

CHAPTER XII

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✓ National consciousness, social reform and industrial expansion were the outstanding characteristics of the period, when Sayaji Rao succeeded to the throne of Baroda and assumed full powers as a ruler. In the course of his rule which extended over half a century, he gave a good account of himself as a builder and organiser of his State transforming it into a modern state. He strove hard to bring about the moral, material and cultural advance of his people.

His early education, domestic life and foreign travels contributed greatly in formulating and shaping his social, economic and political ideas. His upbringing as a minor ruler, the pattern of education and the way he received it, the beginning of his married life and the degree of interference from the British and his political relations with them, had a great impact on him. It was in the minority period that he began to realise the value of education for the people. After having an idea of the economic growth of the advanced countries of Europe and America, he recognised indispensability of industrial and technical education for the general economic progress of his

✓ State and of the country in general. Moreover, he was of the opinion that without proper or general education, the people would not understand or take an intelligent interest in the various aspects of his progressive policy and the reforms he intended to introduce. Therefore, he constantly pleaded and stressed on the need of education throughout his reign. As he had large resources at his disposal, he was also able to translate his educational ideas into practice.

✓ The introduction of free and compulsory primary education in 1893 in the Amreli District and covering the whole State with it in 1906, is significant. This has a bearing on the educational policy of the British Indian Government which had not till then adopted such a policy for their territories. The provisions to educate the Raniparaj or backward classes and the tribes of the State and the introduction of female

education in the State, are the distinguishing features of his educational policy.

✓The problems of his domestic life, his own afflicted health and his foreign travels are so interrelated that they should be taken together for a better understanding of the powerful influences they had on him.

✓His sorrowful life and bad health led him either to concentrate on the work of the State assiduously or find pleasure in prolonged and frequent travels. His personal life was simple and refined and generally, he abstained from drinking, smoking and other such vices.

✓The foreign travels proved for him a sort of practical education in learning the culture and progress of both the Eastern and Western countries. He made the best use of such knowledge of education in introducing suitable changes and reforms for the welfare of his people. Though his successive visits enriched his ideas and broadened his vision, the other side of such visits could not be overlooked. They created in him an urge to wander and consequently neglect of State Administration more than often.

✓Nevertheless, these travels increased in him a thirst for knowledge. It is difficult to attempt whether he acquired knowledge for its own sake or for the sake of imparting it to others. But he came to be recognised as one of the well-informed men of his period. His speeches, addresses, letters, his official orders, administrative and other reforms all bear testimony with this aspect. His numerous donations and financial help to the individuals and to the Welfare institutions in India and abroad, reflect his humanism. His humanist thinking is also revealed through letters written, not only to the rulers of some of the Indian States, but also to the leaders of thought, art and science.

✓ As a reformer Sayaji Rao adopted a policy of experimenting, amending and somehow altering. The introduction of sweeping reforms in different spheres, might be interpreted as his high idealism often mixed with radicalism.

✓ In the system of social ideas of Sayaji Rao, two features are clearly marked. The first is related to the difficulties arising from the caste system and the second is about the difficulties pertaining to the status of women. The religion based Hindu society with many evils and religious injunctions appeared to him stagnant and unprogressive. The social reformers beginning from Raja Rammohan Roy onwards endeavoured hard to free the society from the hold of the superstitions and aimed to reform the Hindu social customs and conventions.

✓ Sayaji Rao viewed the social problems of the country with detachment and with an analytical mind. A series of fast changing legislative reforms notable among them being the Hindu Widow Re-marriage Act, the Child Marriage Prevention Act, the Baroda Special Marriage Act (The Civil Marriage Act) and The Hindu Divorce Act, testify to his determination to revolutionize the society radically. In all his such measures, he was impelled by the requirements of time. Moreover, the changing patterns in the mode of life in the Western countries of the period, had a considerable effect on his thinking. An integrated and well-reconstructed society would build a nation, was the ideal underlying his thinking and approach. Therefore, he looked to all the aspects of society from a utilitarian or practical point of view and desired changes keeping harmony with the changing times.)

✓ The nineteenth century Indian nationalist leaders and economic thinkers like Dadabhai Naoroji, G. V. Joshi, M. G. Ranade, B. G. Gokhale and others, maintained an attitude of understanding the nature and purpose of British rule in India. In a way, the economic policies of British rule provided them

with the problems on which they pondered. In fact, little was found in their thinking based on theoretical reasoning or on prior assumptions. It was so because their understanding was based on experience which they had. The Indian economic thought of the period was influenced with the progress of Western science, technique, economic organisation and by the vigorous European enterprise. England was considered as the most advanced nation of the contemporary world. These thinkers hoped that all these factors would be helpful to India to recover from her economic backwardness, poverty and stagnation. They also held that the credit side of the British in India had been outweighed by the debit side and therefore, it had proved economically injurious to India.

In the context of such economic thinking of the period, the thinking of Sayaji Rao would seem focused largely on the agricultural and industrial spheres of the country. He visualised several contributory factors for the backwardness of the country, prominent being the lack of proper education and skill. He attached great importance to the general as well as specialised education as a prelude to economic progress of the country. His approach on this aspect was pragmatic. The scientific and technological advance of the Western world also deeply appealed to him and dominated his thinking.

