

Caste and Remaking Nationalism: Jotirao Phule's Alternative National Discourse and Social Justice

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Abstract:

Nineteenth century had witnessed a wave of powerful socio-religious reform movements and a warm desire was visible to discard all unwanted superstitious and stigmas from socio-religious life in all over India. The reformists were inspired by western ideas of rationalism, liberalism and humanitarianism etc. and wanted to change that was in vogue in Indian society. The Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Parthana Samaj laid great stress on social reforms such as inter-caste marriage, widow re-marriage by discarding Satidaha, Child marriage etc. But all these movements were in urban centric elitist in nature and barely touched rural peasants and lower caste peoples. As we found an alternative socio-religious reforms movement led by lower caste social reformers like Jotirao Phule in Maharashtra Narayan Guru in Kerala and Guruchand in Bengal these reforms uplifted the rural indigenous people by discarding caste prejudices and Vedic orthodox hierarchy. This paper actually tried to outline the nature and character of socio-religious reform movements led by Jotirao Phule in Maharashtra based on caste, real-modernity and reviews key binary discourses of Indian Nationalism.

Keywords: Jotirao Phule, Caste, Alternative Social reforms, and Social Justice.

It is impossible to understand Indian society without a fine analysis of the race and caste system of India because the race and caste antecedents of a person are much more important which is determined at his birth and not at all acquired through his merits and deeds, than the personal introduction of that person. The caste qualification of a person determines his socio-religious activities, financial interconnections, and authoritative prowess. Caste system determines the manual and mental labour of the manufacturing or producing class, propriety over the produced and manufactured goods and taking up of the hereditary profession etc. In the pre-capitalistic society, caste was the principal component or unit. After the arrival of the Aryan, the caste system of the Hindu society was determined according to the scriptures such as *Veda*, *Smriti*, *Puran* etc. composed by the Aryans. Caste division in accordance with the division of labour in the pre-feudal period was given the religious acceptance in the *Rigvedic* period. The upper caste and lower caste profession were made hereditary and fixed with one's ethnic position. And the social layout of castes was made in terms of purity and impurity. The identity on the births of Brahmin, Kshatriya, *Baishya* and Sudra were linked with various

limbs of God or '*Brahma*' and restrictions were imposed in making a matrimonial relationship with one another and in socializing and in observing the socio-religious rituals. Those who defied those restrictions were kept outside the four castes system and they were, in later period, were considered as '*Abarna*', '*Atisudra*', Chandal and untouchables. In the pre-colonial period, those castes on the pretense of 'Pure and Impure' clause of Hindu society, were debarred from all the human rights like entering into temples, collecting water from the same ponds, eating together, and getting themselves educated in the same institutions with the students from upper castes etc. Even the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Baishya the three upper caste people, thought it as a sin to touch and take water from the '*Sudra*', '*Atisudra*' and '*Chandal*'. The Indian society was not unified and divided into umpteen numbers of divisions in the social, economic and in the educational sectors due to the race and caste divisions of the Hindu society. Regionalism also played a role in the division among the castes.

During the administration of the colonial period, the knowledge of philosophy and science from the western world and their efforts towards

humanitarian reforms and the liberal thoughts of Christian missionaries influenced the educated middle-class Indians immensely and with the active participation of those educated middle class and upper caste Indian, efforts were made to remove the social superstitions and various socio-religious dividing components from Hindu religion which took a very effective role, in the later period, in framing the Indian Nationalism. And on the other side, the rule of law by the British government, saleable character of properties etc. gave the lower caste people certain mileage in the areas of education and in changing of their hereditary professions and they were able to advance in socio-economic areas. But the main structures of the caste system remained unchanged and as a result of that the marginal castes protested against the unjust and inhuman systems of caste distinction in order to get respect and self-esteem from the society. The foundation of building an Indian nation started through reforms of religion and society prior to its formation on political idealism. The Bhakti movement of the medieval period tried to bring all people together under the cover of one shed through love and devotion. Similarly, Rammohan Roy through his *Brahma Samaj* movement, *Parthanasamaj* and *Arya samaj* of Dayananda Saraswati through religious reforms initiated the idea of making a united nation. With the efforts of the upper caste Brahmin reformers, the movement against caste distinction did spread. Our social reformers knew that Caste distinction was the main impediment in building an Indian nation. But they lacked the firm determination in removing that distinction and no remarkable steps in removing that social ills could be observed from their activities. The colonial administration and the influence of the Christian missionaries did help in the emergence of some educated people from the so-called marginal castes. In respect of socio-religious reform movement, at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, new consciousness on caste distinction did emerge. Instead of converting to Christian and Islam religion, the marginal castes protested against the Brahministic pattern of society through their Bhakti movement by unifying the local sects and created a contending ideology in order to get respect and justice from the society.

