female member. From pregnancy woman was to perform some rites for a birth of a male child and its growth to a full man. It is thus quite evident that Hindu scriptures are not only partial but one sided also and ever neglected birth, growth and development of female lives.

And as Maharashtra is a part of unbroken chain of the ancient Indian tradition, Marathi women also lived the life of hardships and humiliations. Woman, again in the Shudras were treated very badly and had very pitiable condition in the society than the women of upper castes.

Some scholars say that in the later period of Puranas there was better life for women. In fact, what the traditional

34. Sahasrabudhe, P.G. *Opcit.* P.200.
Hindu life tells and religious scriptures support, clear that touch of women to god was unacceptable and was treated as the sign of impurity. In regard to worship of god, women were not free as male members. There was always fear that her touch even in worship to god might displease god and bring displeasure to family and society. As Dr. A. S. Altekar tells of those days up to the period of 3rd century B.C., that marriagable age of a girl was confirmed by the society to 15 or 16. Then according to him that age of marriageable girl was brought down to 9 or 10 years, that is, before the age of puberty during the period of 8th and 9th century A.D. Further, he had cited an example from the Brahma Purana wherein 4 years' girl was held suitable for marriage. As a result of such a worse condition and as Kautilya told women were held equal to the Dasyus or Shudras having no right of wealth and property. What Manu had told of them is that, they should not know handsomeness, age or any other quality of man, but must see that he is a man.

AFTER THE ADVENT OF MUSLIM RULES:-

Till the end of 10th century A.D. the religious profounders and those who were the masters of scriptures never felt that there would be either any challenge or

37. Manu Smriti, IX 14.
danger to their religion and way of life. Because of the Muslim invasions and desire of the Muslims to spread their religion posed a threat to the Hindu religious life of India. It was for the first time that, the Brahminical system of social order was brought to a difficult situation. The new invaders who belonged to Islam, though, they had two main sects as Shiah and Sunni, followed universal brotherhood of man and thus challenged four caste system of the Hindus. The four caste system, as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar told, gives respect to men in the ascendancy scale and teaches contempt for men in the descendancy scale. And as usual, all Varnas treated Shudras very badly.

The Muslim influence in India was first witnessed in the 7th century A.D. Tara Chand told that in 636 A.D., the first Muslim fleet was appeared in Indian waters during the Chaliphate of Omar, and it was the land of Boarch and Dabhol. Then it moved towards south to the people of Moplahs. But it was simply a commercial and religious influence. Then the expedition of Muhumad-bin-Kasim in 711 A.D. Penetrated India from the North-East and North-South. As a result of such invasions, the Muslim invaders captured power first in the North and then moved from the North to

40. Ibid.
the South. Against this state of affairs, Maharashtra was rather late to go under the Muslim domination and influence. It was only after the defeat of Yadavas of Deogiri, people in Maharashtra came into contact with the Muslim rulers and their religion. According to Tara Chand,

"The Muslim conquest had tremendous effect upon the revolution of Indian culture. Superficially, it upset everything, the Hindu religion received a terrible blow, the patronage of the priests and pandits ceased, the Hindu monuments were destroyed, literature received no moral encouragement and languished, to all out-word appearances political conquest was synonymous with cultural death."

In regard to the Islamic influence on women life in India, there was a positive approach to treat women in Islam.

"The place that occupies and previleges she enjoys in Muslim society in accordance with the Commands of Quran are in no way inferior to those of man. Man and woman are equally dispensable for each other. They are absolute masters in their own spheres and the division of duties among them are in accordance with their mutual well-being."

