

CHAPTER - VI

KARMVEER V. R. SHINDE AND HIS WORK FOR THE UPLIFTMENT OF UNTOUCHABLES.

V. R. Shinde has left a mark of his own on the Renaissance movement in Western India. V. R. Shinde dedicated his life has not received the same attention as other events has received. In a comprehensive history of modern Maharashtra, the achievements of social reformers like V. R. Shinde must find a place. Otherwise there would be a serious lacuna.

Karmveer Vitthal Ramji alias Annasaheb Shinde was born on 23 April, 1873, at Jamkhindi, the capital of small princely state of the same name. At that time Appasaheb Patwardhan was the ruler. The family of Shinde has settled in Jamkhindi at the time of Vittalrao's grand-father, Basavantrao, who was known as Subhedar Basavantrao, who had lost his father Chandrojirao in a battle, came to Jamkhindi as an orphan. With the encouragement of one Desai, a Lingayat by faith, and Appasaheb Daftardar probably a Brahman landlord, Basavantrao took to agriculture and accumulated a good fortune in the form of landed property and a palacial house.

Marathi-speaking Basavantrao from Maharashtra was married to Shanatabai, a Kannad speaking girl from Karnatak. Vithalrao's father, Ramajibaba came under the influence of a Brahman teacher and received education upto Vernacular Final. Ramjibaba worked as a teacher for some time. Afterwards he worked in an office of administration as an efficient clerk. Ramjibaba, a follower of Karkari sect, was married to Kannad speaking Yamunabai who was brought up under the influence of Vaishnavite Brahmin family. Thus the Shinde family was exposed for atleast three generations to different religious and linguistic influences. Naturally Vittalrao came to inherit a deep respect for all religous and cultures.¹

Later on Ramajibaba left job and remained unemployed for 16 years. Shinde family reduced poverty. In 1882, Vittalrao, who was 9 years old was married with Rukminibai who was six months old only.

Vitthalrao's educational career was promising one. After completing his primary education, Vittalrao joined Parashurambhau Patwardhan High School at Jamkhindi in 1885. During his High School days, he

conducted a debating union and delivered speeches on the need for social reform.

In 1891, Vitthalrao passed his Matriculation with flying colours at the age of 18. Vitthalrao was taken up as a teacher in the same High School. Later on Vittalrao was dismissed from his service in the High School.

Vitthalrao left Jamkhindi and came to Poona in 1893 and received a scholarship from Deccan Maratha Education Association for his college education. Vitthalrao joined Fergusson college in 1893. Vitthalrao passed his B.A. Examination in 1898, securing First Class marks in History and Politics. In 1898, Shinde read the writings of Max Muller, the great Indologist. At the same time, Vitthalrao happened to come in contact with Kalaskar, a notable social worker from Baramati and accompanied him to the Upasana of the Prarthana Samaj at Poona on 29th May, 1898. Vitthalrao's interest in the religion was revived and he received scholarship from Prarthana Samaj for going to England.

V. R. Shinde went to England, joined the Manchester College of Theology by the end of the

year 1901. He studied 'Comparative Religion' and prepared himself for missionary work of Liberal Religion. He observed the condition of the lower classes in England and Europe and also noted as to how the various Missions like Domestic Mission, Sarthplace Moral Association, Postal Mission were extending help to them. He started to develop a vision for social reform and an insight into the problems of different traits of social life.