At different parts of India, different ethnic socio-religious reforms movement started. From the mid-nineteenth century, the Matua movement of the Namasudra community under the leadership of Harichand Thakur started in Bengal.¹ In Kerala, such movement started among the Urawa under the leadership of Narayan Guru, the philosophy of that movement was: "Humanity is composed of one nation, one religion, and one god."² 'Adi-dharma' also started in Punjab.³ 'Balmiki' movement of the shoe-makers of Delhi started at a later period. The movement needs a special mention as it took a strong form.⁴ Those types of movement did not follow the 'sanskritisation process'⁵ of M.N.Srinivas; instead they followed the alternative path to gain social respect and self-esteem by relinquishing caste distinction. Ghanashyam Saha, the renowned sociologist explained the social elevation issue of the Dalit movements in two ways one as reformative and the other as an alternative.⁶ On the other side, ShekharBandyopadhyay opined that the social and political movements of the marginal castes proceeded in two different ways. Firstly, those people aimed at only acquiring the symbols of high status and secondly, their attention shifted to non-material sources of high status i.e. education, employment, and political power.⁷ Recently, Christopher Jaffrelot illustrated that those race organizations unitedly opposed the Aryan dominant ethnicity through their search of pre-Aryan traditions and culture. "They have successfully incited the sub-caste to adopt the same name in the census and to break the barriers of endogamy, rejected hierarchical social system by articulating 'ethnicization process' provided on egalitarian alternative identity. Therefore, such caste movements imply the invention of a separate cultural identity and more especially a collective history."⁸ So, during the British colonial rule, there was an endeavour in Indian nation making through reforms of religion, society and its culture. And alongside, the stream of Aryan influenced culture; an effort was made to build a national discourse in the line of pre-Aryan culture. In the said treatise, it was mentioned that in Maharashtra, under the leadership of Jotirao Phule, efforts were made to rescue the 'Sudra' and 'Atisudra' of the lower caste from the social deprivation and exploitation of the upper caste Hindus by reforming the anti-Brahministic

movement as a dogma with modern rationalistic outlook. The efforts of the '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' helped in the awakening of the women from the lower caste and in establishing their self-esteem. They could also make huge steps in the spreading of education, social reform and their plan to establish the rights of the people from the marginal castes took a significant role in the building of Indian Nationalism.

Jotirao Phule was born in the family of a gardener at Pune on 11th April, 1827. His father's name was Gobindo Rao and Mother was Chimani Bai. The ancestors of Phule were not the resident of Pune. His grandfather lived in Katagaon village of Satara district in Maharashtra. He was the Chowkidar of that village. They were from 'Sudra' caste and the family title was 'Gore'. After the death of Phule's grandfather, Setiba Gore, his father Gobinda Rao was first engaged in rearing of the cattle of the Brahmin land lords of that village and in the later period joined as the gardener at the residence of Pesewa, second Bajirao. Pesewa granted him some land for cultivation of flower and he opened a flower shop at Pune. From that point of time, his title was converted to '*Phule*'. Gobinda Rao had two sons, one was Rajaram and the other was Jotirao. No one from that family was literate. Jotirao's mother died when he was only one year of age. His father Gobinda Rao looked after his two sons and got them admitted in the primary school of the village.⁹ British government established a government school in their village. Jotirao took admission in that school.

Jotirao was a brilliant student and within a short span of time, he became a favourite of his teachers. On that time, his Brahmin neighbors did not want someone from the '*Sudra*' society to get educated. One Brahmin clerk from his neighborhood advised Gobinda Rao to engage Jotirao in the trading job of flowers in lieu of sending him to schools for education which in his opinion would fetch economic sufficiency for his family. And according to that advice, Gobinda Rao after the primary stage of education of Jotirao was completed, discontinued his further education and engaged him in the job of cultivation and in domestic work. In spite of that Jotirao after toiling the whole day in the work of cultivation etc., engaged himself in reading different