41. Ibid. P.137.
42. Jaffar, S.M., Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India, Jayyad Press, Delhi, 1972, P.197.
In this way, Islam with its glorified way of treating women came to India. However, in the socio-political life of Muslims in India, a very few women like Razia Sultana, Chand Bibi, and others are known to have played their

43. Razia Sultana—Razia, the daughter of the great slave king Iltumish, has the unique distinction of being the only woman who ever occupied the throne of Delhi. As Iltumish was of opinion that his sons were not capable for administration, in 1229 A.D., he, formally, nominated Razia as his successor and stuck to his decision inspite of the vigorous protests of his proud nobles, who were scandalized by the idea of having a woman as their sovereign. Razia was not only well versed in the Koran, but moreover, given ample proof of her dauntless courage by accompanying her father in several campaigns. She held the power for four years, i.e., from 1236 A.D. to 1240 A.D., during which she showed superiordiplomacy and overpowered her enemies.—Swami Madhvananda and Mujumdar, R.C., (ed.) Great Women of India, Advaita Ashrama, Almora, Himalayas, 1953, PP. 380 to 82, also refer to Mujumdar, R.C., and others., Op.Cit., PP.285 to 88.

44. Chand Bibi(1547-99 A.D.)—Chand Bibi decidedly holds the foremost place among the Muslim women of India living in the latter half of the 16th century. Daughter of Husain Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar, she was born there in 1547 and was married to Ali Adil Shah of Bijpur. Her husband, Ali Adil Shah, recognised her rich talents and consulted her in all administrative matters. Chand Bibi used to ride with him on horseback, to review the army parades and take an active part in his military campaigns. In 1580 her husband was treacherously murdered by a eunch and his nephew Ibrahim Adil Shah, a minor, succeeded him and she became the regent and then real ruler of his kingdom. She proved to be a good administrator. Akbar, the Emperor, Opened a campaign against Ahmednagar. And Chand Bibi tried her level best to save the kingdom but as the internal desensions prevailed in Ahmednagar, in 1599 this dowager-queen was being either murdered or constrained to take position. Mujumdar R.C. and others., Op.Cit., PP.364, 456 also refer to Swami Madhvananda and Mujumdar R.C., Op.Cit., PP.391-93.
legitimate role to acquire position. But in general, the life of Muslim women in India was not without hardship and forced, way of life. No names of Muslim women in India, except Gulbadan Begum, Salima Sultana and Bibi Fatima Sam, in the period of about 600 years' Muslim rule from 1206 to 1803, architecture, literature, religion and philosophy.

45. Gulbadan Begum (1523-1603)—Gulbadan Begum was the daughter of Emperor Babur and sister of Emperor Humayun. She has immortalized her name by writing the Hymayun-namah. It is written in simple Persian with a large admixture of Turkish words. It was the most valuable contemporary record of Humayun's reign. Gulbadan possessed considerable poetic talent but unfortunately her verses have not been preserved—Swami Madhuananda and Mujumdar R.C., OP.Cit., PP.382-83. Also refer to—Mujumdar R.C., Raichoudhan, H.C. and Datta, K.K., An Advanced History of India, Macmillian and co.Ltd., New York, 1956, PP.529.

46. Salima Sultana, was Humayun's niece. She was authoress of several Persian poems—Mujumdar, R.c. and others.,Ibid.

47. Bibi Fatima Sam occupies a prominent place among the saintly women, and finds frequent mention in the recorded sayings of the well known saint Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi and his pupils. She was also a poetess and composed fairly good Persian verses. She specially emphasized the importance of charity—Swami Madvananda and Mujumdar, R.C., OP.Cit.P.389.

48. In 1175 A.D. Muhammad of Ghur invaded India. Till 1192 he invaded India many times but his victory against Prithviraj, the powerful Chauhan king of Ajmer and Delhi in that year laid the foundation of Muslim domination in the Northern India. After his death in 1203, Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad, his brother, became the ruler of Gazani, Ghur and Delhi. But he too did not live long as he was murdered in March 1206 and as he had no male heirs to succeed him his provincial viceroys soon established their own authority in their respective jurisdictions. As such Qutb-ud-din Aibak assumed the title of Sultan and was acknowledged as the ruler of Indian territory. Thus in India, the Muslim rule was started in 1206. The last Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II lived virtually as pensioner and Delhi had come under British control in 1803—Mujumdar R.C. and others, OP.Cit., PP.278-81, 728.
Even in politics, they had little scope to acquire equal position with male members in the Muslim society. In fact, it is very difficult to say whether the Hindu way of life influenced the Muslims or the Muslim way of life influenced the Hindus. In regard to this, it can only be said that the position of woman in her house was better than the one of the Hindus.

