

CHAPTER - III

MAHATMA JOTIRAO PHOOLEY : FATHER OF OUR SOCIAL REVOLUTION

The first man who spent his whole life for the liberation of untouchables in India was Mahatma Jotirao Phooley (1827 - 1890) who was regarded as the First Social Reformer of Modern India. Phooley believed in acting what he preached. Though not so learned as the others named above, he was fearless in following his convictions. He led a violent attack on the Hindu Society, and especially Brahmanism, which to serve its selfish ends, had created and perpetuated ignorance and inequality. He was the first to open a school for the untouchables, to allow them to draw water from his own well, and to treat them as human beings. He advocated widow-remarriages and led a vigorous movement against the barbarous custom of shaving off the heads of widows. He founded a house for the orphans, and babies begotten out of wedlock. He fought for the rights, equality and justice for the oppressed common man and wrote many books to propagate his view point. He founded 'Satyashodhak Samaj' in 1873, an association which believed in equality of men and sexes.

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE :

Jotirao Phooley was born in Poona in 1827 in Mali family. His father Govindrao Phooley was a gardner, flower merchant in Poona and used to visit Shaniwarwada to supply garlands of flowers to the Peshwas. This Govindrao, the father of Jotirao, worked hard on the farm in the neighbouring village, set up a green-grocery at Poona to sell the product of that soil, and improved his position. Sure of his stability now, he continued his flower-shop in Poona and was content to lead a peaceful life. He married a Mali girl named Chinnabai, who was a daughter of Mr. Lagade Patil of the Kavadi village near Poona.

Chinnabai gave birth to two sons. The elder was Rajaram. The younger was Joti, who was born in 1827. He was named Joti, which means a flame.¹

Joti's father Govindrao had seen the declining glory of Maratha rule. Poona had lost its prestige and power, and the Brahmins were reduced to utter degradation. The Maratha Empire long worn out by the disease of - deeprooted caste jealousies and dissensions, and overpowered by the superiority of British power, ultimately

collapsed under the pressure of Wily diplomacy and the conquiring spirit of the empire-builders of England.

EDUCATION :

Jotirao received his initial education in a mission school and then was temporarily withdrawn in 1833, because of the suggestion by Govindrao's clerk that education was useless for a non-Brahmin. In his formative years, the Poona city's atmosphere of mutual suspicion and jealousy between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins influenced his mind. He also personally had bitter experiences of caste ridden society and of Brahmin domination. He had to tolerate the insulting treatment given to him by his Brahmin-classmates. Missionary teachings of equality and universal brotherhood of mankind. On the hand, and the most inhuman and cruel discrimination based upon caste distinction in the Hindu society on the other, led him to self-thinking.²

MARRIAGE INCIDENT AND

THE BANNER OF REVOLT UNFURLED :-

Joti was not a path-follower, he was a path-finder. An incident in 1848, however, decisively turned Phooley into a social revolutionnary. He was invited

to one of his Brahmin friends' marriage. But some of the orthodox and arrogant Brahmins insulted him by calling him a shudra and by asking him to quite. Jotirao could not bear this insult. He became restless. He wanted to know the roots of the caste discrimination and the inhuman institution of untouchability. He started reading extensively the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, the Manu Samhita, the Puranas etc. In addition he read the literature of the Medieval saints of the Bhakti cult like Tukaram Gatha, Dnyaneshwari and other texts of the Bhagwat Sect. He also read the writings and literature by such reformers as Gautam Buddha, Saint Basweshwar and Tirthankar.³

The taint of social inferiority proved a specific source of several of his later drives. These was a new awakening, with this awakening, the struggle of truth against untruth, of justice against injustice began. Having formulated a philosophy and a programme. Joti put on a rebel's robe. Joti felt convinced that social slavery was worse than political slavery. Jot said to himself that he was well-educated; he knew what was good and what was evil. He belonged to the religion to which

...42/-

Brahmins belonged. In order to annihilate Brahminism that condemned the non-Brahmins to perpetual subordination and humiliation, he ruminated, heredity as the basis of society must be discarded.⁴

JOTIBA'S WRITINGS - THOUGHTS :

