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## SOCIAL REFORMERS OF MAHARASHTRA AND THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT FARMING

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### ABSTRACT

India is known as agricultural country. Since ancient times agriculture is the main occupation. People do farming and business related to agriculture. Agriculture holds a great importance in Indian economy. Agriculture is the main source of tax collection for the government. Agricultural tax is nothing but land revenue.

**KEYWORDS** :Social reformers ,agricultural country, Indian economy, Agricultural tax.

### INTRODUCTION

Since farming depends on nature, it sustains only due to rain. Lack of technology, illiteracy and old methods are farming are the reasons that even today farming lies far from advancement. In such a condition the arrival of British rule bound to have long term effects on farming.

After the establishment of British rule in India the condition of farming worsened further. The British started collecting huge tax. The Company's main objective was to collect as much land revenue as possible. Farmers were financially exploited. This led the farmers to lead a life of poverty, starvation and bankruptcy.

British came into the rule after the last Peshwai in 1818. The condition of farmers became worse during the British rule as they collected huge tax. Farmers started taking heavy loans from money lenders from the government to pay tax. In the process of taking loan over loan the farmer started to become bankrupt. He was severely exploited as money lenders one side and the British on the other kept demanding money from the farmers.

Some social reformers and scholars in the society



were worried about the farmers' condition as the number of farmers was huge. Farming and farmers, who earned their livelihood on farming were the topics close to their heart. They studied how British exploited the farmers, how the farmers' condition became pitiable, how they became bankrupt. They also made conscious and practical efforts to help the farmers come out of poverty and pitiful life and bankruptcy. While some social reformers have made attempts to improve their condition and raise their standard of living so that they could live head high.

### 1. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his thoughts over agriculture:

19th century marks an important century as many historical, economic, social, religious and political happenings were seen. During the same

time, long term effects were seen in all the mentioned areas in Maharashtra. The cruel rule of British had handicapped almost all the sectors in India. Even agriculture sector was in the clutches of the British rule. They exploited the farmers and their farming right as per their plans. Phule not only gave priority to education but also highlighted how the downtrodden section of the society is further going worse due to lack of education. He penned all his thoughts in his book 'ShetkaryanchaAasud' in 1883.

Jyotirao showed it up the British government the pathetic conditions of the farmers and labourers and how they are further worsening their lives. Phule established SatyaShodakSamaj on 24th September 1873 for the welfare of farmers and labourers. Through this society he promoted and spread some burning issues and questions related to farmers and farming.

Mahatma Phule put forward many demands before the British government to put an end to the pathetic condition of the farmers and for the improvement in the condition of farming. "The British government should educate Indian farmers about using machines or technology just like they educate their farmers. Muslims along with White people should stop slaughtering cows and calves to fill their tummies instead they can use goat or sheep." Unless such a law is made and implemented the downtrodden farmer wouldn't have a good supply of oxen for cultivating his land. Besides this, the farmer can also use dung fertilizer to improve their agricultural production. He had also demanded the British government to make small ponds in regular distances or build bunds to stop the flowing water so that the famers could be benefitted out of it. Mahatma Phule had put forward such and many other demands before the government.

After studying Mahatma Phule's attempts to improve the condition of the farmers and farming it is evident that he had studied the farmer's condition in detail. He had dreamt the abolition of the exploitation of the farmers, educating them and making them aware of their rights to live a standard life. Besides this, he also dreamt of agricultural friendly political rule. Through his powerful writing he tried to spread awareness in the Indian society by depicting the pathetic condition of the farmers and he also suggested ways to get them out of such a living.

## **2. MAHARSHIVITTHALRAMJI SHINDE'S THOUGHTS ON FARMERS AND FARMING:**

After Mahatma Phule it is Maharshi's name which foregrounds to have held soft corner towards the welfare of the farmers. He is a well-known farmer friendly social reformer. In order to raise awareness among the farmers he conducted large conferences. He also attempted to initiate movements in the favour of farmers and farming. A farmer is the one who "cultivates land only required to the needs of feeding his family, education and other petty needs." By defining in such a way he made it clear one who cultivates the land is the real farmer.

1928-1932 was the year when Indian freedom struggle was at its peak. Many farmers and labourers had taken part in the freedom movement. Shinde himself was the leader of non-cooperative movement. He had fervently put forward farmers' questions before the government. He blamed Brahman and Marwadi for the pathetic condition of the farmers. "Small scale capitalist Marwadis and Brahmans from villages and clans would trap the illiterate farmers in their money lending clutches. They wouldtake over their farm fields by levying heavy and unbearable interest rates. This made the farmers, labourers." In this way the farmers were being exploited. Even the government policies weren't much in favour of the farmers. To oppose this exploitation Shinde had felt the need of forming a group or an association of the farmers. When the British increased the land revenue, unrest spread among the farmers. He formed a union of farmers in Mumbai area.