In Maharashtra after the fall of yadavas, Muslim rule had good opportunity to create better atmosphere for equality between men and women. While Islamic influence was growing, the Bhakti Cult, which began from Dnyaneshwar started capturing minds of common people due to its preaching of equality before god. This was to give a new shape and new form to whole life in Maharashtra. But it was in vain and neither the Muslim influence nor the Bhakti cult changed the traditional form of life, and women were never permitted to be equal in the age-old Indian society. The Bhakti cult was concerned only to heavenly abode and not to solve worldly problems. According to it "one who was a devotee of god could get salvation through worshipping god directly".

It was thus Bhakti cult concerned merely towards life after

49. Dnyaneshwar, and his brothers and sister, i.e. Nivrutti, Sopan and Muktabai, have their own place in the Bhakti cult of Maharashtra. These renowned children, though, born in a Brahmin family, had to live the life in out-caste for a long time as their father had resumed the duty of household after Sanyasram. This made, Dnyaneshwar, the founder of the Bhakti Cult, to feel the rigidity of Varnashram as well as inequality of man in the Hindu society. So Dnyaneshwar after completing Vedanta and other philosophies, wrote his famous Dnyaneshvari, a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita in the Marathi language. He preached the equality of man before god and the simple way of devotion to god-Pendase, S.D., Maharashtracha Samskritik Itihas (Marathi), 3rd edition, Narayan Mudranalaya, Poona, 1951, PP.141-53.

death but not in day-to-day life of man. The movement or
the cult influenced, no doubt, women like, Mirabai, Muktabai,
Janabai, and others, but it was all to seek salvation in
the devotion of god and not in practical life. Muktabai
the sister of Dnyaneshwar, Janabai a maid servant of
Namdeo and Kanhopatra, a dancing girl from Maharashtra
could be named as women influenced by the Bhakti cult.
Their careers however, failed to help common women in the
society. All that what common women did was the same old
work of carrying of rotten way of life. This had no
previlege or any kind of authority in the socio-political
life or even day-to-day life of the society. Learning,
including with the Sanskrit language, was not kept open to
them. And the Bhakti cult could not help them to have
mental exercises just as male members. Many of the saints
in that cult opposed women participating in the social
affairs. Neera Desai has rightly therefore, commented on
the attitude of many of the saints as follows:

"In short, the attitude of the saints towards women
as a personality was not at all different from the prevailing
one, which might perhaps due to the fact that they considered
Moksha as their basic objective of life and called on men
to eschew whatever obstructed the attainment of that objective."  

Alike the Bhakti movement, Islamic influence did not help women in India to seek their position equal to men. In fact, some of the forms just as the purdah system among the Muslims was made more strict than previous especially in the royal houses. As a result, when women from royal houses or from houses of good middle class were prevented from enjoying liberty equal to men, one has to realize as to how common women were treated. This made to make no change in the way of life in Maharashtra till the impact of Western influence.

SOCIAL CHANGE AFTER THE END OF PESHWA:

The period, from the end of Muslim rule in Maharashtra to the end of Peshwa rule in 1818, had seen, in fact, no change in the life of society in Maharashtra. No doubt, during that span of time, many great women like Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji, the Great, Tarabai, the founder of the Kolhapur Maratha State, and Radhabai, Kashibai, Gopikabai from the Peshwa family as well as women of Maratha chieftains like, Bhagirathibai, Laxmibai, and Yamunabai—the wives of Mahadji Sindia, Umabai Dabhade, Mainabai Pawar, Ahilyabai Holkar, the daughter-in-law of Malharrao Holkar and others were the women to achieve greatness in their life time.