For the propagation of his views, Jotiba wrote books and ballads. His books, Brahmananche Kasab (1869), Gulamgiri (1873), Shetkaryancha Asud (1883), Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak (1891), Ishara (1885), and ballads like Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Bhosale yancha Powada (1869), and Akhandadi Kavyarachana. Forcefully present his views against the supremacy of the Brahmins. He also started two periodicals namely, Satsar (1855), and Dinbandhu (1877) Editor - Krishnarao Bhalekar. Jotiba's vigour, industry and compassion for all down-trodden. People can easily be seen through his writings. In all that he penned, the burden of the song is the same. viz., the pitiable conditions of the lower castes Jotiba held Brahmins responsible for this plight of the lower castes. Jotiba further argued that Brahmins were not the aborigines of India.⁵ They were conquerers who come from outside and established their dominance in India. The original population of India was dubbed as shudras by the Brahmins and in order to keep these shudras under the perpetual

slavery, the Brahmins wrote religious texts in which they culogised themselves.⁶ The laws, which they formulated for the shudras were nothing but a mass of special fiction, invented with a view to hold the original occupiers of the soil fast in their clutches.⁷ The minds of the Shudras were thus enslaved by the Brahmins. The legends like that of conflicts between Bali and Vaman the story about Pershurama's destroying of Kshatriyas for twenty one times indicated some allegoric meaning to Jotiba.⁸ To him they indicated the conflict between the progenitors of Brahmins and the indigenous people, who were the fore-fathers of the present Shudras., with the help of these interpretation Jotiba tried to prove that the Brahmins has done away with Kshatriya's resistance in very cruel manner and thereafter they i.e. Brahmins have kept the non-Brahmins castes under permanent servitude.

Apart from the historic interpretations as above, Jotiba also drew the attention of his readers to the predominance of Brahmins during the British rule. The Brahmin officials of the British Government were not at all sympathetic to the non-Brahmin castes. On the contrary they tried to extract money from them unlawfully and managed to deceive the Government with their usual tactics.⁹

The Brahmin as priests, took undue advantage of the ignorance of the farmers and earned livelihood for themselves. They (the Brahmins) compelled the ignorant farmers to perform many rituals which were meaningless but at the same time advantages to Brahmins.

He was further aware of the fact that the Brahmins did not impart proper education to the Shudra children because their interest were best served by keeping them ignorant. Therefore, Jotiba urged the foreign Government that the Brahmin school masters should not be appointed in the villages as primary school teachers.¹⁰ He, further, suggested that the Government should request schotch missionaries and English people to stay in the villages and make the true reports to the Government, so that the Brahmins will not get chances to Misrepresent the facts.¹¹

Jotirao was very rational in his approach and as such he ridiculed the ritualism, which was according to him only means to keep the non-Brahmin castes under thumb and also to extract money from them under the pretext of rituals.¹²

Liberty, equality and fraternity was the burden of every book that Jotiba wrote. It was a great achievement for him to recapture the God given rights of every human being who had been deprived of them.¹³ Because he held this view, Jotiba dedicated his book 'Gulamgiri' to the American 'Good people', as a token of administration for their sublime and disinterested and self sacrificing devotion in the cause of abolition of Negro slavery and requested his countrymen to emulate their example, by emancipating their shudra brother from the 'trammels of Brahmin throidom'.¹⁴

Jotiba tried to infuse deep respect in the non Brahmin castes by depicting the ancient glory of these castes and fearlessly styled himself as ornament of lower class¹⁵ kulwadibhushan . At the same time Jotiba used reproachful language while talking about the Brahmins. For example, he called them selfish, heartless, tyrants.¹⁶ But the other side of his thought can be seen in his book 'Sarvajanic Satyadharma'. In this book he proclaimed and preached universalism, where in all persons would be treated as equals and not even the barriers, of national boundaries and religious differences would be considered.¹⁷ As in pointed out by

Shri. Laxmanshastri Joshi, in this book we see Jotiba's faith in equal human rights, universalism and rationalism, the qualities which he adopted from his contemporary western culture.¹⁸ A close scrutiny of Jotiba's thoughts reveal that he was also a forerunner of 'democratic - socialism in India.¹⁹

To make the arguments in favour of down-trodden castes ^vstronger Jotiba censured many of his contemporary institutions like Dakshina Prize Committee,²⁰ sarvajanik sabha (1870), Kalyanonnayan Sabha (1854), Poona association (1867), Deccan Association (1853), as Brahmin dominated institution.²¹ Not only that, he wrote scornfully about Indian National Congress (1885), which was an institution interested in the uplift of higher classes only.²² Jotiba felt that unless and until the lower class people like Bhills and Kolis get education and be prepared to part take in the national congress, it cannot be said to have been 'National in true sense of the term.