types of books at home. Due to the then social customs, Jotirao got married at the early age of 13 years of age with Sabitri Bai in the year 1840. Despite his married life and pressure of work in domestic life, his eagerness for reading did not recede. The upper caste Hindus though discouraged him for further education. But his neighbors, Goffour Munshi, a Muslim school teacher and Christian missionary, Mr. Legit requested Gobinda Rao repeatedly to get Jotirao admitted in school again. At last, in 1841, Gobinda Rao got Jotirao admitted in Scottish Missionary School in the year 1842. Jotirao passed School final examination from that school in 1847. Jotirao during his school days read the biographies of Shivaji, the Marathi hero and that of George Washington, the founder of America and was deeply influenced with their heroics and patriotism. He also got the opportunity to go through the book, 'Rights of Man' by Thomas Paine and could know about the rights of the human being and about their self-esteem. From his childhood, Jotirao witnessed, in his village and in the adjacent villages, the caste distinction, discrimination, the misbehaviour of the upper caste Brahmins to the lower caste people, social and economic exploitation of the marginal castes etc. He could also realize the hatred and deprivation made by the Brahmin Methni and Bhotji class of Pune towards the Mang, Mahar castes. In the year 1848, he was invited to the marriage ceremony of one his upper caste friend. But he was driven out from the venue of the marriage ceremony for being a member of '*Shudra*' class.¹⁰ He could get direct knowledge about the real character of the Indian upper caste Hindus. And he could not accept the irrational claims of excellence and arrogance of the Brahmins. He could understand that the arrogance of the upper caste Brahmins had been derived from the scriptures. They built an imaginary image about themselves by making many stories and engraving those stories in the heart of the so called lower caste people. They created the concepts of pure and impure and injected slavery and inferiority among the marginal caste of people.¹¹ The lower caste people did not find out the ways to get themselves out from the inferiority complex which was imbibed in them for ages together. And as a result, Jotirao, from that day, engaged himself in the work of the lower caste people and in getting them back, their

human rights and self-respect and in helping them to grow in them a sense of awareness for such wants.

Jotirao when he was only 20 went to visit a girl school conducted by the American Missionary at Ahmednagar. He was influenced by the efforts of the missionaries in awakening and spreading of education among the women. He observed that none among the Sudra and lower caste communities were educated. The head of the family instead of raising his children was engaged in absorbing alcohol every evening. In those circumstances, he could comprehend that the female members of a family needed to be educated first to raise and educate a child properly. The women needed to be made aware of their rights and only then the male domination in the family would be reduced in the social system and some type of equality in the family would build a larger social equality. The principal objective of the social reform movement of the nineteenth century related to the women principally. Abolition of *Satidaha* system and child marriage, introduction of widow marriage etc. were related with the awakening of the women. Educating women became an important factor and of fundamental importance with social reform movement. The Christian missionaries first came forward with their mission of spreading education among women and the conservative Hindus were very much against it.

A girls' school was first established at Chinsurah in the year 1814. In the year 1847, on the first native initiative, a girls' school was established at Barasat in 24 Parganas on the active efforts of Kalikrishna Mitra. On 7th May, 1849, Bethune Sahib, a member of the legislature of the Governor established Bethune School for girls at Kolkata. In the year 1854, on the recommendations of Woods Despatch, the government took over the responsibilities of spreading education among the girls. During that period, Iswarchandra Bandyopadhyay was the assistant School Inspector of south Bengal and during his tenure, 36 girls' schools were established in the districts of Kolkata, Midnapore, Burdwan, Hooghly and in Nadia.¹² The contribution of Vidyasagar in the spreading of education among the women was tremendous. But like the Bengal renaissance which was limited to the rich and upper castes people in cities, spreading of

women's education too had got that limitation. Nobody evinced any interest in spreading education among the lower caste women living in the villages of East Bengal. The lives of the lower caste women in the villages were immersed in deep darkness due to abject poverty, ill-breeding, superstition etc. which aroused out of caste distinction and the messages of renaissance did not reach them. Even the students from lower castes were not allowed to get admitted in the Sanskrit College whereas Vidyasagar, himself recommended for palanquin for transportation of girls at free of cost from the aristocratic families for admission at Sanskrit college.¹³