But these women were mostly from royal houses and women in


general, had no opportunities to play their role independently. The same form of dogmatic Hindu life was continued and the same form of society were observed throughout the Maratha period. Mr. Raghunath Narayan, a reformist, wrote an essay regarding the position of Indian women in "Dnyanprakash," a well known Marathi journal of the time, which throws light on the real status of women in that society. While describing the position of women it stated thus-

"The condition of women is like that of beasts. This ignorance is beneficial for men, as they could keep them in slavery and beat them brutally. According to them women are created for that only. The women of the middle and lowest strata of the society have to work hard and face many hardships...... Most of the husbands are so cruel that they do not hesitate to beat their respective wives."

The life of women in the Maratha period was not at all different than the life given to them in Hindu scriptures. Moreover, it is seen from some incidents that they were kidnapped in day-light, even on the day of their marriage. Be it then, a woman in the royal house or in the house of a common man. In a way, women in the houses of common men had to live very carefully and save themselves from the wraths and angers of enemies of their husbands and heads of

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54. Marathi Danyanprakashak, August, 1855.
the family. Then even if, the career of Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji the Great, and Tarabal, the founder of the Kolhapur Maratha State, taken into account, it could be said that they were exceptions. And under the Peshwa rule strict orders were passed to observe pollution of women on certain days and keep them away from the religious functions and ceremonies. Similarly, there were number of hardships, which women had to face. Their marriages were arranged in childhood and without their consent. They had no share in the property of their husbands. All, what the social practices dictated, they had to follow and had no avenue against their grievances. In such a way, their growth as human beings was completely prevented. Practices like polygamy, Sati, tonsure, uneven-marriages, prevention of widow-marriages etc., also let them to live very ignominious life. And uneven marriages of rulers like Nanasaheb Peshwa at the age of forty to a girl of nine years old from Vakhore family of Paithan and Mahadj Sindia to Laxmibai, a daughter of a common man, namely, Bhope Kadam from Tuljapur, made menfolk to look upon women as a commodity of enjoyment. Naturally, the life of

women in general, under the Peshwa Period is not worthy to be mentioned and it did not help Maratha women to acquire any kind of status in the society. Even Mrs. Maltibai Bedekar had stated about the status of women thus:

"Marriage was an essential sacrament, enjoined by religion so that from her childhood a girl was mentally prepared for her life after marriage. The mother coached the girl to accept and obey the orders of the in-laws with complete docility. If a girl occasionally displayed her childlike spirits, she was beaten into submission even by her own mother."

While describing the life of married woman she further stated thus:

"She was not allowed to perform any religious rites on her own. The tasks that she observed were all for the well-being of her husband, for her own well-being depended upon the husband, widowhood being death-in-life. She herself was shackled by ignorance, superstition and a number of prejudices. How could she open new vistas before her children? She was accustomed to accept the indignities as a daughter-in-law, she could, as a mother-in-law, inflict cruelty and she was capable of a totally blind love for her son. She was willing to undergo extreme hardships. Infact, her helplessness was her glory."

Naturally, whatever good life came to women was that, after the end of the Peshwa period.

What actually one should account for the changes and beginning of the reforms in Maharashtra after the end of Peshwa is a difficult problem. Many scholars held that the impact of the missionary work and the spread of education by them was the real reason which made Maharashtra go under change and reforms. Economically also, the society in the post-Peshwa period was forced to accept to change and reforms. Prof. V.B. Koltale was rightly summed up the situation and explained as to how, in the time of the Peshwa, the classes in the society, namely, Brahmins, feudataries and solders, were thrown to unemployment as they had lost the patronage, they received from the Peshwa rulers. And the serious problem was that, these three classes faced basically economic one and to cope with this problem they were forced to give up their traditional way of social life as well as the life, specially in regard to Brahmins, supported by religious conventions for earning bread.

