CHAPTER 8

RELIGIOUS REFORMS

Soon after establishing rule in India, Christian missionaries made conscious efforts to spread Christianity. Along with, they also came forward in educational and social sector. It is with their encroachment in religious sector in particular and Hinduism in general, many social and religious organizations began to defend Hinduism. Those who loved and cherished Indian culture tried to reform existing religious and social phenomenon. Thus with their efforts many sects and denominations evolved, of which *Arya Samaj* and must find foremost place to be mentioned. As soon as British established their rule Arya Samaj and Theosophical Society began to establish their branches in Berar region. Various sects of saints in Berar also took efforts to prevent conversion of Hindus. Saints in the Province did their valuable contribution with their preaching. This is why many a traditions of Saints are found in Berar, and Berar is often called the land of saints.

During British regime various reforms in religious sector had taken place and as a consequences of which religious and social reforms too.

8.1 Foundation of Church and English Schools in Berar:-

With the arrival of Stephen Hislop in Nagpur in the year 1845, the work of missionary started Catholic Church of Rome (founded in 1848) is the first institution of Missionary in Vidharbha. Rev. John Thavenet was the missionary of Catholic Church of Rome who worked for 40 years incessantly. In Amravati, a Church was established in 1874. The centre of Catholic Church was in Akola but later its head quarter was moved to Amravati. Two primary, two secondary, and two high schools were run by this centre. It had started a Dispensary for poor people. Thus, started the work of the *Institution* at Amravati, Bandera and Achalpur.

8.1.1 Foundation of Schools in Berar by Church:–

Catholic Church was working in education sector. It established two high schools for boys at Amravati and Kapustalani. Two schools were established for girls. Also, two high schools were founded. Two primary schools founded at Amravati and Chikhaldara. Hostel facilities were provided to poor students. In short all desirable facilities were made available. A woman’s organization of France “*Holy Cross of Chavnad*” came to India for the first time in 1886. It started’ *Holy Cross Convent*’ at Amravati. In Akola there was the centre of *American*
Protestant Mission. The centre started religious conversion at Amravati in 1896. It has its centres at Amravati, Chandur and Anjangaon. The mission was organized in 1930. In ten years the number of self supporting nine church members extended to 375. The Mission started Christian Library at free of cost. Every church had a school in it on Sunday which used to impart religious knowledge.

A great attempt to convert Korkus made by missionaries in 1874 could not borne fruit. They could achieve success in some measure in 1899 when there was a draught that year. The missionaries gathered 160 people and established their separate village which was named Mariumpur. The village also had orphan children. The village is situated nearby hill-station Chikhaldara. British companies started yielding coffee in order to provide work for Korkus who mainly reside in forest.

In 1909 the churches of American Mission established at Yeotmal, Wani and Darwha. A hostel for both girls and boys had been established. In the hostel there were chiefly two boys of Maher and other castes and Brahmin boys. The students were given technical education like carpentry, bicycle repairing and gardening.

In Buldhana district Christian and Missionary Alliance Mission was established in 1892. It has its main centre in New York and its branches were established at Buldhana, Malkapur, Khamgaon, Shegaon, Chikhali and Jalgaon.

There was an orphanage of 16 missionaries and 15 native agents at Khamgaon; also there was asylum for widows in which there were 170 women. Nine teachers taught the girls the skills of sewing, embroidering and dairy. Pentecostal Missionary started its work at Buldhana in 1899 and founded its branches at Buldhana, Chikhali, and Malkapur.

8.1.2 The act of religious conversion by Church in Berar:-

Many institutions of Christian Mission had been established in Berar province. The Missionaries were trying their utmost to spread their religion. Rev. Stephen Hislop of Nagpur sent Narayana Sheshandri a Brahmin converted to Christianity at Amravati to propagate Christianity. At Amravati Narayana worked the propagation of Christianity with the help of Rev. Sidiba Misal and converted Baldevsing, an orphan Rajput.

Although the chief aim of missionaries was to propagate religion still it is obvious that they started many a projects of social welfare. Missionaries aimed at spreading Christianity among poor people. Awareness for education was limited to upper class society. In traditional social
strata, right to education was considered to be the handmaiden of upper class society. Even after the establishment of British rule in Berar the advantage of education was mainly taken by upper caste people. The upper class had every privilege and Hinduism protected the interests of the class.

Hindus had a queer love and respect for traditional discrimination in society. The people belonging to upper castes were proud of Hinduism. Christian missionaries were aware of the fact that it was difficult to convert this socially advantageous group. On the contrary, the condition of people belonging to lower castes was totally different. The social setup here depraved them from many natural and human rights. Therefore it is obvious that Christian missionaries seem to have focused their attention to spread Christianity among and to convert depraved section of society.

It seems that Roman Catholic Mission achieved a considerable success in their enterprise in Amravati district. Achalpur and Paratwada were their centres. They would offer every possible aid to poor and needy people of Mahar caste and attract them. They would also go to judges or magistrates and resolve the matter of a person whoever comes to civil or criminal courts. They had a considerable influence on Hindi or English officials. The people would readily go to ask for help of Church-Fathers in matters such as whenever there was a dispute between two villages.

Ganesh Gawai had called a people’s meeting at Bhugaon (Dist.Amravati) in order to check conversion to Christianity. The meeting was attended by hundreds of Mahar people of Varhad. Church authorities of Paratwada also sent their missionaries there. Father Thevanet sent a letter with a missionary to Givahji, the elder brother of Ganesh Gawai. The content of the letter was somehow like “If you trouble our people, mean the Christians we will send you into custody by Deputy Commissioner of Amravati”. Nanasaheb Gawai did not move by the letter. He took efforts to prevent conversion and took initiatives in the direction of social reforms. As a part of which leaders from Mahar community were probing to convert Mahar-Christian again to Hindu religion. Shri Gunwantrao Gawai of Achalpur changed the hearts of near about four to five thousand Mahar-Christians to return back to Hinduism.

No other Missionary could achieve the success in converting people in Berar than Catholic Missionary. The credit of the success is definitely due to the brilliant efforts of Missionaries and to some extent the queer beliefs of Maharas. Some of them converted with false belief that the Church-Father will prevent plague, some others were converted with the notion that the Father will help when
perchance they had to go in the jail, while the others found the way to Christianity in order to teach a lesson to the Kunabis (farmer Community). There are varied stories of ignorance of Mahar community.

It may be true that missionaries did not spread such beliefs among them but the fact cannot be denied that missionaries let those beliefs remain among the people. The missionaries would assert proudly to a Mahar man that they were not doing anything against their caste; still, they would not convert a man socially lower than a Mahar.

We may find ninety out of hundred cases where Mahar people converted for very little real or illusory benefits with the notion that they will remain Mahar in Christianity too. The missionaries started schools at many villages but it seems that they had no special intention to teach English up to Marathi III\textsuperscript{rd} Standard. They would provide money on debt to needy people. With this and many more ways missionaries were doing their work viz spread of Christian religion and were getting success too.

A wind of reform was blowing due to Western education. Due to the improvement in the condition of lower section of society the established order was getting hard blows. It was getting crippled and the work of missionaries also enhanced the effect. The missionaries criticized the lacunas in Hinduism which greatly stirred the lovers of existing traditional caste-ridden society. An English educated youth had to ponder on the critique of religion by missionaries. It is quite natural with us people who get angered with the missionaries in context of their work of conversion. But it should also be considered that it is very difficult to remain away from homes for so many years to live, serve and work among people different in castes. This kind of sacrifice is expected from hundreds of youths in Hinduism without which the religion which is otherwise shattered hundreds of the time by discriminations of race, castes, untouchability and barbarity etc will not gain its vigour until the integration the religion. The educated youths in Hinduism were getting attracted to sublimity and humanitarian values in Christianity. They were considering the queer traditions and concepts about Gods in Hinduism as foolish. They considered Christian religion to be sublime and ideal; especially the values of equality, humanitarianism, the concept of one God etc. had attracted the educated persons in Berar. Owing to such reasons many embraced Christianity and worked for its propagation.

One more impact is seen on the society in Berar. As the missionaries assaulted the Hinduism on pretext of some evil customs, traditions etc to propagate their religion, the upper caste Hindus soon get alerted. They realized the lacunas in Hinduism. Some reformers attempted
to eliminate evil practices and to provide new dimensions to the religion. The orthodox group in the religion also come to fore to check the threat.

Some enthusiastic workers get influenced by *Bramho Samaj* to prevent the conversion by Christian missionaries. *Brahmo Samaj* was spread in Berar since 1867. The leaders of Mahar community in Vidharbha had adopted *Brahmo Samaj* therefore they become hostile of conversion and stout defender of Hinduism. This resulted in great check to conversion of Mahar people into Christianity. *Arya Samaj* resorted to disciplined ways to prevent Hindus from getting converted. The branches of *Arya Samaj* were started at many places and the Samaj get propagated in Berar Province. *Christian Missionaries* offered a hand of help for many a social and people welfare projects during the draught of 1896-97 in Berar.\(^8\) They provided medicine at free of cost during the epidemic of Plague in 1903. They also started hospitals for poor folk.

