

CHAPTER - I :-

INTRODUCTION

- 1) The Role of Jotiba Phuley in Political Modernization of Maharashtra.
- 2) A brief Biographical sketch of Mahatma Phuley.
- 3) Jotiba and Satyashodhak Samaj.
- 4) Purpose of the Study.

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CHAPTER - I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Mahatma Jotiba Phuley is one of the greatest social reformers who waged relentless struggle for social transformation in Maharashtra. He was somewhat different from other social reformers of his time because he wanted to expound the cause of the downtrodden sections of the society. He wanted to create a sense of responsibility in the minds of newly educated people from non-Brahmin communities of Maharashtra. He strove for the establishment of just society in India.

The importance of Jotirao Phuley lays in the fact that he correctly understood the problems of the Maharashtra in 19th century and tried to suggest new framework for their social and political advancement. It must be understood that every great human being is limited by time and space. A thinker becomes important to the society when his ideas are useful to it. Prof. Sardar rightly says, "The ideas which are born due to the need of time become relevant to the society and society uses these ideas for its development."¹ Mahatma Phuley's ideas were relevant and useful to the non-Brahmin communities of Maharashtra, therefore, there was a succession to radical social movements which took inspiration from the ideology of Jotiba Phuley.

1) THE ROLE OF JOTIBA PHULEY IN POLITICAL MODERNIZATION OF MAHARASHTRA :

Jotirao Phuley played a very important role in Political

modernization of Maharashtra because he was a thinker who put down a blue-print of the future development of Maharashtra. He was the most important leader of democratic movement in Maharashtra because he represented non-Brahmin communities that constituted 95 percent of total population. Jotirao wanted to destroy the feudal order represented by "Peshavai" in Maharashtra. He also wanted the liberation of Shudras, Atishudras and Women from their slavery. He represented a modern period when equality between man and man was considered as the most important principle. In modern industrial society considerations of castes and clans gave way to individual as the most important unit of social thought. The modernization of a society requires several new steps like secular education industrialisation, equality between man and women, female education literacy, and emancipation of downtrodden sections of the society, from their misery. Jotirao fought throughout his life for, female education, universal education, agricultural reforms, equal opportunity to all and mental freedom to most of the people from religious superstition- For that purpose he launched a scathing attack on Hindu religion and the Hindu Social order. He was of the opinion that unless Hindu feudal social structure dominated by selfish Brahmins is destroyed there can not be the regeneration of India. Jotiba not only preached these ideas but he also practiced them.

Education plays a very important role in modernization of a country. Jotiba realized the importance of education and opened schools for women and untouchables. Because of his

contribution in the education field he was described by education commission appointed by the Government as "a benevolent person who has devoted his life to the work of education.³ Education played a very important role in the political strategy of phuley because modern education could only give birth to new educated middle class from the non-Brahmin communities in Maharashtra. This middle class would ultimately destroy the Brahmin dominance and establish a just society. It was also useful in securing Government jobs. Phuley was confident that his satyashodhak ideology would attract thousands of non-Brahmin educated young men and they would carry forward this movement of social change.

After the death of Jotirao Phuley Satyashodhak movement and Satyashodhak ideology continued to grow throughout Maharashtra, because the process of democratization was incomplete. The followers of Phuley followed his principles of opposition to Brahmin dominance and waged relentless struggle to end it. They were successful in doing so by 1960, when political dominance of Brahmins was ended and educational dominance of Brahmins was seriously challenged. The society also accepted some of the principles of modernization,. Therefore, there was secular and universal education, co-education and female education, secularization of life and agricultural development. It can not be said that all the dreams of Jotirao Phuley are realized but it can not be denied that Maharashtra is marching on the path of modernization.