The people from the *Mahar*, *Mang* and *Chamar* and other low caste communities of Maharashtra was despised and treated by the Bhat Brahmin and Beniya Seth, as untouchables. Like the '*Brahma Samaj*' movement in Bengal, the '*Parthana Samaj*' at Madras and '*Pune Sarbojonik Samaj*' were the vanguards in the socio-religious reform movement. But their reform movements and their plan for the awakening of the women and spreading of education could not reach among the lower caste societies. Jotirao Phule was the first who concentrated on spreading of education among the women of the '*Sudra*' and '*Atisudra*' communities. Jotirao established a girls' school in the lower caste inhabited area at Videsoyada of Pune. He appointed his wife, Sabitri Bai as a teacher of that school. Most possibly, Sabitri Bai was the first Indian woman teacher. Sabitri Bai was inspired by the ideals of the British missionary, Mrs. Michel and Tomas Kitcheland devoted herself along with his husband in spreading of education among the women of the lower caste communities. Though she faced violent protest from the then upper cast people and abuses and brick batting etc. but she was firm in her conviction.¹⁴ Jotirao, apart from that school, also established two other girls' school at Rashtrapat in 1851 and in Vetolpat in the year 1852. He also built one Girls' hostel and a separate library for the untouchables with the object to spread education among the women of the marginal castes.¹⁵ In 1852, on the efforts of Sabitri Bai, '*Mahila Mandal*' was established which worked for raising women's consciousness about their human rights, dignity of life and other social issues. Phule and Sabitri Bai did realise that due to ill-

breeding or lack of education, the positions of the 'Sudra' and 'Asudra' remained confined at the lower level of the society through the ages. The objectives behind the efforts of Phule to spread education among the women was his realization that with the help of education, the women would be able to unchain themselves from the superstitions and would be in a position to disallow irrational social customs and practices and their practical senses and morality of life would give them the required strength to overcome all impediments in life and would usher in a new age of financial sufficiency among them and in the process the entire classes of lower caste people would have social upheaval in their life.

The contribution of Jotirao was very important so far the efforts of building an Indian nation was going on with the socio-religious reform movements in the nineteenth century. In the economics of Maharashtra, the domination of the ShethjiBania and BhatjiShethni was very powerful. Shethji and Bhatji also did administer the guilt system in Maharashtra. In that system, 'a cluster of castes became caste occupation, cosmopolitan money, and mercantile capital became caste capital and craftsmen's castes became part of the Jajmani or 'Bulatendari' system. Most of the caste craftsmen had been pushed out of town and villages and were declared as untouchables.'¹⁶ Jotirao was initially influenced by the reform movement which was first started with the efforts of M.G.Ranade, AtmaramPandurang, Madhavrao and others in Maharashtra. But Jotirao could not be in accord with the concept of a society and culture on Vedic ideologies as propagated by 'ParthanaSamaj' and 'Sarbojonik Sabha. He considered the Brahmin as an Aryan race but instead of thinking the 'Sudra' as dravid, he considered them as other race. The Brahmin organizations were anti Sudra and anti-untouchables. The untouchables and the Sudra had no right of admission in those reform movements, in its organizations and in the education institutions. Phule studied diabolic strategies of the Brahmanical forces and how that could go against the very process of positive and egalitarian nation building.¹⁷ Phule wanted the Chandal, Sudra and untouchables to have the solidarity based on the framework of dignity of labour. He thought that caste was a

product of Hindu spiritual thought. It had its racial origin and Aryan racism was the crucial factor for fragmenting the Indian society. He did not accept the theory of Hinduism as defined by the Aryan thoughts. He thought that women should be in focal point in all discourses of human evolution. He also showed that race, caste and gender inequalities were complimentary and how they bred multi-layered inequalities. In his book, 'Priest craft exposed', he divulged the wiliness and trickeries of the Aryan priests. The Brahmin priests collected monies from the uneducated and ignorant Sudra only by intimidating them with the fear of Dharma and creating all type of hurdles in getting them educated and made them dependent and believers in all types of superstitions. They created false stories on fear of death and on salvation and got them recorded in the religious scriptures with the intention to implement those in every layer of the society.