The Missionaries started News papers and magazines to propagate their religion.\(^9\)

With this, the creation of prose and literary work began in Marathi. After some days some educated people started the various Marathi newspapers in Berar.

As a precautionary measure to rein the act of conversion by missionaries the branches of *Arya Samaj* and *Brahmo Samaj* were founded. Educated people tried to eradicate evil customs and mores in society.

There were 73,403 Christians in Berar in 1911. As per the census of 1921 their number increased to 77,718.\(^{10}\) Christian missionaries were doing conversion under the garb of such humanitarian aids such as health, education, economic. They started schools for the students of lower castes.

They tried to solve every problem of peoples. In short they resorted to every possible way to spread Christianity and as the people belonging to lower castes were falling victims to the allurements; the class of upper castes strove hard to check it. They began to analyze the social mores and customs in religion.

**8.1.3 The Service work of Christian Missionaries**

Christian missionaries had started many works of social and public welfare. They resorted the way of social service of illiterate peoples for spread of Christianity. They understood the need to identify the troubles, problems of poor and untouchable folks and to bring out remedy for the problem. They were committed to this difficult task. They also had perseverance to fulfill their objectives.
The Women institute, *Holy Cross of Chavnad* of France helped during the draught of 1900 at Amravati and in 1903 they aided the people during the epidemic of plague.\(^{11}\)

The institute also started orphanage at Chikhlgaon and opened dispensary at Rasigaon. The poor people get benefit of the hospital no cost. They provided medicines too. They served depraved section of society as well as those who were affected by drought, flood or other natural calamities. In this way the missionaries served the unfortunate and troubled and thereby generated a feeling of attachment towards them.

The number of people embracing Christianity was increasing in Berar which became the cause of concern for educated people. They realized that the missionary was entrapping poor folk and the customs, mores in Hindu religion itself were responsible for it. As a result of which a wind of reform in Hinduism was blowing in Berar.

**8.2 The impact of foundation of Arya Samaj:**

Arya Samaj has secured an important niche in the reformatory movement in religion of 19\(^{th}\) century. Like Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj too emphasised the elimination of evil customs in religion. The reformatory zeal in Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj had certain impact of liberal principles of Christianity. But Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati received only the principles from ancient Hinduism. Along with assault on certain evil traditions Arya Samaj also brought before the world the greatness of Indian culture. Arya Samaj claimed that during Vedic period Indian culture had attained perfection and in ancient theory of structure of class, race, creed etc included the supreme values.\(^{12}\) Therefore there is no need to refer ideals in other religion to bring out reforms. They attempted to re-establish the sublime values in ancient Vedic culture and due to this work of Arya Samaj respect for Hindu religion was enkindled among the people.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati took inspiration from the reformatory principles of Brahmo Samaj. Initially he did his work of religious reforms with the help of Bramho Samaj and its branches but later he thought to part ways and found the sect of his own.

Accordingly he founded Aryam Samaj on 10 April 1875 at Mumbai.\(^{13}\) Here at Mumbai Arya Samaj got followers and there was a rapid spread of the Samaj. The famous personalities of the time like Lala Hansaraj, Lala Munshiram alias Swami Shraddhanand and Lala Lajpatrai used to participate in the work of the Samaj. Due to the efforts of Arya Samaj, soon it gained popularity. Along with the religious and social reforms Arya Samaj also focused
its attention to education sector and indirect effect of which further were seen on the political sphere of the country.

Arya Samaj has those principles for the upliftment of society. The honour of nation, Subhashchandra Bose has praised Arya Samaj in following words:

“The principles of Arya Samaj are of supreme values in the world. Swami Dayanand holds a higher place among reformers of India”.\(^{14}\)

Arya Samaj was founded in Mumbai yet it spread chiefly in North India and especially in Punjab Province. Here in Punjab Arya Samaj got the followers like Lala Hansraj, Swami Shraddhanand, Lala Lajpatray, Gurudatta Vidhyarthi. Arya Samaj could achieve remarkable work in many a sector in Punjab.

Arya Samaj did a valuable service for Hindu religion by its expedition of *Purification*. Many people were converted in other religion and due to the orthodox principles of Hinduism those converted did not have the scope to return. Arya Samaj opened the gates of returning to Hindu religion for such people by getting them *purified*\(^{15}\)

Arya Samaj also did a valuable contribution to education sector. It has emphasized the spread of education along with the reforms in religion. Lala hansaraj, a follower of Arya Samaj founded ‘Dayanand Anglo Vedic College’ at Lahr. He became the first principal of this college. The managing committee of Dayanand Anglo Vedic College opened many schools and colleges in the country.

In this way the work of providing vigour to nationalism in India is done by the Samaj, hence the Samaj has also a great role in preparing the ground for the freedom movement of India.

Arya Samaj attempted to provide aggressive nature to Hindu religion. It attempted to assign the orthodoxy of Christian and Islamic missionaries to Hindu people. With their expedition of *purification* it had done the work of renovation of Hindu religion by bringing back into Hinduism many converted people. It also focused on reformatory work. It created awareness among the people about the customs like idol-worship, caste-discrimination, child-marriage etc. It had also encouraged inter-caste marriages.

\textbf{8.2.1:- Foundation of Arya Samaj in Berar Province:-}

Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati founded Arya Samaj in order to explore Vedic sanctions. A programme of Swami Dayanand Saraswati had been organized in Pune. Dadasaheb Khaparde
from Amravati attended the said programme by the invitation of Lokhitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Justice Shri Madhao Govind Ranade Khaparde came in contact with Saraswati for a week. The intellectuals and residents of Amravati were under the influence of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati. *Arya Samaj* was founded in Amravati in 1889.\(^\text{16}\)

Shri Deoji Damodarji Pradhan and Pandit Balmukund Sharma were appointed as minister by the procedure of Arya Samaj in 1889. After 1889 the work of Arya Samaj remained admirable in social and religious sector.

The Arya Samaj of Amravati received visit from eminent personalities and leaders in the country. They included Swami Shraddhanandji, Keshoraao Koratkar (High court Judge, Hyderabad) *Punjab Kesari* Lala Lajpatray, Pt. Ramchandraji Dehahali, and Pt. Byuddhadve Vidyalankar. The social workers and the local personalities in Amravati agreed to extend the work of Arya Samaj. Those were Dadasaheb Khaparde, Dr. Wasudev Ramchandra Bhat, Shri B. G. *alias* Babasaheb Khaparde, Shri Bhaiyyalal Balmukund Sharma. The office bearers and workers of Amravati’s Arya Samaj included Shri Jaikrushna kurhade, Shri Kurhade, Shri Malhotra, Devdatta Sharma, Dhamorikar, Shri Satyaveer Shastri, Shri Tayeshwar Mishra, Brahamadatta Sharma, Avinash Shroff, Smt. Rajashri Sharma Amaravati branch of Arya Samaj started *Vachanalaya* (public library) in 1890.

In 1902 the monthly *Sarswati Prakash* started.\(^\text{17}\) K. D. Chavhan was the editor of this monthly magazine. The books such as *Puran kisne Banaye, Vedic Sandya, Agnihota* were published. In 1908, a debate of on scriptures was arranged In 1909 the debate on *Shastras* (Scriptures) was conducted through Sanskrit language. The debate was presided over under R. B. Ranganath Narsinha Mudholkar.

In 1928, Kalicharan Sharma, Aalim Fazal and Baba Khalildas debated under police security. The debate lasted from 9 p.m. to 4 am. The meeting ended peacefully. In 1930 Pt. Thakur Kahanchandra debated with some Christians.

The principles of Arya Samaj were propagated through erecting pendals (kind of big tent) at the place of pilgrims Bahiram, Kondeshwar, Runmochan, Koundnyapur, Ambadevi etc. Many times morning tours were made to propagate Vedas. A pendal of Arya Samaj was installed during the assembly of Congress in 1897.

Since its installation religious discourse is being continued every Sunday. In the programme discourse and discussion with intellectual guest is being arranged *Berar province*
Arya Religion conference was organized in 1927. Babasahed Khaparde presided over the conference. Shri Jaykrushna Kurhade arranged annual function and district assembly in 1931. He showed wonders of archery. Many a converted Christians were purified and given the ‘Diksha’ (adoption) of Vedic religion. Such programmes as remarriage of widows and adoption of orphan children were conducted. The temple of Arya Samaj was erected by raising funds under the leadership of Dr. W. R. Bhat. Timely speeches of eminent personalities were arranged which helped by Dr. Shiwajirao Patwardhan, Dr. Bhojraj, Shri Pannalalji Sanghai, Dr. Bhat, Dr. Varhadpande, Veer Wamanrao Joshi, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh, Seth Radhakishanji. Sharada Bill passed in 1929. An assembly was organized to congratulate Shri Harvilash Sharda. In the programme the speakers of all religions were present. The programme was presided over by Sir Moropant Joshi, Mohd. Suffi was present as a representative of Muslim community. Suffi was an education officer.