V. R. Shinde came to India on 6th October, 1903. On his arrival, Prarthana Samaj gave a hearty welcome to him and appointed him the Missionary of Prarthana Samaj in the Bombay Province. Vitthalrao took keen interest in his work and won the admiration of all the veterans of the Samaj. Shinde's activities went on multiplying in various directions. In his missionary work Shinde came in close contact with the untouchables. Noticing their aspirations and efforts, V. R. Shinde established 'The Depressed Classes Mission Society of India' in 1906.²

THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

MISSION & ITS ACTIVITIES :

In addition to his heavy duties as a Missionary of Prarthana Samaj, V. R. Shinde worked hard for the All India Theistic Conference and the Depressed Classes Mission Society of India. From 1906 to 1910 the Depressed Classes Mission spread its activities for the welfare of students, women and men of the Depressed Classes by way of schools, boardings, dispensaries and Bhajan Samajas. In 1908 V. R. Shinde approached to Sir George Clarke, the Governor of Bombay for help. Sir George Clarke allowed his daughter, Miss Clarke to present a Music programme in aid of the Depressed Classes Mission. The programme attracted the attention of European Officers, Indian rulers and Indian leaders to the activities of the Mission.³

By the beginning of 1911, the Depressed Classes Mission suffered financial stringency. Shinde utilised this difficulty to win sympathy of the people from various quarters and collected rice, clothes and rupee. In 1912, Shinde held the Maharashtra Conference of the Mission at Poona and involved learned men from various

social stratas to express their opinion on the abolition of untouchability and education of the Depressed Classes. The Conference secured a big donation of Rs. 20,000/- from Holkar, Maharaja of Indore, towards the building fund of the Poona Branch. The Poona Municipality gave seven acres of land for the building of the Mission.⁴

In 1913, Shinde's efforts to attract the help of the Government towards the Depressed Classes bore fruit Lord Willingdon agreed to introduce change in the policy of the Government towards the Depressed Classes, and sanctioned a grant to the extent of 50 per cent of the total expenses of the schools, a special grant of boardings and Rs. 20,000/- for the building construction of Ahalyashram at Poona. Shinde's concern for the untouchables was also extended to the care of the Mangs who were stamped as a 'Criminal Caste'. Lord Willingdon agreed to establish a colony of Mangs.⁵

When V. R. Shinde founded the 'Depressed Classes Mission Society of India' in 1906, he decided to co-ordinate the efforts of the untouchables, the caste Hindu, British Officers and others for the uplift of the untouchables and to bring them together in the programme of the 'Depressed Classes Mission Society of India' Shinde very well understood that mere education and

employment which the untouchables urgently sought were not going to save the community from depression and degradation. The total abolition of untouchability at all levels, Personal, Social and national level, was the only remedy for removing the degradation and the depression of the untouchables.⁶ Shinde started his work very systematically. He undertook research to find out the origin of untouchability, and its dimension and adverse effects, not only on the untouchables but also on the future of the country in general.⁷

The aim of V. R. Shinde in the organisation of depressed classes mission society of India was the total abolition of untouchability. The means for achieving this objective were mainly abolition of caste distinction on the basis of liberal religion and association of all these groups to extirpate the institution of untouchability. Under the auspices of the Depressed classes mission society of India, Shinde founded boardings, schools, free hospitals and Bhajan Samaja, in which the members of the caste society and untouchables were associated together with the view of removing the prejudices towards one another by helping the backward children from Depressed classes to follow good habits of the advanced classes. This association was started from the top-level. The most

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splendid success of all, won by V. R. Shinde's mission was the change in the governmental policy towards the - untouchables. In response to the deputation of the mission to the Governor of Bombay, Sir George Clarke in 1910, the Governor's Council passed a resolution directing the Government officers to the municipalities for increasing educational facilities to the students from Depressed classes.⁸ Moreover, Sir George Clarke in the prize distribution ceremony of the Depressed classes mission society in 1910, took cognisance of the work of the mission in elevating the untouchables, and in 'arousing the sympathy' of the caste-Hindus towards them. In view of the changed conditions in the society, Sir George Clarke declared official disavowal of the policy of discrimination initiated by Mount Stuart Elphinstone.⁹ The deputation that was sent in 1913 to the Governor of Bombay, Lord Willingdon, was successful in getting, a grant of Rs. 20,000 to building fund of "Ahalyashram" of Poona branch, a special grant to its industrial training classes, a grant of half the expenditure of its educational institutions, and an extraordinary grant of Rs. 2,000 to its hostels.¹⁰ In 1913 Shinde persuaded the Governor of Bombay. The year 1920-21 marks the decline of V.R.Shinde's hold over the - untouchables and loss of their confidence in him. This