Jotirao proved the unreasonableness and uselessness of those religious theories and got himself engaged in the work of awakening the Sudra and *Atisudra* in his own way. He thought that both the Sudra and *Atisudra* were from warrior class. The Aryans made all type of obstacles in getting them united with the objective to rule and exploit them. The Aryans mentioned those Sudra and *Atisudra* as demons and painted themselves as god or as incarnation in all the religious scriptures composed by them. The Aryans created caste distinction and by applying their pure and impure rules ensured religious reservation of all the opportunities in their favour. They also robbed off the so-called, Sudra and *Atisudra* who was originally the son of the soil of this country from their respect and human rights. He also opined that Veda is not a creation by God, himself. In his book, 'Cultivations whips...' published in the year 1873, he wrote that due to lack of education, intelligence of a person decreases. And because of that the Brahmin directed the women, Sudra and lower caste people to stay away from Veda reading. He propagated a different idealism which says that Knowledge and valour are neither hereditary nor a property of any group of people. A child with high intelligence can also take birth in the house of lower caste people but if he/ she does not get proper environment and opportunities then his/her genius would not flourish

and would remain in latent stage. So, if lower caste children are given the opportunities of compulsory education and proper atmosphere are created for their upbringing then all their latent talents would get flourished. Jotirao considered the women as the driving force of the society. In his opinion, women's education can only create a rationalistic awakened society. He thought the building of Modern nation with coalition of women and spiritual democratic religions.¹⁸

The Brahmins used their supremacy and utilized caste distinction as a weapon to embezzle the produce made out of the labour of the Sudra and they, themselves, led an idle and immoral life and finally recited hymns to make their persona purified. Even during the primary stage of British rule, the upper caste people were in close contact with the British and were able to grab all the opportunities for education and service exclusively for them by depriving the lower caste people. Phule revealed that the Brahmins looted everything, the Sudra people had from their birth to death by citing various religious tricky commands. Phule considered the embargo imposed on Hindus to go abroad as orthodox conservatism. He thought that religious duties and professional duties were quite different in applications but there was no conflict in between them. Phule was quite rationalistic and clear in his opinion about religion. He opined that every religious scripture has been composed by men and none of those were completely true. Changes had been made in those religious scriptures on the demands of time. So, religion was not at all beneficial for all sections of people. They gave tacit support to distinctions, hatred and created birth for animosity.¹⁹ Phule was a monotheist. He was against conversion but very much against caste distinction and against the intervention of a Guru or Brahmin priest in between God and disciples. He was very much against caste distinction as he considered cast distinction had created that division among the Brahmin and non-Brahmin class of people. He also did not believe in incantation and witchery. He believed that Indian national unity could not be achieved unless and until equality in our society was not attained. He considered those Brahmins as a liar who were against that idea and did not accept them as saints. Phule said that the Brahmin Bhatji

and Settys came from Iran and they forcefully made the sons of the soil, the aborigines as their servants by trickery which immersed the Sudra of this country in total darkness. He wanted to unite the Sudra and *Atisudraas* Dalit and through a social revolution, attainment of social equilibrium was his aim. The ideologies of Phule were very firm and full of conviction. On the 16th chapter of his '*Golamgiri*' book, he wrote: "I express my indignation to those outlooks where we have been painted as servants andasana object of hatred in the books written by the Brahmins."²⁰ The Dalits were forced to tolerate the oppressions of the Brahmins and despite that the forcible cruelty, inhuman dictate and hatred, forced on the Dalits were not at all acceptable to Phule. He was ready to fight his entire life to free the Sudra and Asudra from the slavery of the Brahmins. And for that reason, he wanted to unite all non-Brahmin castes and other Dalit groups.²¹

Phule was very independent in his mindset and because of that reason he did not want to be in governmental service and he had to take the profession of a contractor, of supplying of stones etc. required for construction of roads etc., in order to collect the necessary funds for his regular living and also to manage the expenses of his reform works and for the work of social services. At that time, he could comprehend that all the government employees and the high-ranking officials from the Public Works Department and Engineers were all from the upper-caste Brahmins and they were all engaged in the embezzlement of government funds and on the other side, they were debarring the lower caste working class from their just wages. He earned money from his business of contractor ship and with that fund he published his own composed books to awaken the Dalits. In 1865, he wrote "Reflection on the institute of Karad" where he discussed about the selfish tricks of the Brahmins in creating caste distinction and also on the reasons of poverty among the Sudra. In 1879, he wrote '*Powada: Chatrapati ShivajirajeBhosleYanchara*' in which he discussed the patriotism of Shivaji and about his bravery, by which he wanted the Dalits to be encouraged and got confident and self-less in their struggles to attain social equality. His famous book '*Golamgiri*' was published in the year 1873. In that book, he expressed the ethics and ideals of his life

clearly. In that book, Jotirao rejected summarily the Aryan dictated Indian nationalism and stood against the reform movements of the Brahmins, he placed an alternative nationalism keeping parity with the culture and traditions of the Sudra, *Atisudra* and non-Aryan where the liberation of the people got prime importance. In the book, he presented the Brahmin as the wily and unscrupulous operator who acted always to exploit and suppress the peasant and labour.