Under the guidance of SardarVallabhai Patel farmers from Gujrat did satyagraha. During the same time Shinde also conducted conferences in Maharashtra by bringing thefarmers together. Shinde

opined that the nation's development was in the literacy of the farmers. This will also reduce the influence of the capitalists. British wouldn't take farmers' problems seriously. "In order to change the farmers' condition they have to be educated. If the British are to be feared then the farmers must be given social education."

VitthalSinde also sent an awareness among the untouchable farmers. The untouchables would work as slaves on meagre wages under the land lords. These land lords would make these untouchables to work day and night but pay a petty amount against the mammoth work they do. Shinde tried to bring such untouchables together and help them get good wages.

### 3. DR. PUNJABRAODESHMUKH AND HIS THOUGHTS ON FARMING AND FARMERS:

Sculptor of education in Vidarbha and one of the leading agricultural revolutionists in India, Dr. PunjabraoDeshmukh's thoughts about the farmers and farming are absolutely significant. After completing education in England he returned to India in 1926 and established 'Madhya Pradesh VarhadShetkariSangh'. He devoted himself in the union's work. In 1930 Deshmukh swore in as a minister. He was assigned to handle education, agriculture, co-operative and public service.

Dr. Punjabrao focused on the hardworking farmers. The feeder of the mankind and life-saver wasn't given enough facilities during the British rule. Even educational facilities were kept from the reaches of the farmers. A son of a peon would get education but a son of forty acres land wouldn't get education just because his father was a farmer. This is how their condition was pitiable. Punjabrao did a commendable work by making education available even in villages with 34% discount in their educational fees.

He was agriculture minister of India during 1952-1962. He did revolutionary work during his tenure for the farmers and farming. He promoted modern farming techniques. To solve the questions related to farming he established 'Bharat KrushakSamaj' in 1955. In 1956 he established 'TarunKrushakSangh'. Further he established Farmers' Co-operative bank.

In this way Deshmukh did his best to provide assistance during and before his tenure. It is evidential that he was truly devoted towards the service of farmers and did sincere attempts to provide assistance to farming.

### 4. RAJASHRISHAHU MAHARAJ AND HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT FARMERS AND FARMING:

Rajashri taught us an ideal lesson of life which can be stated as 'the kingly hood should be used for the welfare of the people alone.' He meditated over the problems of farmers, peasants and the downtrodden people. He has always worked for the betterment of the underprivileged class of the society. Once he took charge of Kolhapur he focused on the condition of farming. He was convinced of the importance the farming held in the country's economic condition.

He made sincere efforts to help drought hit farmers and their cattle. He not only built public ponds for the needy farmers but also renovated the ponds that once existed in the past. In 1902 he also announced policies to build bunds and canals as a permanent solution to drought hit regions. Initiating department of bunds construction he appointed an irrigation officer exclusively for the look after of irrigation policies.

"He built an ambitious dam named Radhanagari in western Kolhapur by stopping the flow of Bhogawati River. This project proved to be a crucial project for the state's irrigation problem." This dam was indeed a blessing to Kolhapur and the surrounding area. Unfortunately the project couldn't be completed in his existence. Yet, this attempt makes it clear that he made it in the favour of the farmers.

Radhanagari was the one of the biggest dams in India. Even British government couldn't initiate

such a dam ever in their rule period. But Maharaj did it in order to provide irrigation facility to the farming. He could do this because he was the true visionary who could foresee the things. "Keeping the common man in the center Shahu Maharaj did all he could for the welfare of his subjects. This shows that though he was a king he had a heart of a common man. This is why he was honoured with the title Rajashri.

### EVALUATION:

After the commencement of British government farmers and farming were in a pitiable state. Some social reformers made sincere efforts to uplift the farmers from their pathetic condition. Social reformers from Maharashtra brought awareness among the public and the farmers against the exploitation that the British government did.

After the establishment of British government in Maharashtra in 1818, they imposed heavy tax over farming resulting in the deterioration of the farmers' condition. They were financially oppressed by the government. To stop such an exploitation and to improve their standards some social reformers undertook great initiatives by putting forward demands to the government and appealed to solve them. They undertook some of the projects themselves and implemented them effectively. They also spread the awareness among the farmers. As a result many farmers stood against the ill-policies of the British government. This enforced the British government to amend the existing policies.

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