‘Paropakarini Sabha’ is the sub-branch of Amravati’s Arya Samaj. This institution participates in many civil programmes. Like Amravati, the branches of Arya Samaj were started in other districts of Berar province. In 1904 the branch of Arya Samaj was founded in Khamgaon city of Buldhana district.

Laxman Dev was the president of the branch. On 4, 5 and 6 Oct. 1927 Arya Samaj organized purification conference first and then Arya religion conference for next two days. Pandit Ramchandraji Dehalwi was the president of first conference whereas Shri Pannalalji was the president of welcome programme. The next conference was presided over by Thakur Gocindsingji when prof. Indrajit, the son of Swami Shradhananjji failed to attend the programme as a president. The president of welcome Babuhev Khaparde.

The pedantic and effective speeches of pandit Ramchandraji Dehalwi on date 4 and 5 at Jog square and on 6 at Jugalkishor exercise ground before three to four thousand audience. Pandit Ramchandraji Dehalwi stirred the emotions of audiences by his speeches.

Pandit Pannalalji Vyas spread the thoughts in Arya Samaj thorough his speeches. His speeches were very effective. The chief duty of Arya Samaj was to prevent the various types of attacks on Aryan (Hindu) religion. They would ask the people not to get tempted by temptation of any kind and embrace other religion.

They would emphasise the point that those who by mistake converted to either Islam or Christianity might not have hurdle to re-enter into the glorious religion (Arya). This was a new
thought during those days because a person would not get permission to re-enter into Hinduism once he left it. However the intense his will might be. Due to effective oratory of Pandit Pannalalji Vyas an air of enthusion was blowing among Hindu youths. Pt. Vyas was fondly called as ‘Vyakhan kesari’. He started the process of purification from 1975. Nazar Ali, who was converted to Islam was re – converted in Hinduism as Narhari.

In the adjoining area of Khamgaon there are a considerable number of populations of Pradhan caste. The Pradhan people are the gurus (teachers) of Gound people. These Pradhanas are considered inferior to Maharas. Not only this, the people of Hindu religion do not treat them properly.\textsuperscript{22}

Presently, as there is no savior of untouchables, they get suffered especially they cannot get even water. Due to these things the rumours of conversion of 200 to 300 people prevailed but due to consultation of some people there they did not converted. When it was conveyed to Hindu Sabha of Akola, the Sabha sent R. Gurjar. R. Gurjar investigated the situation. Those people were given assurance and get t embraced to Arya Samaj. R. Mamasheb Joglekar, R. Gurjar, R. Nagojirao Mane and the minister of Arya Samaj Pana Chandra Jayabhai from Akola went there. Their effective counsel resulted in the firm commitment of the people not to get converted and remain in Hindu religion.

The branch of Arya Samaj was started at Lonar in Buldhana district on Sep. 16, 1939.\textsuperscript{23} Mangilji Ramachandraji Arya, a zealous youth was appointed as secretary Mangilalji did remarkable work after his appointment as a secretary. We many mention his important works:
1) Re-converted 21 people in Hinduism.
2) Freed 10 widows from goons.
3) Saved 12 feticides.
4) Founded exercise school (Jim).\textsuperscript{24}

Social reforms were brought up by religious reform through the work of Arya Samaj. Society was growing aware for the evil customs and traditions. Religious conversion by Christians got setback. People began to cherish Hindu religion. Many programme of social – welfare were being happened Due to foundation of library social started. The attention of people was being given the education. There grew a tendency of self – esteem among the people and
they realized not to get tempted to the temptation of any kind. In 1933 pandit Hiralalaji, his perseverance bring one thousand converted Christians back into Hindu religion.

Hiralalji’s act is called as act of *purification*. He therefore, purified even such people who spent some thirty two years of their lives in Christianity. The work of purification includes the people belonging to protestant, catholic, Islam etc. And people belonging to different age groups. The purification of near about 50 to 100 people resulted in turning villages non – Christian. This further resulted in the decline of missionary schools in villages. Pandit Hiralalji declared his mission would go on until the purification of five thousand folk in Amravati. He also asked for economic help for the fulfillment of his objective.

On 30 January 1934, Ajijkhan Wallidin Mohammad khan of Anjansindhi (Tah. Chandur) was purified by his own request. Moreover, he was a Muslim by birth. The ritual of purification was conducted by Dr. Varhadpande. Dr. Sabinis, Shri Gulabrao Thakare, Pt, Rameshwarji, Shri Jagnnath Prasad Tiwari, Shri Jaykrshnapant Kurhade etc. member were present for the said ceremony. Ajij khan was named as Ajabrao Arya. Such works as ‘purification’ provided an opportunity for many converted to be back in Hindu religion as well as it aided in the love of *Swadeshi* and patriotism. The foremost impact of Arya Samaj is seen on the sector like education, service and social reforms. The reformatory work of Arya Samaj attempted to eradicate evil customs and traditions in the society.

The customs like idol - worship, concept of innumerable gods, concept of incarnation, animal sacrifice, rituals after death, mantras (chanting) etc. were tried to eliminate. Pt. Arya Samaj appointed Pt. Muniraogi at Khamgaon who built a beautiful temple of Arya Samaj. Shri Jamini Mehata delivered Arya Samaj speeches our Tilak, Maidan, Akola on 13 April 1936 to next three days.

10 Aug. 1947 was observed as *Cow Protection Day* at Nagpur, Khandwa, Amravati and Khamgaon (dist. Buldhana ). The resolution was passed to appeal the government to ban cow-slaughter by law. Arya Samaj arranged the meetings at Jabalpur, Durg, Amravati, Karanja (Dist. Akola) to transform the resolution into a legal act. Arya Samaj created affection for religion and culture in the society of Berar.

The social reformers made conscious efforts to check the growing influence of western culture and preserve the culture and social mores in society. The social thoughts of Arya Samaj included Omniscient nature of God, fraternity among human being, male female equality,
Justice, love and sense of charity. Due to these things Arya Samaj brought up the sense of self confidence, retrospection and self-purification among the followers of Hindu religion.

8.3:- Foundation of Theosophical Society.

Theosophical society was founded by western intellectuals who were under the influence of Indian culture and way of thought. Smt. H. P. Blavatsky, a woman of German race founded theosophical society in America in 1875. Colonel S. M. Occult followed Smt. Blavatsky. The branch of theosophical society was founded at Adyar near Madras in 1882.\(^{29}\) The objectives of the society were to bring out spiritual development and the knowledge of God through self–enlightenment. Inspired by *Upanishidas* and *Samkhya* philosophy they also aimed at creating spiritual fraternity. In this way the work of theosophical society became the part of re-vitalizing of Hinduism.

After the foundation of theosophical society, Colonel Alcott and Madam Blavatsky visit the world for propagation and spread. They arrived in Mumbai on 16 Feb. 1879. During those days British govt. feared that Russia is going to attack Hindustan. As Madam Blavatsky was Russian, government appointed spies to watch her movements. Later govt. realized that its doubt was quite useless. India basically has a resource of spiritual knowledge which helped them and they founded many branches of theosophical society throughout their travel in India. They purchased a land at Adyar near Madras and founded society’s international head quarter. The chairman of the society lived at Adyar and all the branches across the globe get directed from there. The society is an international institute and its branches are in the most of the countries in the world. After the death of colonel Alcott Annie Besant was elected as president of the society.

She founded central Hindu college at Varanasi in 1898. The same college later became Banaras Hindu University. She founded five middle school schools near Madras which used to impart education of untouchable students at free of cost, Annie Besant chaired the society from 1907 to 1933.\(^{30}\)

8.3.1: - The objectives of Theosophical society:-

1) To create a centre of universal brotherhood, devoid of sex, caste, religion.

2) To encourage comparative study of Religion, philosophy and science.

3) To research unknown principles of universe and mysterious powers that resides inside human beings.

4) Human soul is immortal and hence there is no limit to its development.
Mrs. Annie Besant devoted herself to the work of the society and did her valuable contribution to social work. She allied spirituality to social work. This influenced class of educated people. Educated youths were attracted to social work along with spiritual.

8.3.1: Foundation of Theosophical society in Berar and its work:

Berar Province produced an educated middle class which had a sense of patriotism as well as the sense of social and spiritual service to society. 21 January 1900 the branch of Theosophical society was founded at Amravati. M. M. Desai and Dadasaheb Khaparde served Hindu society through the institution as a president and as member respectively.

Annie Besant expressed her thoughts about theosophy at Amravati. Like Amravati an institution was founded at Yavatmal. Dr. Y. K. Deshpande was the president of this branch. Saint Gulabrao Maharaj used to take interests and give suggestions in the work of society. He obtained the diploma of Theosophy in 1905.