Politically, Jotiba was of the opinion that British Raj for protection of the lower classes.²³ Therefore, whatever was designed to challenge the British dominance in India, Jotiba condemned it,²⁴ at several places in his

writings. He condemned the 1857 mutiny and denounced Nanasaheb Peshwa, the leader of the mutiny, for his cruel deeds.²⁵

The organisational culmination of Jotiba's thought was the creation of Satyashodhak Samaj.

SATYA-SHODHAK SAMAJ :

Jotirao Phule, a reformer became a Social revolutionary 1873 was the crucial year, both - ideologically and organisationally. It saw the publication of Phule's major book Gulamgiri "Slavery" and the founding of the Satyashodhak Samaj. The challenge to caste and Brahmanism was now in the open and increasingly bitter and it was to this cause the Phule devoted his efforts until his death. From 1873 he worked to organize the Samaj, primarily at first in Poona and in Bombay, where it received important support from a group of Telugu Mali contractors.

It is interesting to see how Jotiba Phule founded his Satya Shodhak Samaj in Poona first and its branches were started elsewhere in Maharashtra later on by his followers.

Having written a book entitled Gulamgiri 'Slavery' addressed to the lower classes. Jotirao resolved now to launch a movement in Maharashtra for their liberation from Brahmin thralldom. A revolutionary leader like Jotirao required an institution, an authoritative credo and a platform for the propagation of his ideals.

Jotirao impressed upon their mind that their slavery was not inborn, in-separable and preordained or a divine dispensation as described in the Brahmanic scriptures. Awakening self respect in the peasants and toiling masses, he infused courage in them to stand up against the poverty and social injustice and against the oppressive, unjust and inhuman Hindu priestcraft and the caste system.

Jotirao wanted now to organise his followers and workers, so that they might assimilate his rational ideas and bring them into effect.

So he decided to set up an organisation to preach his ideology. Accordingly, Jotirao convened on - September 24, 1873, a meeting of all his admirers and disciples at Poona.²⁶ About sixty men from many important

centres of Maharashtra assembled. Jotirao made an impressive introductory speech and impressed upon his followers the necessity of a central institution for the guidance of the movement. After some discussion and several other speeches it was agreed to form an institution. Jotirao named this institution Satyashodhak Samaj - Truth-seeking Society.

Jotirao was elected first President and Treasurer of the Satya Shodhak Samaj and Mr. Narayanrao Govindrao Kadalak was elected its first Secretary.

Thus Satya Shodhak Samaj (Truth-seeking Society) was founded by Jotiba Phule at Poona on September 24, 1873. The objects of the Samaj were to redeem the Shudras and Atishudras from the influence of Brahminical scriptures under which the Brahmin priests fleeced them, and to teach them their human rights, and to liberate them from mental, religious slavery.²⁷

The teaching of the Samaj was :-

- a) All men are the children of one God, who is thus their Parent.
- b) As there is no necessity of an intermediary to approach the mother or to please the father there is

no need, of an intermediary such as a priest or a preceptor to enable the devotee to offer his prayers to God.

c) Anyone accepting that principle is qualified to be a member of the Satya Shodhak Samaj.²⁸

The main attack of the Samajists in this was upon the caste system and idol worship.

Jotiba's thoughts volcanic as they were, challenged by other. Chiplunkar Vishnushastri wrote in a very scornful style about Jotiba. He did not take Jotiba's findings in his books seriously and commented that in a 'book of about hundred pages, he (Jotiba) has squeezed history of thousands of years.²⁹ Jotiba's allegiance to British Raj and his thinking which appeared to anti-traditional and pro-christians had been ridiculed by Vishnushastri.

But in appraising Jotiba's thought we can state that, Jotiba's contribution to development of social thought in Maharashtra is unique, especially in the field of revolt against the social supremacy of the Brahmins in Modern India.