From 1870, Jotirao emerged as a popular Dalit social reformer and as a preacher of truthfulness and justice in the state of Maharashtra. Jotirao first expressed his statements about '*Satyadharm*'. He was a monotheist. Though, he was a believer in monotheism like the devotees of '*ParamhansaMondoli*' and '*ParthanaSamaj*' but he did not believe in priesthood and in the fallacy of '*Avatar*'. He did not allow anybody in between the devotees and his god and was also skeptical about salvation and on the existence of hell and heaven.²² And as a result of that, he could not be in agreement with the Vedic reform movement. Jotirao believed that there was no such place like heaven; he too was also of the opinion that women were better than male and every debt on the earth can be repaid except that of the mother.²³ He considered the incantation and other religious rituals as meaningless. He believed that the mission of the life should be to work for the eradication of discrimination, hatred, and violence from the lives of the human beings. As people did not realize that truth, hence there were so many differences, communalism, and incoherence in our society. He named his thoughts as '*SarbojonikSatyadharm*'. He established a society called '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' in the year 1873 to propagate his ideas on religion and on the ideas for reforming of the society. He outlined 28 rules for the members of the '*SatyasadhakSamaj*'. That Social reform society was established as an adversary of the organizations founded by the Brahmins because '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' was formed with the objective of forming an equal society for the downtrodden '*Sudra*' and '*Atisudra*' by putting an end to their age long distress and misery. Every member of the *Samaj* had to take some vows which were as under: I shall not worship any other than the creator of this universe, I shall give support for the movement of the people at the lower tier of

the society in their fight for equal rights, I shall refrain from killing animals and from consuming alcohol, I shall stick to truth only, I shall work for the society and will be involved in spreading education among the women and the children. I shall be aware of my own rights.²⁴ The main objective of the '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' was to make the Sudra and *Atisudra* free from the dominance of the Arya-Brahmins. He also wanted them to be aware of their social rights by making them free from the commands of the Vedic scriptures and from the exploitation, hatred, religious and mental slavery of the Brahmins. He also emphasized on giving the Sudra and *Atisudra* a separate identity by stressing on their own cultural heritage and identity.²⁵ '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' on one side, was involved in reforming the religion and society and on the other was active in placing various demands of the agriculturists and labourers to the then British governments for their education and on other issues. At that time, the Mahar, Mang and other untouchables of Maharashtra were not allowed to use the village wells meant for common people. Jotirao, at that time, allowed them to use his own well for drinking water and other uses to them. Most of the Dalit died in a famine which occurred almost every year in Maharashtra due to shortage of rain or draught like situations. Jotirao tried to attract the attention of the government for food and other work for the distressed by writing articles in '*Dinabandhu*' magazine. Apart from that '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' opened a center for service from where foods were distributed to the children during the period of draught. There was no representative of the Dalits in the Poona municipality and as a result of that, no development plan for improvement in the supply of water, health, and other facilities was taken for the Dalit habited areas because of the upper caste people. Phule was elected as a member of the Poona Municipal Council in the year 1876 with an intention to serve the people of the Dalit community and fulfilled his responsibilities with much credit till 1882. Phule felt that the representatives from the Dalit community and from the poor peasants & labours should be in the governmental organizations to raise their issues for development. Phule considered the British government capable enough to implement the administration with equal consideration for all class

of people and he supported the British government for their ability to establish the balance of power in the society, economics and in the political arena of the country. He expected that the British government imposed 'Rule of Law' and their efforts in spreading education among the lower caste people, would help the Dalit community to get awakened about their rights and would help them eventually to get themselves free from the bondage of the erratic religious belief of the self-interested Brahmins and superstitions. In the year 1880, he wrote an essay in 'Dinabandhu' magazine, specially attracting the attention of the British government, highlighting the rationality of introducing free and compulsory education for all.