The new Government, i.e., the British Government after the end of Peshwa introduced their system of administration.

and those who were qualified among the natives in the qualifying test of English were given position and jobs in the British Administration. There was the most attractive feature due to which, Brahmins, those, who were hither to very much conservative and critics of English language then began to have acquisition of that language. It is true that Mountstuart Elphinstone continued that patronage to Brahmins and encouraged them granting in 1821 the Sanskrit Pathshala. But all those efforts of the Bombay Governor were not sufficient in considering unemployment of the majority of Brahmins in the regions under the newly acquired lands from the Peshwa. The Brahmins, therefore, had to find out new ways and means, so also, the classes of feudatiaries and soldiers, to seek new opportunities and those opportunities were not to go to them without learning English or acquiring the art, which British wanted as a basic requirement for recruits in the British service. This was the period, really, of crisis and unquided one, wherein, those who faced difficulties, had to find out their own way for survival and good living. The example of Krishna Shastri Chiplunkar, the father of famous Marathi author, Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar (1850-1882)- Vishnushastri Chiplunkar was one of the prominent reformers and intelligintia of Maharashtra. He started Marathi journal, Nibandhmala, on 25th January, 1874, and continued for six years. During that period he wrote on various subjects like condition of the country, superstition, history, science, oratory, etc., which inspired the spirit of nationalism among the Marathi people. Though, previous to him the form of essay was used, it was he, who gave it status and technique of the form, as well as proved that Marathi language is equal and even superior to English- Sardar, G.B., Op.Cit., pp.70,105,208,230, also refer to Joshi, P.N., Op.Cit., pp.83-84.
was the first among the Brahmins, who learnt English instead of Sanskrit. As his maternal uncle advised him that the days of earning bread by chanting Sanskrit hymns were gone and there was no alternative without English for survival, he learnt English. It was thus, the Brahmins, the dictators of Hindu religion turned to change. But the commoners among the Hindus still remained away from learning English, as learning was the privilege of the Brahmins. Then, right from the entry of Krishnashastri Chiplunkar in the English school to the end of prof. Balshastri Jambhekar in 1846 A.D. much water had flown under the bridge to make Brahmins and most of the conservatives among the Hindus to go under some changes. Of course, it was not one factor or one need only but many factors and many needs, made Brahmins to go under change and slowly to reforms.

However, it was only the Brahmins and specially, the western educated few among the Brahmins liked to have such reforms. And people below the Brahmins in the caste-system of the Hindus were totally neglected and were moving still under the period of darkness. Their tragedies were unlimited and unending. The Brahmins, even if, western educated ones did not like to introduce either changes or reforms below

64. Madkholkar, G.T. and Banhatti, S.N., Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar, (Marathi), Bombay Book Depot. no date, P.4.
the caste of their own. The famous Downward Filteration Theory of education of Macaulay did not allow all people to enjoy the fruits of English and western education. The theory of Macaulay was aimed to educate first the highest class and step by step downward classes below it. But it never happened. The people in the highest class of the Hindus were the Brahmins and they did not like people other than the Brahmins be benefitted by English education. In fact, the four caste system of the Hindus is based on the heterogenous attitude to each other. The Down-ward Filteration Theory of education, therefore, went very much partial, doing injustice to majority of people in Maharashtra. As a result, very few among the non-Brahmins got benefit of English education and hence, there was no progress among them till Mahatma Phule came to the horizon. No question, therefore, comes of giving any benefit of English education to women of all castes including Brahmins.

**MARATHI WOMEN UNDER WESTERN IMPACT:**

India's contact with the modern West, in general, and the Great Britain in particular, was an event of decisive significance for her future development. Though, she had been keeping sporadic contacts with some of the western countries since the long past, no one among them influenced her. But the tide that Vasco-de-Gama brought to Indian shore in 1498 A.D.

made India to moot about new trends in the socio-economic,
so also political and cultural way of life. Then after the
establishment of the British rule, almost all over India, she
saw her village economy as well as institutions like that of
caste system moving towards reverse. It gave a great blow to
joint family system and stable society in India. Evaluating
such an influence of the British rule, Percival Spear told-

"The British proved the bridge for Indians to pass from
the medieval world of the Mughal to the new age of science
and humanism".