Theosophical society was also founded at Akola. Many programmes were being arranged by the society. The society built a big auditorium which appropriately named as Brahmavidya Mandir. This auditorium renovated by the charity given by Balasaheb Joshi in the memory of his father Dr. Joshi. The auditorium named as Shrikrushna Theosophical Lodge’s Dr. Joshi Auditorium. The Theosophical society of Amravati had arranged public speech of Swami Bhaskareshwaranand of Nagpur’s Ramkrushna Ashram (Hermitage) on 4 January 1934. His topic was ‘Socialism and Vedanta’. This restructured auditorium inaugurated on 2 April 1941 by Shri C. Jinaraj Das, M. A.

Shri C. Jiwandas was theosophical society’s world famous Buddhist worker, president, writer and a speaker. He was born at Ceylon. He was appointed in America as an international speaker of the Society in 1904. He was there in America till 1911. He also contributed to Annie Besant’s Home - Rule Movement. He has written many books.
A meeting was arranged with the objective to found the branch of the society in Akola on 4 Dec. 1901. The place of the meeting was the house of Vyankatrao Desai. In this meeting it was decided to found the branch. In this very meeting the society’s branch was given the title as Akola Lodge of the Theosophical Society. Shree V. K. Desai and Shree L. G. Oke were unanimously selected as president and secretary respectively. The respective members of the society were all the practitioner of law. Four members were famous lawyers. They opened a library at Shri Phadke’s house.

Shree N. K. Phadke was appointed as president of the society on 20 Nov. 1903. He had allotted two rooms of his house for the office of the society. It is during Phadke’s tenure as president, Annie Besant visited Akola. The secretary of the society W. L. Chiplunkar was also the secretary of Marathi Theosophical federation and therefore the quarterly entitled ‘Dharmajagruti’ used to be published by through the medium of library. The branch of theosophical society was founded at Washim (Dist. Akola). This branch had a library. In the library of Amravati Lodge large number of books on theosophy philosophy, literature of saints and book on other religious were available. Through the library regular study class, newspaper service, Yoga etc were conducted Dadasaheb Khaparde used to attend and participate in those meetings. In the class the books like Panchadarshi, Brahmasutre, Pantalsutre were studied Theosophical society observed White Lotus Day. Madam Blavatsky died on that day. In memory of Madam Blavatsky the reading of Gita was arranged On 21 April 1905 the meeting of Theosophical Lodge was arranged in Rajaram Library. Dadasaheb Khaparde had delivered his speech through English in the meeting. It appears that this branch of theosophical society, Brahmavidya Mandir conducted many programmes through which they supported to eliminate evil customs, traditions and superstitions from the society.

On 24 April 1905 the social conference was held in Brahmavidya Mandir presided by Annasaheb Mahajani. The speech delivered by Dadasaheb Khaparde was effective. Immediately after this conference Industrial Conference held at the same place and R. B. Mudholkar chaired the conference. Lokmanya Tilak visited Brahmavidya Mandir on 5 May 1905. Tilak spent ample time discussing with the people there. In the Brahma Vidya Mandir the meeting was also organized to found Berar education society. A bill was passed in the
meeting to found and register the institution where in Dada Chitnss, V. K. Kale, Wamanrao Joshi, Dadasaheb Khaparde and some other members should work.\textsuperscript{38}

The work of theosophical society was incessantly going on in Yeotmal district. The various programs like \textit{Kirtan}, \textit{Bhajan}, reading of \textit{Puranas}, songs of cow grazers, and the discussions of various social movements, reading of newspapers etc were going on. The discussion on the meanings of Vedas etc. In short, religious and intellectual currents were flowing rapidly. \textit{Brahmavidya Mandir} was renovated A beautiful construction was erected on the same place. The work of imparting knowledge was incessantly going on. The programs like religious discourse held four times a week, and the \textit{Bharatpooja} was conducted every day. Annie Besant inaugurated \textit{Brahmavidya Mandir} on 9 Feb 1906 at Amravati. A large number of populace attended the inaugural speech of Besant. She delivered her speech on the topic \textit{‘What is Theosophy’}? This speech was very nice and didactic. Dadasaheb Khaparde was the president for the said programme. Annie Besant asserted that theosophy makes one committed to religion and liberal in attitude.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{Vanita Samaj} had organized the speech of Annie Besant for women in \textit{Brahmavidya Mandir}. Annie Besant expressed her didactic, straight-forward and progressive thoughts through her speech. The ceremony like \textit{Dasnavami}, \textit{Shivajayonti}, \textit{Ganpati Chaturthi} etc. were enthusiastically celebrated in \textit{Brahmavidya Mandir}. People, students and guests in the city used to participate in such programmes. In all, Theosophical society helped social works along with the work of theosophy. It observed its commitment to the welfare of society. Due to this people got attracted to theosophy. They began to develop the sense of brotherhood among themselves.

The 21\textsuperscript{st} convention of \textit{Maharastra Theosophical Society} was declared to be held at Akola on 23 and 24 February 1935.\textsuperscript{40} Due to illness the proposed president for the convention Dr. Arudel and his wife Rukhminidevi could not make it to the convention. Still the remaining programme was a success and finished with zeal. This shows the religious inclination of residents of Akola.

Many guest were arrived specially for the convention of the federation, among those gentlemen were prof. Bhagwat ( ed – Dharmanjagruti ) and Shree Phadke from Thane, the famous Shri Ganpatrao Marathe and Shri Gokhale from Pune, Mrs. Parvatabai Patwardhan (Amravati), Shri Mohgaoankar (ex-session Judge, Rajnandgaon), Shir Balasaheb Abyankar ( Nashik ) Shri Sutar ( Ketkar ) of \textit{Nawakal}, Shri Bhat (Yavatmal) Shri Gopalrao Chiplunkar ( Sawner ), Shri
On Friday evening the vivacious sports of children were look place. Day of Remembrance was celebrated. The convention began on 23, Saturday at 8.30 am. The first speech was delivered by Prof. Bhagwat (Thane), on ‘Theosophy and Theosophical society’ to which the chairperson was Prof. Kulkarni (Gwalior). Although it was declared that Dr. Arundel could not make it to attend the convention Shriram Theatre was full of intellectual class of men and women of Akola to listen the speech.

The second speech was delivered by Shri V. L. Chiplunkar on the Development of Mentality which was presided over by prof. Kulkarni.

On 24 Sunday at 8.30 am, under the chairmanship of Prof Bhagwat, the speech of renowned Prof. Pendase (Nagpur) delivered an very oratorical and thoughtful speech on the spiritual role of Religion. On the same day, at 4 p.m. Prof Bhagwat (Pune) delivered speech on Yogashastra, Presided by Shri G. S. Marathe. This was the last speech for the programme. After this speech the secretary of federation Shri V. L. Chiplunkar deliver out of thanks in appropriate words for the guests.

Shri Kakasaheb Athalye arranged feasts for the guests; also the Swagat Mandal arranged a feast for the guests.

On Monday 25, there was a speech of Prof Bhagawat organized by Vangamy Mandal (literary association) at their place. The speech of Prof. Bhagwat on new discoveries in invisible lives was very entertaining and full of information. The branches of Theosophical Society used to participate in many a work of social welfare beside spirituality which included health-service, education, problem of women, eradication of superstitions etc. They arranged many conferences by which social enlightenment was being done. The educated class in Berar was getting attracted towards the society. People in Berar began to participate in the social works. Theosophical society provided encouragement to many festivals and thereby achieving awakening in religious, spiritual and social sphere. The society believed that the spiritual development would soon bring about religious and social reforms. The efforts of the society were generating the sense of brotherhood in society. The educated youth in Berar was influenced by the objectives of the society and began to realize the importance of Hinduism. Consequently the work of conversion by Christian missionary got set back. The sense of brotherhood created tolerance. People began
to respect other religion. As they realized the importance of Hindu culture and religion, the sense to preserve the religion and culture was in the air in Berar.

The class of educated people attracted to social service with the religious work of theosophical society. They youth in the society was attempting to eradicate evil customs and social traditions. The propagation of humanitarian and universal brotherhood was being there in Berar province.

8.4:- Impact of various sects:-

British did not interfere in religious matters during their regime in Berar. After the agitation of 1857 they decided not to fuel religious feelings. Still the impact of English culture and values obviously felt on established and new sects of saints. The sects of saints did a great relief to the shattered religious and spiritual sector. These sects popularize reformatory tendency and propagate stout confidence about the Indian culture.

In the progress and development of culture in Berar province varied sects have great contribution. There were many saints, and spiritual personalities in the province. The sects like Warkari, Sufi, Mahanubhav, Datta, Nath etc. greatly enlightened the society. These sects provided the direction of righteousness to society when there arouse a chaos and religion lost the vigour to hold a common folk, it was then the creators of new sects revitalized the lost vigour of religion.