Phooley should be considered as a great leader of little tradition in Maharashtra. It was characterised by the search for the identity of Shudras in the neglected and exploited people.³⁰

Equality was his passion. Caste distinctions create and nurse inequality and so such distinctions has no place in Phooley's new religion. His religion was essentially a humanist faith. There was equality for all.

Jotirao was the first Indian leader to start a movement for the removal of the social and economic ills of the lower classes who were starved, stunted and suffering untold privations. He gave vent to their age-long rage and grief. His movement aimed at establishing social equality and securing social justice. He struggled for the dignity of human personality and human rights, as he considered all Indian equal. His movement was thus a part of the social revolution that had been started all over India. Jotirao started with the education of the lower classes, for it was his belief that life could not be lived satisfactorily without the means to live a full life, and he believed that education was one of the chief means for opening the gateway to a full and satisfying life.

Jotirao put his combative genius into his work. He sublimated his vitality to remould a stagnant society and devoted his talents to preaching radical reforms in the character and pattern of the people. His movement disturbed the stagnation in Maharashtra.

Jotirao gave up his life to the service of the lower classes. His followers worshipped him.

Jotirao was pre-eminently a patriot of humanity. Like all really great men, he was a universal man. He stood for human rights, justice, peace and prosperity, and not for power. He wanted a religion which recognised social equality.

Thus in brief Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1827 - 1890) was the most remarkable social reformer of Modern India who believed in acting what he preached. He was fearless in following his convictions. He led a violent attack on the Hindu society and especially Brahmanism, which to serve its selfish ends, had created and perpetuated ignorance and inequality. He was the first to open a school for the untouchables, to allow them to draw water from his own well and to treat them as human beings. He advocated widow remarriages, and led

a vigorous movement against the barbarous custom of shaving off the heads of widows. He founded a house for the orphans and babies begotten out of wedlock.

He fought for the rights, equality and justice for the oppressed common man and wrote many books to propagate his view point. He founded 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' in 1873, an association which believed in equality of men and sexes.³¹

Jotirao was pre-eminently a patriot of humanity. Like all really great men, he was a universal man. He stood for human rights, justice, peace and prosperity and not for power. He wanted a religion which - recognised social equality. Therefore, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is regarded as the father of our Social Revolution.

.

R E F E R E N C E S

1. Dhananjay Keer : Mahatma Jotirao Phooley -
Father of our Social Revolution, P.3.
2. Keer and Malshe : Samagra Wangmaya, P.145.
3. J. R. Shinde : Dynamics of Cultural Revolution
19th Century Maharashtra, P.53.
4. Keer : op.cit., P.19.
5. Vide : Malshe and Keer : Mahatma Phooley -
Samagra Vangmaya, P.71.
6. See; Ibid; P.75.
7. Ibid; P.76.
8. Ibid; 100-123.
9. Keer's biography of Phooley, PP. 90-92.
10. Jotirao Phooley : Gulamgiri, 1873,P.128.
11. Ibid; (Gulamgiri) P.128.
12. Ibid (Shetkaryancha Asud) , PP. 195-201.
13. Vide: Keer Dhananjay : op.cit., P.111.

14. See : Malshe and Keer : op.cit., Dedication to Jotiba's book Gulamgiri, P.68.
15. Ibid: Shivajicha Pawada, P.9.
16. Ibid: Gulamgiri, P.77.
17. Vide : Malshe and Keer : op.cit., (Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak), P.353.
18. Ibid; Preface, P.VII.
19. Ibid; Preface, P.VIII.
20. See : Keer Dhananjay : op.cit., P.73.
21. Ibid; PP.107-108.
22. Vide : Keer Dhananjay : op.cit., PP.219-221.
23. See : Malshe and Keer : op.cit., (Chh.Shivaji Raje Bhosale Yancha) P.38
24. See: His opinion about Vasudeo Balvant Phadke;
Ibid; P.230 (Shetkaryacha Asud).
25. Ibid; 'Satsar; No.2, PP.303-304.
26. D. Keer : op.cit., P.126.

27. D.Keer : op.cit., P.126.
28. Ibid.
29. See : Sathe,V.V. (Ed.) : op.cit., PP.447-448.
30. J. R. Shinde : Dynamics of cultural
Revolution 19th Century Maharashtra 1985.P.156.
31. Ibid : op.cit., P. 157.

.