He also advised to supply to the peasants with the improved crop seeds, fertilizers, and agricultural machinery and also to open a *subziMandi* at Poona and also advised to give the farmers those shops on a rent not more than 4 annas only per month. Apart from that, he also objected to opening of a liquor shop at Poona and advocated for granting of loans to the farmers at a lower rate of interest.²⁶ The government was compelled to give attention to ensure the rights of the interests of the poor agriculturists due to Jotirao's planning and persuasion with the government during his tenure at Poona Municipality. And on the other hand, Jotirao encouraged the Lower castes people to have the fighting spirit in gaining their rights by shrugging off their lethargy and indifference.

In 1882, Hunter Commission was formed to examine the ways and means to spread education in India. Jotirao in his memorandum to the State Education Commission depicted the real picture of education and placed various demands and recommendations which helped the Hunter Commission significantly in submitting their final recommendations on education to the government. Jotirao established that most of the government revenues were collected from the peasants and labours and the rich people from the higher castes enjoyed those surplus profits. In the governmental education system, there was the dominance of the upper caste employees under the leadership of the Brahmins. In Madras Presidency, the Shethji and Bhatji and other Brahmins comprised only 3.2% of

total population, but their dominance in government jobs and in education was total. 70% of the graduates in Madras University were from the Brahmin caste during the period of 1870-1918.²⁷ Phule observed that Government's desire to spread higher education was nothing but appeasement of Brahmin class. He stressed on the improvement of primary education and on establishing schools in the villages. He said that: "One of the most glaring tendencies of the government system of high-class education has been the virtual monopoly of all the higher offices under them by Brahmins if the welfare of the royal is at heart, if it is the duty of government to check a host of abuse, if believes them."²⁸ There were many primary schools in the cities of Bombay presidency but there were not even a single one primary school in many villages. And for that reason, he counseled for establishing primary schools in the villages. The Brahmins, who hated the Dalits, were the teachers of the schools in the Dalit villages. Phule also proposed to appoint teachers from the Dalit community in lieu of upper caste teachers for the schools in Dalit villages. He said: "I think teachers for primary schools should be trained, as far as possible, out of the cultivating classes, who will be able to mix freely with them and understands their wants and wishes much better than a Brahmin teacher, who generally holds himself aloof under religious prejudices ...teachers of the other classes... will not feel ashamed to hold the handle of a plow or carpenter's adze when required and who will be able to mix themselves readily with the lower order of the society."²⁹ His statement was very clear that the teachers posted in rural areas should have knowledge on the agricultural system and on the sanitation process as well. They should have a few lessons on moral duties in their syllabus too. He also put it into writing that few school inspectors from the upper castes were not used to visit the schools on a regular basis. He proposed for visits of the schools four times in a year without informing the school authority. His proposal was to allot 50% of the revenues earned by the Local Boards for primary education and to take responsibility for the primary education by the autonomous local administrative boards. He also opined that if the major portion of the funds allotted by the Central Government were fixed for primary education then

eligible students for higher education should come from the lower tier of the society. Spreading of education among the women was most important to Phule. He said: "I beg to request the education commission to be kind enough to sanction measures for the spread of female primary education on a more liberal scale."³⁰ Phule emphasized on education among the Sudra and *Atisudrato* get them free from the bondage of the so called religion and caste distinction. He also advised for rejecting of all Brahministic socio-religious customs and manners. He himself was abided by the new non-Vedic customs and manners and also advised the members of the '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' to spread those ideals because at that time, the progressive social reformers like Ranade and Tilak also opined in favour of Vedic holiness and the priesthood of the Brahmins.

Sudra was not entitled to read Veda and Phule thought that the embargo was mainly imposed with the intention that if the scriptures of Veda were made open to everybody then the trickery or the untruth of the Veda would get exposed to the common people. The women and the Sudra were debarred from the rights for education and from their religious rights because they apprehended that it might cause the fall of the Brahministic patriarchy. Phule acknowledged and gave priority to the rights of women and their rights on property in his alternative thoughts and planning. He made a will before his death, giving the rights of his property to his wife. *Arya Samaj* and other social reforming movements when propagating the infallibility of the Vedas and got inclined to the purification process and on virulent nationalism, then Phule in 1884, through his two essays named '*Hushiyar*' and '*Satyasar*' declared firmly that it would not be possible for the Sudra and *Atisudra* to get themselves associated with those reform movements until and unless the upper castes did reject the caste distinction and stood unitedly with the *Sudra* and *asudra* in the reform process.³¹ He introduced the performing of rituals in the marriage ceremony, *Sradh* and in other social events of the Mang, Mahar and Mali communities without the Brahmin priests. He performed the marriage ceremony of his adopted son, Yoshobanta without the help of any Brahmin priests and without chanting of Sanskrit hymns but only with songs composed and tuned by him.