was due to the deepening of the Schism between the -
nationalists and the non-Brahman, the nationalists were
mostly orthodox Hindus and especially Brahman, while the
non Brahmans consisted of all castes including untouchables.
When Shinde tried to reconcile the Nationalists and -
untouchables or scheduled castes he lost his hold on the
latter. The untouchables made common cause with non
Brahmans, and in the meeting at Madanpura Presided over by
Subhedar G.S.Rokade (27th Oct. 1918), they decided to join
lands with the liberals. Along with the liberals and non-
Brahmans, untouchables made efforts to outlit the claims
of the Nationalists that they were representing the entire
country consisting of caste-Hindus and untouchable. Thus
Shindes ideal of National unity was shattered by the folly
of the Nationalists and untouchables leader like S. J.
Kamble who joined with V.R.Kothari to consider the policy
of the Government towards the mangs who suffered disabilities
due to their having been stamped as a criminal tribe, Lord
Willington showed readiness to establish a seperate colony
of mangs in which they would flourish as an agricultural
community.¹¹

By 1916, the Central Government as well showed
interest in the elevation of the untouchables. The Central

Government admitted the resolution of uplift of untouchables presented by Dadibhog of Nagpur in the Imperial Legislative Council in Delhi on 15th March 1916. Shinde by now a recognised authority on the problem of untouchables, was requested to send his recommendations as to what measures the Central Government should adopt for the improvement of untouchables. Shinde sent his report and recommendations to the Government of India,¹² and there were afterward published in the form of booklet, "Views and suggestions to the Government of India". Shinde recommended that the Government should required private and Government schools to grant admission to the untouchables students without any restriction so that they would get education of the same standard as that of the students from caste-society. Hostels for untouchables student to train them in a culture of higher order should be opened, large number of scholarships should be made available to the students from untouchable classes, taking education in training colleges and other higher education institutions, and the scholarships should be properly notified. In addition to Industrial training provision should be made for getting them employed as apprentices in factories, their recruitment in the army should be again started. However, there recommendations could not

materialize at that time as Dadabhoy was required to withdraw his resolution because Surendranath Banerjee and Pandit Malaviya opposed the Government as unduly interfering with the domestic problem of Hindu Society. They considered the problem of untouchables as a socio-religious problem, and insisted that it should be solved by Hindus themselves.¹³

For almost 10 years since the inception of the Depressed classes mission society Shinde organised the conferance of the Depressed classes along with the seasions of the Indian National Congress, and requested the prominent leaders of the congress, to take up the problem of untouchability as a national problem. But all of them brushed it aside as a socio-religious problem unconnected with politics. In spite of this disappointment Shinde urged the untouchables to cultivate the spirit of patriotism in them.¹⁴

The non-Brahman leaders Kothari, Annasaheb Latthe, Bhaskarrao Jadhav and others organized " The Deccan Rayat Sabha" and also started the weekly 'Jagruk' for protecting the political interests of the non-Brahamans and untouchables.¹⁵ V. R. Kothari soon won over Shivram Janaba Kamble, the President of Somavamshiya mitra Samaj to the Deccan Rayat Sabha.

Shinde organised 'Akhil Bharatiya Asprishyata Niwarak Parishad', on 22nd 23rd and 24th March, 1918. The Conference aimed at the removal of untouchability from public and personal life. The conference was attempted by prominent political leaders such as Jayakar, M. R., Bipinchandra Pal, C. V. Mehta, V. I. Patel, S. A. Belavi, R. G. Pradhan, other. It was Presided over by Sayajirao Maharaj Gaikwad, M. R. Jaykar initiated the resolution of removing untouchability in public life, and opening temples, tanks and wells to the untouchables, and - requesting the Shankaracharya to issue ordinances to remove the religious disabilities of the untouchables.