In the economic thinking of Sayaji Rao, it is significant to observe that a criticism of the 'laissez faire' policy practised by the British Government in relation to India or of the Home Charges (to the nationalists as drain of the country) was lacking. This was because he was a ruler of an Indian State and this could not come out too openly like other nationalist thinkers, in criticising the discriminating policies of the British Government. Though he often criticised the unhelpful attitude of the British towards industrial development, it lacked in force and vigour. It would seem natural that he wanted to avoid confrontation with the British rulers on this issue.

In the sphere of agriculture, Sayaji Rao, since the early part of his reign made changes and solved the problems relating to the alienated or Barkhali lands by carrying out the surveys and measurements and tried to improve the classification of lands. It is quite apparent that this was done for the purposes of tax. From the table mentioned in Chapter VII, it is clear that the land revenue receipts of the State formed a major portion of the total receipts of the State. This shows that there was no significant change in the land revenue structure of the State. Whatever fall in the land revenue receipts was noticed, it was due to peculiar circumstances like floods, famines and seasonal conditions.

In the 1940's, the Vadodara Rajya Prajamandal had agitated on the issue of heavy land revenue in the State. The economic thinkers of the period had also vehemently opposed and criticised the land revenue policies^{es} both of the British and the Indian Ruling Princes. In spite of Sayaji Rao's many economic measures for the good of the cultivators, there is no evidence to show their improved condition.

It is also interesting to note that Sayaji Rao left the land-holdings of the Maratha Sardars and the big landlords in the State untouched. It is a manifestation of the policy to maintain the privileged classes in the State.

It is ironical to find Sayaji Rao criticising and accusing the people of their inertia, apathy and helplessness in learning and knowing new trends, improvements and methods in the fields of agriculture and industry. This does not make any sense. Perhaps, in his high^{sp} spirit of 'progressivism' and idealistic obsession, he apparently overlooked the sufferings of the masses which were groaning under the heavy yoke of taxation. Repeated famines, scarcity conditions and unemployment further aggravated their plight. It is strange that persons like Maharaja Sayaji Rao who occupied high responsible and authoritative positions could remain unmindful to the true

conditions of the poor totally oblivious to the realities. During the famine of 1899-1900 in his State, he had personally witnessed the scarcity conditions and the plight of the masses.

Such a thinking and approach of Sayaji Rao show that he was neither alive to the peculiar problems of the people nor did he want to bypass them deliberately. Whatever remedial measures he had adopted, they touched only the fringe of the affected people. This was surely, in contrast with the liberal views he generally professed.

Unlike other economic thinkers of the period, Sayaji Rao desired the economic development of the country in agricultural and industrial fields equally. The nationalist leaders envisaged complete economic development and not in isolated sectors, whereas, Sayaji Rao wanted these sectors to develop and grow correspondingly and not lop-sidedly. His endeavours to render financial help and encouragement to the agriculturists and industrialists in the State were commendable. He started industries with State Capital with a view to providing incentive to the industrialists, but from his experience, he soon changed his concept and adopted a State-aided industrial policy.

The political thinking of Sayaji Rao is characterised by two broad-based points of view. The first included his vision to see India as a whole from a nationalist point of view, his approach and policies based on democratic ideology and his attitude towards the popular bodies in the State. The second included his demand for the position, rights and authority as well as his conflict with the British on the issue of interference in the internal administration of the State and relations with them.

The spirit of nationalism of Sayaji Rao was neither aggressive nor did it have any political bearing with the demand of complete independence of the country. In many of his speeches, addresses and letters, his affection and love for the country and his national spirit can be easily marked. Though he

sympathised with the nationalists and helped them as much as he could, he viewed the national movement with mixed feelings. He never forgot his position as a Ruler of an Indian State owing allegiance to the Paramount Power. At no time did he cross his limits as a ruler even in helping the cause of the country.

In 1902, he interpreted the national movement from a different angle and called it 'a movement for the economic revival of the country.' In his concept of national movement, he conceived each man working not for himself or for his caste, but for his country with liberty of action, equality of opportunity and sense of fraternity. To him, these factors would ultimately build the nation. It can be surmised that he gave much prominence to the social and economic problems of the country rather than to the political issues of the day.

The patriotism of Sayaji Rao is depicted through his veiled criticisms of the British attitudes towards the constitutional demands of the Indian people for rights. He repeatedly demanded for conceding the federal structure of the government to India and made strong pleas for according India her rightful place in the British Commonwealth. In this regard, he was certainly one of the few Princes in India who talked about politics with an open mind. His contact with the Indian nationalist leaders both in India and abroad and the type of help he rendered to some of them, proves that he was a national-minded patriotic Prince.