8.4.1: Mahanubhav Sect:-

Mahanubhav has its origin in 13th century. The impact of this sect is seen more than 300 years on society. The original founder of the sect is Govind Prabhu alias Gundam Raul. This sect is known by varied names like Mahanubhav, Mahatma, Bhatmarg or Manbhav. The meaning of Mahanubhav is the sect of greatly illuminated people. In the 10th century this sect spread in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab.

During 12th century Yadavas ruled Maharashtra. Chakradhar Swami extended Mahanubhav sect in Berar. The profounder of Mahanubhav i.e. Chakradhar Swami, whose original name was Harpaldev. Govind Prabhu, the guru of Chakradhar Swami was living at Katsur Gavhan (Dist. Amravati) near Riddhapur village. Chakradhar Swami was inclined to worship of Lord Krishna right from his childhood. Chakradhara Swami was an ascetic and kind saint. He reached his guru while traveling. There he came to know the mystery of Mahanubhav sect and he felt the experience of peace in his heart.
Chakradhara Swami has shown the new way of conduct by giving a strong blow to evil customs and mores in society. He referred his way of conduct back to the philosophy of *Gita* and *Upanishidas*. He asserted two ways to attain God, the first being the way of knowledge and the second, the way of warship. Like Jainism and Buddhism, Chakradhara also criticized orthodox Vedic religion. He renounced the concept of many Gods that was prevalent since Vedic period. According to Chakradhara, the God is Supreme Being and Brahma is included in him. God is timeless. This sect has given equal status even to women and Shudras. Like the upper castes people it permitted entry to women and Shudras into the temple. The sect prominently asserted that the worship of God and salvation is open for all; women and Shudras too could achieve salvation.

Mahanubhav sect opposed the system of Chaturvarna (system of castes and race), it also opposed caste system. Chakradhara himself ate the sweet given by a man belonging to *Matang* (one of the scheduled castes) caste and made others eat the same. He ate the betel leaf given by a *Chambhar* (shoe-maker). By such events he propagated social equality and a broad outlook before society. Chakradhar had to face the ire of Vedas due to his criticism of Vedic religion. He propagated this sect. he got innumerable disciples. His disciples had to pledge that they will remain away from alcohol, non-veg, hunting, theft, other adultery, and service by other. Chakradhara has given an extended definition of principles and conduct in *Sidhant Sutras* (the structure of principles). Among his disciples were Nagadevacharya, Mahindra, Janardana, Damodara, Bhandarkar, Barins a alias Nagambika, Mahadmba.

Chakradhar’s disciple Mhain Bhatta has written *Lila Charitra*. Mahandamba wrote *Dhawale*. Mahunubhav holds a special importance from literary point of view. The followers of Chakradhara wrote his preachings in Marathi language and accepted it as the language of the sect. The following work in Marathi is accepted as sacred books.

2. *Rukhmini Swayanwara* (1214 Shak, San,. By Narendra Kavi)
3. *Vatsaharan* (Shak. San. 1200 lerushana Lila by Damodara)
4. *Shishupalwadh* (Shak San. 1228 krushan Lila by Bhaskara)
7. **Dyan proabodh** (Shak san. 1253)

Shri Vishwanath Balapurkar has written 125 psalms based on the 13th chapter of *Shrimadbhagwat Gita* and other psalms about ethics and knowledge. The *Mahanubhav* sect did the task of awakening of society in Berar. It contributed to the growth of Marathi literature. There was a growth of Hindi literature beside Marathi literature too. The pilgrimage of *Mahanubhavas* were Riddhapur (Dist. Amravati) and Mahur (Dist. Yeotmal) in Berar province.

It is due to the sect Ridhapur and Mahur are considered to be the holy places. Here the pilgrims and other festivals are celebrated every year.

**8.4.2: Nath sect:**

Although the founder of Nath sect is Shiva, the first person is Machindranatha. The ninth and 10th century is the period of Machindranatha. The places and hermitages are found throughout India.

Amrut Ray of Fartekharde village in Buldhana district in Berar province belonged to Nath sects. In the province Amrut Ray, Devnath, Shri Dayalnath Maharaj etc adopted Nath sect. They spread and propagated the sect. Vishnudas( Mahur, Dist – Yeotmal) was the saint of the other branch of the sect. He was visionary and benevolent and helped the people a lot. Goswami Nandan of Sindakhed (Dist Buldhana) was the saint of this sect. He was very self-less and man of taciturnity. His mausoleum is at Shindkheda.

Shri Govindnath, the hermit of the sect is told to have the blessings of Lord Datta and Lord Hanumanta. Accordingly, Devrao become Devnath and went on a tour for the good of the world. His poetry is famous. He awakened the people by his poetry and songs of Lord and thereby demonstrated the ways of God. He established hermitages at places like Gwalher (Gwalior), Burhanpur, Elichpur, Ramtek. The chief of all hermitages is situated at Surji where the pilgrimage is organized every year.

After Devnatha, Shri Dayalnath, Shri Govindnath, Shri Manoharnath looked after this hermitage of Nath tradition. This hermitage still run the heritage and many devotees throng there and get contended. It is a pleasant sight to see. The heritage of worship is still proudly seen there. One wishes everyone should visit the place and get enlightened.

Nath sect opposed the discrimination of male – female, touchable – untouchables etc. It strongly assaulted on queer rituals. They renounced orthodoxy and never observed superior – inferior differences. The sect began to tell its philosophy through native languages – Marathi,
Bengali and Hindi. Nath sect provided a good and valuable direction of Yoga Marga.\textsuperscript{52} The sect harmonies the philosophy of monism and dualism and proposed new philosophy containing the fine blend of both. They considered meditation, asceticism and chanting as the supreme way of worship of God.

\textbf{8.4.3 Datta Sect:-}

Datta is the chief deity of this sect. The devotees of Data regard that Data incarnated through the person of Shripad and Nrushinha Saraswati, the book which contains the story of greatness of Datta is \textit{Gurucharitra}. Gurucharitra is written by Gangadhar Saraswati. Nrushinha Saraswati adopted Data sect. This sect had some Muslim devotees.\textsuperscript{53} The philosophy of Datta sect believes on Vedic religion. It relies on rituals and also observes Varna (caste – system). This sect has done the task of enlightenment of class of intellectuals during the decline of traditional religion. The sect opposed Islamic oppression. It also attempted to reconcile between Hindu and Muslims while doing renovation of Vedic traditions. Muslims would get influenced by the impact of Shri Guru and would become his devotees unknowingly.

The devotees in sect believe that the Datta sect originated from Nrusinha in Maharashtra.\textsuperscript{54} Shri Nrusinha Saraswati who is considered to be the second incarnation of Data was born before 400 to 500 years at Karanja alias Karanj nagar (Dist Akola).\textsuperscript{55} On 1 April, 1934 the idol of Nrusinha Saraswati was installed in the temple built in Karanjnagar. Through the temple of Nrusinha Saraswati the work of imparting education started by founding Vedic school. Beside Vedic literature, Jyotish (Astrology) Medical, singing etc. education was organized.\textsuperscript{56} Mahur is a famous place of Datta sect. It is famous as a place of sleep of Datta as per the \textit{Dattapanchamrut} (the book).\textsuperscript{57} Yogi Yoganand lived in Jarud (Dist Akola) before 40 years. He was a Kanyakubja Brahmin. He was worshipper of Datta. He took Jalsamadhi (dying by throwing oneself in water) at Prayag.\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{8.4.4 Sufi sect. (Denomination): -}

Sufi sect is a liberal denomination in Islam. The sect enters India during the latter half of twelfth century. Hajarat Maulana Shaikh Ulkira Hafeej Syyed Shah Inayullah, a great Sufi devotee in Berar receives four denomination of Sufism by his Guru Hajarat Majaffar Sufi Burhanpuri.\textsuperscript{59} Indian tradition of Sufism can be seen in the poetry of prominent sufi poet Gulam Husain of Alichpur in vidharbha. The protagonist of Husains poet symbolizes God. Nakshabandi denomination of Sufi sect held prominent place from it religious influence and thought point of
view. The sect made its progress in the first stage in Berar and till 17th century its development seen at the stage of perfection.

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The son of Aurangzeb Faruki was the disciple of Masum. Nakshaband denomination in Berar is related to the tradition of disciples of this Masum. The first and the oldest centre of Sufi sect ‘Khankha Inayat Ilahi’ aliases ‘Khankha Nakshebandiya’ in Berar province was at Balapur (Dist Akola). It was founded during the tenure of Aurangzeb in 1649. The credit of its foundation is assigned to Sufi saint Hajrat Maulana Shaikh Ulkiya Hafeej Syyedshah Hayaniul – Husaini Nakshebandi Ul Mujaddi. Hajarat Gaus Pak. Sheikh Abdul Kadir Jileni (the expounder of Kadir denomination) was scion. He received the four denomination of Sufi sect from hojarat Mujjaffar sufi Burhanpuri. Hajarat Mujjaffar Sufi Burhanpuri was the disciple of Ahmad Faruki Sarhindi’s son Hajrat Khwaja Masum.