He performed the marriage ceremony of a barber in the non-Vedic system. He was successful in that effort despite severe obstruction from the local Brahmins. He instructed his wife and son that after his death, his dead body should not be touched by the Brahmins and should be buried according to the non-Vedic ritual system. In the then Maharashtra, it was the custom to shave the head of the widow. Jotirao as a leader of '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' organized a contending movement on that issue. He wrote about his rational view points on that issue in '*Dinabandhu*' Magazine. At last, in a meeting at *Apsinestone* School on the 14th April, the barbers vowed not to shave the heads of the widows anymore.³² The leadership of Jotirao for introduction of widow marriage among the lower caste women of Maharashtra became much popular than the reform movements led by the Brahmin reformers. Prior to the death of Jotirao Phule on the 18th November, 1890, the reform movement of the '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' for the upliftment of Non-Brahmin Dalit society and to awaken them with self-consciousness in the areas of Bombay, Puna, Nagpur and in other areas made an outstanding impact. He was the pioneer and living inspiration of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra. Before his death, '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' adored him with the title of 'Mahatma' on 11th May, 1888. He devoted his whole life to the service of the Dalits. He wrote the '*SarvajanikSatyadharmapushtak*' for the guidance of the non-Brahmin class in their passage to life. In the later period, Sahu Maharaj (1884-1922), the king of Kolhapur state followed his education policy and first introduced the reservation system in education and in the service sector for the untouchables. In the 1920s, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emerged as the worthy successor of the inspiration of social and political philosophies of Phule in establishing the rights of the Dalits. Ambedkar was acknowledged as the all-time great leader of the 'Self-respect movement and non-Brahmin movement of modern India in Madras Presidency.

The dream of the '*SatyasadhakSamaj*' of Phule was to establish equal rights and respects for the Sudra and the untouchables in the society. But in the later stage, the leading portion of the Dalit movements took the role of its driving force. Maratha

Kundipeasants propagated the Marathi ethnic ideology and claimed to be Kshatriya. A portion of the movement adopted the idea of *Sanskritization*. Gayle Velvet observed that the non-Brahmin movement ran side by side parallel, one was conservative in their approach and the other was progressive in nature. The progressive portion of the movement followed the '*Satyasadhak*' trend of class character movement.³³ Though the relatively rich and the conservative portion of non-Brahmin took the leadership of the strong movements of '*Marathi identity*' but they also could understand that despite their being rich in financial power, their ethnic status was looked at as low by the leaders of the Brahministic Congress party. That contradiction was the main weapon to the leadership of '*SatyasadhakSamaj*'. And as a result of that, the ideologies of the Non-Brahmin movement of Phule were executed in various degrees in the state of Maharashtra. At the initial period of the reform movement, Raja Rammohan Roy followed the 'Constructed or revivalist discourse around the Vedas and the Upanishads. Phule framed his non-Vedic reform movement for the Sudra and Dalits in the alternative discourse manner of Rammohan Roy. In the later period, the ideologies of Vivekananda attracted the attention of Western intellectuals but the speed of reform movements got reduced. Though Vivekananda and Gandhiji both were aware of the impediments of caste distinction and untouchability but none of them did reject the four caste system made in accordance with the '*PurushSukta*' of Veda. They also acknowledged the highest place of the Brahmins according to the caste distinction system.

On the other side, Jotirao marked the Brahmin as foreigners and it was his endeavour to unite the Sudra and untouchables who was son of the soil and called for their liberation from exploitation and placing them in the society with respect. Jotirao rejected the discordant Vedic culture. Brahma Samaj movement was initiated by Raja Rammohan Roy with the objective to modernize the Hindu religion. Syed Ahmed Khan worked with his mission to educate the Muslim with the modern western education system and wanted to bring socio-economic development in the Muslim society. Guru Nanak wanted to establish self-respect for the Sikhs.

Likewise, Jotirao Phule too wanted to establish the Dalit Sudra and Atisudra in the society with self-respect. It could be said in the language of Kanchallaiah, "While the nationalism or the Indian renaissance of the Brahma started with Raja Rammohan Roy, the early nationalism of the Dalitbahujan started with Mahatma Jotirao Phule."³⁴

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