SHINDE'S CONTRIBUTION :

Thus, Shinde brought about a peaceful social reform of untouchables between 1906 and 1917. He took inspiration from the indigenous saints and the western concept of Liberal Religion and started Depressed classes mission society of India in 1906 for the elevation of the untouchables in India under the auspices of the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay. Gradually, he transplanted the mission to a bigger All India level, and in 1908. Opened its membership to any worker Indian or foreign

who felt interested in this work. Shinde's research in the origin and problem of untouchability, and his persuasive and powerful speeches and writings convinced the intelligentsia of the injustice and inhumanity of the practice of untouchability. The mission aimed at abolition of untouchability by abolition of caste-system; and this was to be achieved by intimate association of the members of caste society with the members of untouchable castes. He abolished caste distinctions among the untouchables who came in contact with the Depressed classes mission society, with careful planning of the program of service to women, men and children catering to the needs of their educational cultural, and economic needs and associating untouchables and caste society people together.

The Government of Bombay issued the ordinances that scheduled class students should not be debarred from admission to municipal schools and Government schools on account of their untouchability. Special grants were issued to their hostels and their schools started getting the benefit of grant in aid. The Governor showed consideration even in removing the brand of criminality on the Mangs. The government of India sought recommendations from V. R. Shinde as to what measures should be

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adopted for the reform of untouchables on the administrative level and consequently in 1917 opened recruitment in Indian army for untouchables.

Shinde had as we had seen earlier, started schools for admitting both caste-society students and untouchable students together. He also emphasised importance of inter-caste marriage. His ultimate aim was to create casteless society.¹⁶

Shinde believed that the uplift of the untouchables was to be all sided-social, economic, cultural and political. The development of these aspects much be simultaneous. This development, Shinde believed, was along drawn process - which could not be achieved by momentary fits. Neither legislation, nor conversion or purification nor education and employment alone, was going to cure the age-long disease of untouchability. The quick conversion of the untouchables on large scale by christians or by the Muslims, or the purification by Arya Samajists or the conversion to Buddhism by Ambedkar was not fruitful as they were not accompanied by well planned constructive programme and persistent efforts for their social and cultural education, efforts for their economic uplift, efforts for their self-help

and for their social and cultural education, effort, for their economic uplift, effort for their self-help and for their unconditional acceptance by the caste-society.

Shinde's effort for reform of untouchables were first initiated in the urban areas, and it achieved success there due to the new cultural of Industrial Revolution.

Karmveer V. R. Shinde, a philosopher of Liberal Religion, a social reformer who spent the best years of his life in the cause of the Depressed Classes, a great - economist who saved the poor peasants from complete annihilation, a great worker of national integration, an educationalist and supporter of the cause of liberation of women died on 22nd January, 1944.

Tarkatirtha Laxmanshastri Joshi says :-

" V. R. Shinde was very well aware of the inseparable connection between social, religious and political reform. The hierarchical caste-system that makes distinction between one individual and another and one caste and another caste is based on Hindu religion. India will not achieve real social reform unless one accepts the liberal religion which transgresses the limitation of caste system established by Hindu religion. Hinduism,

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Islam and Christianity are religions which are imprisoned in their scriptures. It is only the liberal religion that will release society from these bondages of blind faith. It is only the Liberal World religion that will slacken the tight grip of these separatist religions. Shinde concentrated on his auspicious religion that will achieve welfare of the world.. Shinde started his career with this world religion, and going further to social reform, social service, he completed his life's mission with National resurgence ".¹⁷

Thus, in brief, Karmveer V. R. Shinde was a saint in every sense of the term. The mission of his life was service to God through service to his fellow-beings without any distinction of caste, creed, language, nation or any other. He , in his spirit, belonged to the category of Universal Men. He will no doubt be long remembered for his service rendered to the upliftment of untouchables.

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