In this way the tradition of founder Hajarat Inayatullah of Khankah Nakshebandi of Balapur was retained In Berar province the variety of poetic creation, in variety of Sufi style was came into being. The spread of Sufi sect did not remain confined to Berar only. It reached Hyderabad and Marathawada. Shahdabal is a famous Sufi place in Buldhana district. Here there lived a fakir named Shah. Shah was regarded to be the great ascetic who could perform miracles. With him lived a Dawal, a saint belonging to Mahar caste. Dawal and Shah were close friends. They died at same time and buried together. Thousands of devotes visit the place.

Achalpur (Dist Amaravati ) in Berar was famous as a glorious city since medieval age. There lived many a Nababs. Gulam Husain Alichpuri was related to Chisti denomination.

It appears that Sufis influenced both Hindus and Muslims. Sufi saints enhanced the importance of devotion in Islam. They stressed on the worship of God as well as on social service. They resorted to worship in isolation, restraint, mercy, forgiveness, peace and equality. They advised Muslims to renounce worldly indulgences and the sense of fanaticism. Sufi saints deeply studied Hindu philosophy. They adopted many good customs and traditions from
Hinduism which helped in reducing the hatred of Muslims in the minds of Hindus. Sufis did the work of reconciliation between Hindu and Muslim religion.

8.4.5 Varkari sect:-

Varkari sect is also known as Malkari or Bhagawati sect. The Varkari means those who go regularly go to have Darshan (to bow before) of Lord Vittala every year to Pandharpur. This sect of pilgrims, of devotees is known as Varkari. Varkari held a very important position as a sect of devotion in Maharashtra. As compared to other sects in the state Varkari is very influential and large sect.

A mausoleum of Darkeshvar Maharaj Patil is at Adgaon (Dist. Akola) Dwarkeshwar is a beautiful place where there is Pashupati temple. The Shiva-linga (idol) was installed by Lord Shrikushna here. Here is also the Sati Temple. Dwarkeshwar (Shivalaya) registered in the year 311 under F class and the area of the temple is 1 acre 18 yard. This is ancient place as per government records. The work done by teacher Dev here is important. Dev lived here from 1928 to 1939. He did many social works. He was also from the devotees of Sant Gahanna. There was a castle and an inn in Dwarkeshwar which was in dilapidated condition. The saints from outside used to live here.

The new inn was constructed in the place of dilapidated inn in 1932. There use to be various programmes of social advantages and the worship, religious discourses throughout the year. The tradition continues even today. Even today every year the wari (pilgrim) to Pandharpur is celebrated

Devmastar realized the impact of addiction on Bhamberi village (Dist Akola). There were liquor shops and gambling habits among the people in the village. During those days the crew of dancer- singer used wonder villages. These dancers were called Kanchani. It was matter of pride and prestige to arrange and the programmes of such Kanchanies. Such programmes used to cost people heavily. People would spend lavishly on those dancer- women. Dev Mastar probed deeply and pondered over to check the people from such kind of evil habits and addiction. He found a unique solution. He would elaborately discuss on the dialogues and songs of boys and girls in various programmes of the schools. Such type of discourse aided to erase impressions from the minds of people and to develop the god values. The ideal conduct, spiritual power and the spark of asceticism of Dev Mastar used to greatly influence people.
Devmastar heavily rely on the importance of voluntary labour. With the help of voluntary labour he repaired roads. The road from Rama Temple to local bazaar still reminds the work of Devmastar. Devmastar would serve the patients and he would also arrange the programmes for removal of superstitions. He liked to have nearness with the saints of the time. He regarded saints as living gods. He happened to be blessed by such saints as, Sant Gajanna Maharaj, Shri Langade Baba, the Majaraj of Waghali, Sadhu Maharaj of Khakata etc. We must mention the name of Bailwade Baba of Bhamberi.

Sakharam Maharaj of Loni village (Dist Buldhana) became ascetic at the early age of his life. He helped many people some 40 years have passed for his Samadhi. Here at Loni, a huge pilgrimage is arranged every year.

Ramkrushana Baba of Washim was Brahmin having the trust on Karma. He was disciple of Jagdamba. He was great ascetic his mausoleum is at Washim. Thousands of people visit there. Sonaji Buwa was the famous saint of Sonala in Buldana district. Every year on the day of Kartik poornima (Full moon day in the month of Marathi month Kartik) pilgrim is arranged on the place of his mausoleum.

Today many disciples and devotees participate whole heartedly in the programmes of Warkari sect. during these years (275 years), the important happening is the increase in number of palanquin carnival. Haibatrao Baba in Satara district had started this carnival near about 125 years before. Haibatrao took great labour in collecting palanquins and installing Padukas (footwears of God) and started to proceed to and bring to Pandharpur. Since onwards, from the British regime till today those palanquins which come to Pandharpur have to travel 160 mile distance from Aalandi to Pandharpur from the Marathi month Jestha 09 to Ashad Shu. 10. These palanquins come via Aalandi, Pune, Saswad, Jejuri, Lonand, Faltan, Natepute, Malshiras, Welapur, Shegaon and Aakhari.62 Maximum 9 to 10 mile travel is to be done on a day.

Thousands of people walk together. By observing great discipline throughout all areas freshness should meet religion, culture, belief, devotion and there should be implantation of seeds of good conduct by which the all area there be bright and enlightened.63 Since British rule till today, number of educated folk to get benefitted by the happiness of palanquin carnival every year.

Near about two to three lack devotees for Ashadhwari and 2 lack devotees for Kartik wari of Pandharpur. Those devotees come from Kolhapur, Satara, Solapur, Karnataka, Nagar,
Pune, Nashik, Khandesh, Nagpur, Varhad, Marathwada, Bangalore, Tiruchanapalli etc. places. There used to be pilgrimages during *Magh wari* and *Chaitr*

Due to the movement of Warkari sect the queer concepts about inferiority superiority in castes were somewhat decreased. The sect imparted spiritual teaching to Shudras and made them share the same dais as that of Brahmins. The relation of family got sacred nature and the women got respect. The sect taught national integrity. The sect proposed that love for God, stout trust on Him and worship is of more importance than law, medicine, acquisition of knowledge and meditation, pilgrimages, hunger strikes etc. In this way, the Warkari sect proved useful to generate the strength of thought to the nation and bringing it supremacy.  

All types of people like educated, uneducated Brahmins, untouchable men and women, children and adults, rural and urban joined Warkari sect in Berar. Warkari sect is the sect who reconciles people belonging to every castes and religions. There is a tradition of the sect from Dhyaneshwara to Tukarama. Even after Tukarama the work of the sect continues. Saint shri Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon (Dist Buldana) in Berar was in Warkari sect. Also, other saints were there in Warkari sect from Berar.

The sect has done remarkable and variable work in religious, social and political sector not only in Berar province but in entire Marathi and adjoining areas.

The sect opposed the excesses of false rituals, queer concepts and superstitions. It taught that every devotee is same before God, be that woman, man, Shudra or any. Everyone has the right to worship God. The sect showed the true path of worship.

The sect made Marathi instead of Sanskrit as the medium of its literature. This helped in understanding of the thoughts of saints and thereby the change in thoughts and thought process occurred people began to realize their back-wardness, lacunas and superstitions.

The impact of various sects is seen in Berar province. It is seen also that due to various cultural and political reason the rise and decline of many sects. The various sects contributed to retain progress of social life in Berar province from literary point of view, Mahanubhava sect held the position of special praise. In the tradition of development of Hindi literature, in the province, Nath sect deserves the place after Mahanubhava. In the liberal literary creation, the contribution of Sufi denomination is important.

These sects taught to devotion. They taught the *Karmayoga* (a way of life) which harmonies between family and spirituality. They had given special emphasis on mercy, peace,
liberalism, Charity, welfare of others etc., ethical values, spread equality and fraternity in society.

The various sects in Berar brought awareness among *Babujan Samaj* (general mass) of society. The sects generated confidence in them and made them creative. They freed the society from the clutches of casteism, false rituals, and certain evils in religion and made them alert and rational. Consequently there was rapid cultural, social and political transformation in the society of Berar.

8.5 **Berar as the land of Saints:**

Berar is the land of saints. Babaji Maharaj of Lodhikhed, Shewalkar Maharaj of Achalpur and Gochar Swami of Umarkhed are famous. Also Sadanand Brahamchari of Chandur, Govind Maharaj of Barshitakli, Om Brahmi Swanand (saint Balabhau) of Mehkar, Sakharam Maharaj of Loni, Palasidhha Swami of Sakharkherdi, Tanaji Maharaj of Kapashi (dist.Akola) and many more saints were there in Berar. For example ;Sadranath, Maskinath, Devnath, Narsingbua, Brahamcharibua, Shivanandbua, Maninath, Padmaji Amrutray, Annaswami Washimkar, Uddhavsut Sonaji Maharaj etc. saints have executed their roles in creating awareness about social, religious and political sphere. These saints performed the role of creating social awareness among common folk by their religious discourses. They also created political awareness by their discourses in freedom movement.