In contrast to the above, Sayaji Rao is seen as a ruler as far as the demands of his own people for responsible government in the State, were concerned. As stated elsewhere, he was liberal enough to introduce self-governing institutions with elective elements in them from the village Panchayat to the State Assembly level. But in 1916 and in the subsequent period, he faced the demand of responsible government under his aegis from the people through Prajamandal. But he showed reluctance and posed himself as an 'absolute' ruler with no desire to see his powers curtailed and authority limited. This attitude

clearly revealed a certain amount of inconsistency with the liberal political ideas he held to the last. Nevertheless, his liberal attitude and benevolence were beyond question.

On the issue of responsible government it would be necessary to explain the concept and demand for such a type of government during that period. The first point was the ambiguity of the concept of responsible government under the aegis of an Indian ruler. The second point was the non-feasibility of the demand in the context of the political situation prevailing then.

In the case of the Indian Ruling Princes, the ^{de}legation of powers to the people and to the Popular Government in the State, were not easy. Consequently, friction between the two were anticipated. On the side of Indian Rulers it was clear that they would not be ready to accept a cut in their powers and their importance being minimised in the new structure that would be evolved. On the other side, the people of the State had but a vague idea of the popular government in the hands of their Ruler. At no stage, a clear-cut notion about the demarcation of powers, was suggested or demanded.

So long as the British Indian Government was concerned, the granting of responsible government, was against their established policies.

Under these circumstances, the granting of responsible government to the people in the case of Sayaji Rao, would naturally be out of question. However, this discussion is not meant for defending the stand of Sayaji Rao, but for understanding better the political outcome of such issues.

The next point that requires attention concerns Sayaji Rao's concept of progressiveness and the demand of the people for more rights. With many remarkable reforms which were liberal and benevolent in character, he had impressed the world that he

was a ruler with progressive outlook and expected all to recognise him accordingly. It was suggestive of his position and his age wherein he wanted his people to "prove" before him that they were progressive, if they wanted to secure constitutional reforms ultimately leading to responsible government. How could the people demonstrate their "progressiveness" and show their worth when they were denied ^{sufficient} ~~adequate~~ opportunities and powers ?

In spite of such conservative thinking, Sayaji Rao may be regarded as a ruler with democratic leanings in a narrow sense of the term. As has been related elsewhere, Sayaji Rao allowed the Prajamandal to take birth in 1916, tolerated its activities and permitted to hold its fifteen Sessions till 1939 in the Baroda State territories. He maintained a liberal policy towards the Prajamandal till it came heavily under the spell of the Indian National Congress around 1934. In spite of the Prajamandal's vigorous agitations and demand for responsible government, Sayaji Rao made no noteworthy concessions. Nevertheless Sayaji Rao's benevolence is to be marked in his attitude towards the Prajamandal.

All these features underlying the political ideas of Sayaji Rao lead us to conclude that throughout his reign, he maintained a benevolent and patriarchal form of government.

Sayaji Rao's repeated assertions of the position, rights and authority and the demand of restoring greater autonomy to the Indian Princes should be viewed in the perspective picture of the general life, authority and status of the Indian Princes of the period. The then Indian Ruling Princes were by and large indifferent to their political and other responsibilities. But Sayaji Rao was an exception as a ruler. He thought himself to be a conscientious ruler fighting for his legitimate rights. In his demand for restoring the legitimate rights, he was guided by the spirit of progressivism. He wanted to attain such rights that would help improvement and progress in the economic spheres.

His thinking reflected that the degree of freedom allowed to him and other Princes, must have proved inadequate to start and foster industries in their jurisdictions. The struggle of Sayaji Rao to secure his 'legitimate' rights and claim more freedom on the basis of treaties and engagements is to be viewed from this point of view.

The study of the ideas of Sayaji Rao on various problems of the country including his own State, offers a logical inter-connection. His approach towards them for solution, was essentially practical. The optimism and enthusiasm which pervaded his thinking, were in fact, largely due to the impact of the Western culture, institutions and the progress that was achieved in agricultural, industrial and technological fields. It is very difficult to ascertain and distinguish as to what extent he was influenced by the thinking of his contemporaries in India.

The Indian social and religious reform movements, the Indian political thought and institutions and the approach of the British Government towards them, must have influenced his thinking. The distressing picture of the country depicting all the facets of Indian life, more especially, in the social, economic and political spheres, must have prompted him to find out the underlying cause of all such "evils" and look out for their remedies.

Sayaji Rao, viewed as a thinker, reveals that basically he thought that the lack of general and specialised education was responsible for all "evils" and regarded it a hard felt necessity for the advancement of the country. Development and progress were to follow them. His dictum "Education is the basis of all reforms and is the only way of salvation from our present condition," therefore, became the key-note in his thinking at all times. It is significant to observe that among the class of his fellow rulers, Sayaji Rao was perhaps the foremost to attach high value to education. As alluded before his reforms

and measures were based on this fundamental thinking and approach. He stood for modern civilization and disapproved ancient and mediaeval traditions and customs which were based on erroneous conceptions of life. In this regard, Sayaji Rao was both an idealist and a realist with rational outlook.

Sayaji Rao in many ways among the class of Indian Ruling Chiefs and Princes, emerges as a thinker and reformer of considerable magnitude in the social, economic and political spheres.