British brought not only change in the political life of
India, but in all walks of life also. The introduction of
western knowledge and diffusion of English education made
Indians to read western philosophers like Becon, Edmund Burk, Jhon
Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and others for the first time.
Alongwith English literature came to India western moral and
religious ideas. In the economic sphere, the British played
a part of carriers. They were the agents for the entry of
the new machine age into India and their provision of railway
system, provided the nervous system of the country's new
economic life. If, they were responsible for the decay of
the handicrafts, they made possible the development of machinised
industry and brought India within the orbit of the new world.

66. Percival, Spear., The Oxford history of India, part III,
67. Ibid., P.10.
This system of new economy created a sense of dignity for human labour and hence human dignity. This phase was entirely new to Indian life and life in Maharashtra, for never before people imagined that their country would ever go to the new phase of industrial revolution. The norms, therefore of a social rigidity and the form of compartmental caste system were to go to loose their shackles in the age of science and technology. This had certainly helped, although, only to new educated few in Indian society, to know, women were also human beings and had rights to live like them.

It is difficult to know, what exactly made Indian society to respect Europeans and specially the religious-minded Christians who came to India. In the sphere of politics, it was possible for the Britishers to command respect from the Indians but in the cultural life, it was not possible as Indians regarded out-siders as "Mlencha" and Europeans were not to adjust with the Indians. Secondly, Indian society never visualised that there could be any superior way of life than the Indians. And Europeans took themselves as far more civilised and superior than the Indians. Culturally they were really advanced and practically very much rational in their day-to-day life. And after the Indian conquest, they had proved their superiority and supremacy. Naturally, the dogmatic Indian society had to submit both way by politically and culturally to European domination in India.

CONTRIBUTION OF RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY (1772-1833):

The advent of Raja Rammohan Roy in the arena of Indian social life is a very significant event in the Indian history. He was the man who heralded a new age and welcomed the new culture to India. He is the first great representative of the intelligentsia, who absorbed new philosophy, viz., Liberalism. He did not, however, confine his activity to one or two subjects. His alert and eager mind ranged with keen interest over the whole field of contemporary life, and on almost every branch, thereof, he left the impressions of his individuality. Alike in religion, politics, literature and philosophy, his labours will be found among the earliest and most effective in the history of native Indian reform. Social Reform Movement, as a distinct movement, may be said to begin with Raja Rammohan Roy's work. His contribution to modern India, especially, to the upliftment of women may be summed up as follows:

Born in Radhanagar, in 1772, Raja Rammohan Roy came from an ancient and respectable orthodox Brahmin family. And before the age of sixteen, he acquired knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. He studied Bible, and Quoran along with the Hindu scriptures and discovered the unity of religions. Comparative religion as a subject of study was his inspiration. He was a

pioneer in this field of research. Both, Max Muller and Monier Williams acknowledged that, Raja Rammohan Roy was perhaps the most progressive theologian, for nowhere in the world before him was comparative study of religions included in any religious discussion. His love for all world religions developed from his extensive investigation of faiths. He could truthfully admit that, he belonged to every religious faith, provided, it accepted the principle of monotheism.

Having studied the essence of the Hindu scriptures, he became determined to present a fresh interpretation in his translations which he made in Bengali, and English. The basic object behind the interpretation of the Hindu scriptures was to remove misunderstandings with the Hindu priesthood which were unconsciously distorting the fundamentals of Hinduism as well as to arouse the leaders of the society against basic ignorance and mass illiteracy. His distributed his works free to his countrymen with view to acquaint the people with the original scriptures which did not support the crude forms of idolatrous worship. He objected strongly the Brahmin


72. In 1815, Raja Rammohan Roy translated Vedant- Sutra in Bengali and in 1816 he translated the Vedantasar into Bengali and Vedanta in English. In the same year he translated the Isha and Kena Upnishadas into Bengali and English. Those were the first efforts made for translating the Hindu scriptures into Bengali and English—Ibid., P. 16.
priests interpreting the worldly desires of the Gods and Godesses. Thus for the first time in India, Raja Rammohan Roy threw light on the original Hindu Dharma and preached monotheism as well as Universal Brotherhood.