8.5.1 **Saint Shri Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon:**

There was a saint named Gajanan Maharaj in Shegaon village of Buldhana district in Berar Province. He appeared before the populace of Shegaon on 23 February 1878 for the first time. He got Samadhi (a state in trance in which body lives soul) in the procession of religious discourse on 8 Sep.1910 at 8’o clock in the morning. He would live in Digambar (naked) form. Gajanan Maharaj was in contact with those revolutionaries of 1857 who by their work attained sainthood in real sense of the word. He was a selfless and in that very condition of Him attained the likeness to God. He would solve the hurdles in matters of spirituality. Moreover, he got incarnated for the same. Gajanan Maharaj was in contact of such saints who did not knew their prior birth among them were Shri Khateshwar Maharaj of JodaMoha, Sri Maniram Baba of Baggi, Shri VrajBhushan of Shivar, Shri Miyyasaheb of Umara, Birbalnath Maharaj of Mangrul Shri Mahetabsha. All of them had a great respect for Gajanan Maharaj and would worship him. Gajanan Maharaj performed many miracles for the common folk. Lokmanya Tilak visited Akola
to bring national awareness. Shiv Jayanti festival was began to celebrated socially along with Ganesh Chaturthi. A meeting of Tilak was organized at Akola. Gajanan Maharaj was present on the Stage. Thousands of people attended the meeting. Kaulkar, Dadasaheb Khaparde, Damle, Desai etc. were mainly present for the meeting. Lokmanya Tilak had asserted in his speech that Gajanan Maharaj was present in the programme to give his blessings to welfare of the Nation.

8.5.2 Shri Gadge Maharaj:-

Gadge Baba’s notable contribution is his social work than that of spiritual. Gadge Maharaj did a valuable work to uplift the society from its degraded condition. His huge social work may be termed as a social revolution. He was born in Shengaon (Dist. Amravati) in 1876. Gadge Baba was stout challenger of superstitions, queer traditional customs and exploitation under the garb of religion. Baba’s great work for the social and national integrity is matchless. Baba has thrown bacon light on the exploitation, black-marketing, and exploitation of farmers by traders through his preaching. Baba has no peer in India in entering into and stirring the very depth and conscience of entire society. He would never enter the temple to seek the blessing of God. He regarded the service of man is the service of God. He built the inns for the poor people. He realized that the common illiterate man could not make progress until the benefit of education and hence he was haunted to make them literate. Like his dislike of social inequality he also opposed economic inequality. He regarded observance of rituals was nothing but very process of economic and religious plundering of citizens. He tried to change the minds of superstitious village folk from existing superstations and spread the thought of nationalism through preaching. Baba co-operated Dr. Ambedkar, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil and Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh in their work. Baba gave importance to education with the thought that the children from depraved section would do their progress if they receive education. He believed that an educated man will prosper and will attempt to make others to prosper too and thereby there will be social transformation through education. That is why with this trust an illiterate man like Baba took utmost efforts for the spread of education.

The common link or the formula of Baba’s preaching and work was easier to understand even to the common man. For ex. He would reach that they hungry should get food, unemployed should get work people should be free from debt and addiction, farmer and the workers should have home at least of two rooms, illiterate should get justice, the exploitation of weaker section should cease, if the economical progress reach to villages and the naked Adivasis
(Tribles) then it would be the economical progress of the nation. He stressed on the education to remove evil tendencies, laziness, addiction, indulgence from the society. He considered education to be the only panacea for all evils. He regarded that there is no difference between animal and an illiterate man. He would teach that the moneylender plunders illiterate man, government employee threatens, liars deceive, if you want my mothers and fathers (people) to live with self esteem you should have education.71

Baba used to refer Dr. Ambedkar in his preaching because like Dr. Ambedkar he also wanted to bury the evil of discrimination of castes from society. He built an Inn in Murtijapur in 1925. He also built inns at various villages and cities. No inn built by his have the provision to live in on the basis of caste and category. In the same way in no eateries or educational trust admit the people on the basis of the same. This is what the teaching of Baba and truly the way to social transformation. Social transformation is more akin to the change of heart rather than the enforcement by law. Scientific way of life, harmony, liberty, equality, brotherhood are some of the backbones of social transformation and Baba spent almost all his life to teach the importance of these values. He generated the love for truth, mercy, compassion, service etc. in the society. He spread the love in society and asked the people to spread the same. Baba respected the poor and depraved folk and built inns, steps on the bank of river etc and started school and colleges for them throughout Maharashtra.

Baba would preach tirelessly and sometimes his teaching would last throughout night. It thorough the gigantic work of Baba that the institution Gadge Baba Mission came into being. The relief and escape from and the propagation of equality became the motto of the Mission.72 To encourage of social welfare became the task of the Mission. It was the motivation of Baba that there erected many places of motivations. Baba has given the trinity of values in the name of cleanliness, independence and education. Gadge Baba realized the importance of Gandhian Movement during struggle for freedom and explained the same to the people. His sense of patriotism was of great importance. He started his social work in 1908 with building steps on the bank of river at Runmochan. He built the inns for poor folk during 1908 to 1956 at Nashik, Pandharpur, Mumbai, Murtijapur, Akola, Satara etc. He started many eateries. He started asylums for those affected by leprosy. He built Gourakshans (asylums) for cattle. He started hostels and schools for untouchables. Schools for girls and asylums for women were also started by Baba.
Although he was illiterate, Baba was great rationalist and visionary social reformer. Gadge Baba founded and registered *Gadge Mahraj Mission* with the view that his work should continue retained and grow. He bring about social transformation, moreover, he was living-moving dais of humanism.

Anybody who might have proved the teaching of saint Namdeva, who would absorb in his Kirtans (preachings) and would burnt light of knowledge, in modern age that was our supreme saint, Gadge Baba. Gadge Baba had realized this and taught the mercy, pity and humanity to all poor people. He taught equality. His *Kirtans* were full of boisterous laughter and emotions.

### 8.5.3 Saint Shri Pachlegaonkar Maharaj:-

Saint Shree Pachlegaonkar, the expounder of humanity installed the temple of restecable Swami Shripad Shree Vallabha’s Paduka (footwear) at Khamgaon (Dist: Buldhana). Though he was born at Pachlegaon in Marathwada (Tah. Jintur, Dist. Parbhani) he worked in Vidarbha. Shree Gadge Baba and Shree Daganu Maharaj appreciated the image of Shree Pachlegaonkar Maharaj.

His oratory stirred the conscience of the society. He was expelled from Vidarbha for 20 years during the regime of Nijam. Nijam had banned his public speeches.

Pachlegaonkar was famous preacher. During the freedom movement he openly propagated nationalism to bring national awareness through his kirtans (preaching). Due to which British Government obstructed his kirtans by many means. He was put into custody under various sections. He was put in Yerwada Jail during 1930-1932. He happened to meet Mahatma Gandhi at Sewagram. He did many humanitarian works. He organized programmes like voluntary labour, voluntary labour week, service to agriculture, building wells, dam, schools, compost fertilizer, compounds foe farms etc through voluntary labour by people.

### 8.5.4 Rastrasant Shri Tukdoji Maharaj:-

The importance of Rastrasant Tukdoji is very great among the saints of modern age in Vidarbha. Tukdoji Maharaj was born in 1909 at Sawali village (Dist: Amaravati). He received the religious heritage from his guru Akduji Maharaj.

On the very base of Gadge Baba’s work Tukdoji Maharaj erected the home of social service. He bound himself to the service of the nation and society after coming in contact with
Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi has given importance to the right medium of mean whereas Tukdoji Maharaj has given importance to mean rather medium to attain it.

He would make society understood that superstitions leads but to utter degradation. Tukdoji Maharaj awakened the God within human beings. He has shown the new vision, spark, and new way of conduct to rural society. He has given the real mantra (formula) of welfare of the village. Tukdoji’s way of propriety is very beneficial for society. The thought he has expressed in his Gramgita for the upliftment of society which was in the clutches of superstitions are still worthy of imitation. This saint has really awakened the society and taught renunciation, asceticism. He has imparted new religion on the foundation of humanism. He was social reformer in real sense of the word, giving a new vision to rural folk by his thought and way of life. His Gramgita is important gift to the rural folk for their own upliftment. On 28 Dec.1935 Congress Party completed its 50 years of foundation, the golden jubilee of the Party was being celebrated throughout the country. The golden jubilee of the Party was celebrated with great zeal in Akola too. Dr. Pattabhisitaramayya published the authentic history of Congress on the occasion. The Akola Congress unit had specially invited Tukdoji Maharaj for the said programme. The Bhajan (song- offering) of Tukdoji before the huge crowd gathered on Bhate ground was very effective. After Bhajan he had given very effective speech.

