



“SATI SYSTEM IN MAHARASHTRA (1800-1829)”

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Abstract:

At the beginning of 19th Century there was political changes in Maharashtra. This period witnessed the end of Peshwa rule and beginning of British rule in Maharashtra. British rule and modern education brought some social changes in Maharashtra.

KEY WORDS:

Sati System , political changes , transcendental. Society .

INTRODUCTION-

Society on the eve of beginning of British rule was firm believer of transcendental. Society of this era was deeply embedded in blind faith, antagonist of girl education and caste ridden.

TRADITIONS OF MAHARASHTRA -

Social status of each individual was ascertain on his own caste. Along with Caste system child marriage, untochability, mismatched i.e. marriages of younger girls with over aged men, complete balding of widow, Polygamy were the social evils of that edge. Along with these evils greatest evil was Sati system. This system created stir over social sphere of Maharashtra. However, 19th Century Sati system of Maharashtra was not as serious as it was in Bengal.¹ Royal Maratha period and Peshwa period also witnessed the stray cases of Sati in Maharashtra. It is therefore, impetrative to study this very inhuman system and its 19th century stipulation.

SATISYSTEM -

Widowhood was curse in the 19th century women of elite class and caste. Instead of accepting socially deserted and enforced segregation and haltered of family and society many high caste women after death of their husband were enforced to get self burning i.e. sati along dead body of deceased husband. High caste Brahmin and Maratha women were opting for the Sati.² Dr. Sharada Deshmukh has put forth in her studies that during 1800 AD to 1812AD by an average 12 women were opting for Sati after death of their husband per year.³ This inhuman system was cruelty for human being and was well understood by British administration. However, to ban this system at once was difficult proposition for it. They decided to reorient peoples' psyche by educating them and at the end to enforce the law to curb the practice.⁴ Many social reformers took early initiative to educate people in this regard. Erstwhile Deccan commissioner Mount Stuart Elphinstone witnessed one Sati incidence on the bank on confluence of Mula and Mutha river in Pune in 1816.⁵ Even noticing such incidence he could not avert the incidence. The incumbent widow who opt for the Sati should get minimum pains were the initial steps that were initiated by British administration

in initial years. Robertsen then Collector of Pune thought about the arrangement of funeral burning materials so that incumbent Sati may get minimum pains. Early comments of Elphinstone on Sati system are important. He asserted that instead of going into Hindu scriptures and public consensus, administration should take cautious steps before proceeding enactment on banning the system.⁶ However, even in this cautious approach Elphinstone and other British administration took steps to curb this social evil.

On 27th September 1823 one widow named Radhabai reported forced for Sati after her husband's death. Some British officer tried to bring such Sati from the self emolition rites at the time of funeral. However, the British officers could not save her life. This news came to Robertson then collector of Pune that this incidence was not voluntary incidence and Sati was enforced on the deceased widow. Robertson then ordered on 8th October 1823, authorities who makes ordeal on the religious matters over Pune that whoever, tries to force widow or sati into pyre who tries to escape from the pyre, would be treated as murder and would be trailed under Criminal Procedure Code.⁷ Robertson's above order created stir among the religious authorities of Pune then. The called meeting in Budhwarwada in Pune. They made resolutions that the arrangement of pyre must be under grass hut the walls of that hut must be of grass also. There should be entrance for such hut and pyre must be arranged in such hut. There should be entrance to such hut and it should not be closed. Another resolution in same meeting was made that the on escaped Sati stringent social boycott rules must be enforced. Such incumbent Sati should enforced to stay in untouchable's house i.e. of Mahar community. This stringent social resolution made obligation on deceased widow opt for only self emolition and no other alternative left for her.

The statistics of 1821-27 period of Bombay region is interesting to describe the nature of early 19th century Sati system over Maharashtra.⁹

| Year | Different Collectorates | | | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| | South Konkan | North Konkan | Khandesh | Pune | Ahmednagar |
| 1821 | 50 | - | - | - | - |
| 1822 | 47 | - | - | - | - |
| 1823 | 38 | - | - | 1 | - |
| 1824 | 27 | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| 1825 | 32 | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| 1826 | 28 | 1 | 2 | - | - |
| 1827 | 27 | 0 | 6 | 1 | - |
| Total | 249 | 03 | 10 | 2 | - |

This chart suggests that south Konkan registered more number of Sati cases. Pune and Ahmednagar collectorate reported least number of Sati cases. Though Ahmednagar collectorate not reported any incidence other evidences suggest that even Ahmednagar witnessed stray incidences of Sati. Khandesh reported cases of Sati next to South Konkan region. This suggests that the clans and families having military traditions were more prone to Sati system. Only Marathas and Chitpavan Brahmins were observing Sati system. The areas from where Sati cases were reported depict the same story. Pune city being dominated by Chitpavn families ironically reported least number of Sati cases. This might be due to social reform environment and strict vigilance of British administration.⁸

PENSIONS TO SATI-

One Brahmin Devbhat Shouche of Ahmednagar died in cholera epidemic. His wife and two children suffered. His widow applied Henry Pottinger then Collector of Ahmednagar for Sati as she was not having any means to survive.¹⁰ Pottinger was successful in pursuing her not to opt for Sati and started Rs.7 per month pension to her. Yamunabai Agnihotri another widow also changed her decision of Sati after her husband's death. British Collector Brigds also implemented pensions to widows. British government announced policy decision that those Brahmins whoever implement propaganda against Sati and pursue not to follow Sati would get Rs.50 as prize money. This announcement resulted into fake cases and applications in this regard. This development enforced Brigds to withdraw this initiative.¹¹

ABOLITION OF SATI -

John Malcom the Governor of Bombay presidency was very eager to abolish Sati however, the policy of non-inference in the religious policy of natives he remain aloof in that regard. However, he made resolutions to terminate Government services of government employee in whose family Sati incidence occurred. He also made resolution not to appoint persons from the families in which Sati incidence had been

occurred.¹² Willim Bentik the then Governor General of India finally made enactment of abolition of Sati in the year 1829. At that time orthodox Hindus arranged protest meeting in Calcutta at that time. However, over Maharashtra social reformers like Nana Shankar Sheth assisted Jhon Malcom in his efforts in eradication of Sati system.¹³ However, Sati abolition enactment bore no fruit. Stray cases of Sati were reported in the year 1829 over Bombay presidency.¹⁴ One of the widow of judicial magistrate reported opt for Sati after her husband's death instead pursuance of Maharaja Prtapsingh of Satara.

CONCLUSION -

Cruel inhuman Sati system was the greatest social evil of 19th century. This system was product of religious attitude of so called religious authority. British administration avoided direct interference in curbing this method. However, British administration opted various indirect attempts to curb this system. Finally in 1829 Sati abolition Act legally abolished the Sati. However, stray cases of Sati occurred over Maharashtra. Strict adherence to law and attempts of social reforms finally stopped the Sati system in Maharashtra.

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