The study of Hindu scriptures made Raja Rammohan Roy to prove the various cruel practices like Sati, permanent widowhood, prohibition of education to women, as unauthorised practices, having no sanction from the scriptures. On the otherhand, he started crusade against these customs and because of his sincere and tireless efforts, the custom of Sati was prohibited by the Act passed on 4th December 1829.

As early as 1818 A.D., Raja Rammohan Roy published a tract in the form of a dialogue between an "Opponent" and an "Advocate" of the custom. The "Opponent" explains the laws of Manu, the great law-giver, who enjoined that the widows should live an ascetic life. In the style the "Opponent" leads the discussion on a critical point, the "Advocate" denies emphatically that women are capable of permanent virtue and should perish along with the husband than to go stray.

At this point he enters upon a logical controversy, obviously, to rightly defend the women of India, and also to uphold their fine qualities which men usually ignore. According to Raja Rammohan Roy, the society had continuously ill-treated the women.

73. Ibid., P.17.
74. Ibid., P.61.
As a result, they had been deprived of all privileges. But in spite of all the persecution women suffered, they had shown outstanding courage, determination and patience, also magnanimity and loyalty. Referring to the names of famous women in Ancient India like Lilavati, Maitrayi, Bhanumati Raja Rammohan Roy told that, women were not inferior to men, if they were given chance. He realised that the economically helpless position of women, especially, after her husband's death led them to voluntary practice of Sati.

The systematic arguments that Raja put forth created a stir, for by defending women he exposed the weakness of men. He used "Sambad Kaumudi", a Bengali journal, as a means of communication through which he expressed his frank comments against the society particularly, callous about women.

Thus, the Raja's work is permeated with the spirit of liberalism and humanism. Whether it pertains to the problem of Sati or the freedom of press, this new spirit in constantly visible. As M.A. Butch describes-

"Raja's Liberalism is, therefore, not only implicitly but also explicitly a social and political liberalism also. He thus became the founder not only of Brhamo Samaj but also of Social Reform School of Ranade and the political Reform Movement of the early Indian National Congress".

The condition of women's life in Maharashtra at the beginning of British regime was as before deteriorated and worst. V.K. Bhave described that life as torturous and inhuman. In general, women had neither dignity nor honour in the Hindu society. Fortunately, but changes began to occur in the old stagnant, so also rustic way of life, after the efforts of the missionaries and Europeans. Side by side, because of the impact of English education of new generation in Maharashtra, a need of reform like prohibition of child-marriage, Sati, un-even marriage, or introduction of widow remarriage were not commenced for a long time even after the beginning of British rule. However, new atmosphere created in the British rule was quite favourable to such reforms. English education and western knowledge made the natives to think of new reforms and see carefully as to how hardships of women would be removed. But conservative forces were not dead. All the while they made efforts to keep women inside the house, and feared was expressed that contacts with the western people and new English educated young men in society would destroy the old form of purity in the society. In Hindu society, woman's character was and is considered as an ideal

standard of the society. To maintain the morality of women all efforts were made by the old-dogmatic society.

Gopal Hari Deshmukh alias Lokhitwadi had given vivid account of the deplorable condition of life of women in the early British rule in Maharashtra. While discussing the position, status and rights of women, he told that, she had no property right and in her widowhood she had to depend upon the support either, from her husband's side or from her parents' side and no one looked upon her as a respectable member in the family. No one was to come to her rescue including her parents or close relatives. In the religious matters, her pollution was observed and she was kept away from all religious functions. She was treated as if, she was an evil spirit and all the while members in the society were to curse the widows.

As the Hindu scriptures provided no right of education to women, learning and education were day dreams to women. The Peshwa rule, which gave way to the new British rule, also practised as it was in the Hindu scriptures following no education to women.

80. Ibid.