In the beginning of the year 1935 Tukdoji made his Mahayadhnya (great altar) successful. After this the Aarti Mandal (a group that offers religious song in praise of God) started. On 2nd March the meeting about the Gourakshan (cattle- preservation) was organized by local Congress in the magnificent temple at Aasti. A number of lovers of cattle-service were invited from far off areas for the meeting.

In the Gurukunj Ashram (hermitage) Tukdoji Maharaj at Mozari the emphasise is given on such virtues besides, worship of God, as cleanliness, neatness, restraint, discipline, industry, love for society, straight-forwardness, honesty, tendency to serve, skills, humanity, free from addiction, equality towards all love for every religion. Stress was also given the use of khadi. Tukdoji would regard the service of man as the service of God and he would wonder to serve people. He was saint, reformer, social- man and emperor of Bhajan.

8.5.5: Same other Saints of Berar Province:-
There were many saints in Berar province. They had Hindu and Muslims saints in them. The birth and death anniversaries of various saints at various places are celebrated in the province. Below are given the names and brief introduction of those saints.

1) Shri Narsingji Maharaj, Akot :-
Nursing was a boy of virtues than other boys of Punjaji Nahate (Patil) of Jalgaon (Nahate) village near Akot. He had like of devotional songs for God. He got the blessings of Sadguru Shri Narsing Maharaj and supreme saints Shri Gajanan Maharaj were in contact with each other for some time. Maharaj was devotee of Lord Shiva. He would sing devotional songs with playing a stone in each hand. The ceremony of Narsingji is celebrated every year. The tradition continues till today.

2) Shri Brahmachari Maharaj, Panet. :-

There is a village Gopalkhed situated on the bank of river, Purna on the Akola – Akot road to the 2 k.m. west direction. The adjoining area of Gopalkhed is known as Panet. There is the self – existent temple of Shri Vishweshwar Mahadev (Lord Shiva ). This place is situated on Akola – Akot road, five kilometer away from Chohatta Bazar village. Brahmacharibua of Panet was of radiant and long starded personality. He acquired Yoga (austerity) due to which he became glowing in appearance. Many miracles are attributed to Brahmachari Maharaj. He would guide his disciples. He sought the permission to go to Vaikunth (The abode of God) to Hanumantrao on 25 Feb. 1905. He took Samadhi on the same day (his soul left the body in trance).

His dead body was given Samadhi (last rites) near Vishveshwara Temple on the bank of Payoshni River, as per his wish told to disciples. The trust of the temple used to observe reading of Bhagawat, Haripath weak festival.

3) Shri Mungsaji Maharaj :- Mungasaji Maharaj was born on 5 sep. 1863 at Dhamangaon village in Darvha tehsil of Yeotmal district. He lived a life of an ascetic since his childhood. He would absorb in the meditation of Brahma (God). It is said that he received the mercy of God due to his practice of austerity. He was resplendent by his austerity. Shri Mungasaji left this world in 1958.

4) Shri Lala Maharaj, Darvha :-
Lala Maharaj was an ascetic saint of high order. He never ate anything by his own hand. He would eat only by the hands of others. He would feed dog or cat if the animal happens to be
before or near him. He did various miracles. The people of Darwha built Math (hermitage) by raising fund. The folk installed *paduka* of Lala Maharaj too.

5) **Ranganath Maharaj (Sindkhed, Dist Buldhana):**

   Ranganath Maharaj was intelligent since his childhood. People regarded him to be the incarnation. His conduct was like that of a Rajguru. He spread the love of worship. He helped the people a lot. His mausoleum is at Sindakheda.

6) **Appa Maharaj (Wani, Yeotmal):**

   His original name was Shriniwas. He developed the love for worship of God. He grew ascetic after the marriage. He was a great saint.

7) **Sakahram Maharaj (Loni, Dist Buldhana):**

   He attained asceticism in the very childhood. He helped many people. A huge pilgrimage is organized at the place of his mausoleum at Loni.

8) **Ramkrushna Bua (Washim, Dist Buldhana):**

   Ramkrushna Bua was a Brahmin who relied on the virtue of work. He was disciple of Jagadamba. He was great ascetic. It is said that many diseased people got relieved by the sacred ash given by him. His mausoleum is at Sindakheda. His mausoleum is at Washim. Thousand of devotees visit the place.

9). **Umardev:**

   Umardev is 10 k.m. away from Jalgaon (Jamod). The place is situated among hills. People believe that by visiting the place their miseries are removed.

10). **Shahdawal (Uprai, Dist. Buldhana):**

   This is a famous place in Berar. Here lived the Fakir by the name Shah. He was thought to be had miraculous powers.

11) **Supenath Bua (Palashi-Jalgaon, Dist.Buldhana):**

   The spatiality of this saint is said to be the miracle to remove the poison of venomous animal by bowing before his *Samadhi*. Two generations have passed after the saint.

12) **Fattepuri Baba:**

   This saint existed before some 50 years ago. The place of this saint is situated six miles among the hills. The diseases from animals can be removed from the *Vibhuti* (sacred ash) of
Fattepuri Baba. The place is prohibited for women folk. People regard him to be the incarnation of Swami Kartikey.

13) Naraharinath (Deulgaon Raja, Dist. Buldhana):-

Naraharinath was the son of famous saint Shivadin Kesari. His mausoleum is at Deulgaon Raja. Here at the place there is his hermitage too.

14) Sant Nanasheeb (Patur, Dist. Akola):-

There was a prominent saint by the name Maskinath in Berar Province whose disciples were everywhere. The disciple of Maskinath, Nanasheeb lived in Patur. His birth anniversary is celebrated on Magh Shuddha Dashmi. Likewise the birth anniversary of Sidaji Bua is celebrated on Falgun Shukla 02, by his disciples. People went to have Darshan at the durgah of Shaikh Babu.

15) Bholaram (Achalpur, Dist. Amravati):-

Bholaram was the disciple of Samartha Ramadasa, the famous saint in Maharashtra. His muselum is at Achalpur. Likewise some Hindu and Muslim folk in Berar offer prayers at the Majar (kind of mosque) of Dularaheman Shah.

16) Narsingdas Baba (Akot, Dist. Akola):-

He was famous Yogi (ascetic). He would always be in meditation. His mausoleum-temple is in Akot.

17) Uddhavsut (Anjangaon, Dist. Amravati):-

Here is the hermitage of Uddhavsut.

18) Zigara (Kurha, Tah. Achalpur, Dist. Amravati):-

The caste of Zigara was Kurmi. He lived an isolated life since his childhood. His Samadhi is situated on the bank of river Purna. He did the welfare of many disciples.

19) Khatia Bua (Amravati):

Khatia Bua lived in the forest. He would throw stones at the people who went to him for his darshan (blessing). His Samadhi is situated on the bank of river Purna.

20) Gomaji Maharaj (Nagazari, Dist. Akola):

The Samadhi of Gomaji Maharaj is situated on one mile distance from Nagazari railway station.

21) Govind Baba (Barshi-takali, Dist. Akola):-
Govind Baba was *Patawari* (one who maintains records of farmers) by profession. He had a tendency for solitude and led isolated life.\(^{82}\)

There were many saints of varied sects and denominations in the Province, so also there are *Majaras, Samadhis, Mathas*, etc of saints. These saints taught to lead the life of virtue. All these people stressed on the devotion. They did not rely on any particular form or incarnation of God, on the contrary they believed on the concept of God. They asserted that in the domain of His worship there cannot be discrimination of superior and inferior. Also, the *Shudras*, women, etc should have the opportunity of salvation.

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On the one hand the saints taught righteousness and on the other hand they lessened the discrimination of superior and inferior. They provided the right of worship and also made the light of knowledge available for the folk. They organized the common folk and generated their self-confidence and self-esteem. And generating their self-confidence and self-esteem was the appropriate path to banish the authority of *Shastra- Pramanya* (authority of scriptures).

The saints believed on *Dharma* (right path of duty), but theirs concepts were not based on obstinacy or a sort of orthodox. They desired that none should exploit the others on the pretext of religion, none should propagate false rituals, and there should not an arbitrator between God and man. Saints diverted the minds of peoples from the evils like addiction and demonstrated the way of virtue.

The saints taught such virtues as observance of duty, good conduct, and mutual love etc. to society. They had modest dislike of *Sadhus* who deceive simple folk. The saints attempted to manifest successfully the principle in philosophical books, the asceticism of saints, the worship contained in *Bhagwat* and *Puranas*. That is why they did not need to rely on false rituals.

The cunning *pundits* had created the false rituals and beliefs by adulteration of fasts, rules of worship, *Smruti- puranas* etc. The devotion was lost in false rituals. Those pundits exploited
the common mass by taking undue advantage of their ignorance. The saints in Berar did not observe the false notions of superiority-inferiority of the castes. They also propagated the gender equality.

By their own transparent conduct they put an ideal before the society. They have shown the virtue of simple living and high thinking. All this generated awareness among the people in Berar and they began to participate actively in freedom movement. Many have sacrificed their lives out of love for the nation.

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