Jotirao fought for political modernization in the sense that he wanted equal political opportunity to all the people, that is all the people should have capacity and facility to compete for political jobs. He did not consider that democracy an ideal democracy where one caste or community dominates politics. Now in Maharashtra different communities are playing important roles in the political life of the state. Those political leaders who were either associated with Satyashodhak movement or were influenced by Satyashodhak ideology became the Chief Ministers or important cabinet ministers after 1960. It is true that these leaders have sometimes played caste politics by misusing the name of Phuley but it can not be denied that they helped the development of democratic process in Maharashtra.

Phuley put forward certain progressive ideas and he thought that by implementing these ideas, The process of democratization would develop some of these ideas were converted in to Government policies by the followers of Phuley when they came to power. Phuley talked about universal education. Now primary education is almost free in Maharashtra. He suggested wideranging measure to improve, the conditions of peasants. some of his measures are implemented by the Government for example Government has established agricultural schools, encouraged farmers to use fertilizers, constructed dams, tanks, and canals for the irrigation purposes, undertook soil conservation programme, held competitions and attempted to provide better seeds and catles to the peasants. Some of the

agricultural products like cotton are protected by Government by implementing monopoly cotton procurements scheme.⁴ The Government also encourages female education and it has undertaken a programme to uplift backward classes of the society for that purpose the Government has followed the policy of job reservation which was suggested by Phuley.

Thus, some of the progressive measures, necessary for the modernization of a country were suggested by Phuley and subsequently pursued by the Government of Maharashtra. But these were the short-term measures suggested by Phuley to solve the immediate problems of the people. The real aim of Phuley's thought was the establishment of ideal society (kingdom of the creator) which would be classless, casteless, raceless, and stateless. In this idea state all religions would be equally respected and the dignity of human labour would be maintained. This revolutionary ideology is not yet implemented.

2) A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAHATMA PHULEY :

Jotirao Phuley was born at Pune in 1827, in the gardeners caste. He took his school education in the Scottish Mission School. English education played a very important role in the life of Jotirao, in the sense that Jotirao could look at Hindu religion from a rational point of view. While discussing religious matters with Christian Fathers Jotirao came to know about several new things regarding Christianity and Islam. Throughout his life, Jotirao remained religious though he did not believe in any particular existing religion like Christianity

or Hinduism. He believed in universal religion which was based upon principles of justice, equality and liberty.

In his young days Jotiba keenly observed different customs, traditions and ritual practices of the people. He had visited Hindu religious centres and temples like Pandharpur, Jejuri and Nasik, He read several books on different religious reforms like Martin Luther, Calvin and Layolla.⁵ He was greatly influenced by the ideas of American Philosopher Thomas Paine. He read Paine's book like, "Rights of man" "Justice and humanity" and "Common sense".⁶ He was greatly influenced by a book "Rights of man", which supports the cause of individual liberty, freedom, opposition to slavery and respecting dignity of human beings were the three cardinal principles which he borrowed from Thomas Paine. Jotirao was a keen student of Indian History and literature and he tried to give his own interpretation of Indian History. In his book "Slavery" he imbibed the principle of critical rationalism from the European Scholars.⁷

In his very young days Jotirao hated the British Government and wanted to overthrow it. He later on admitted that he used to go to gymnasium to acquire power and he learnt some techniques of sabre ~~fa~~ fighting from his teacher. At that time he was greatly influenced by his Brahmin friends like Bapu Khare, Chimnaji Jadhav. But slowly Jotiba realized that Brahmins wanted to overthrow British Government because they were severely hit by the fall of Peshava rule. It was not necessary for him to join their anti-Government activities because they want to reestablish the Peshvai.

Jotiba entered the public life in the year 1848. It was the momentous year as at that time Karl Marx's "Communist Manifesto" was released. In America an earnest movement was started for the emancipation of women and there was third French revolution. The first women's right convention was held in 1848 at the Wesleyan Church in Seneca fall, New York. Phuley established a school to impart education to women and untouchables. He was spending a lot for it from his own pocket and from donations made by his friends and admirers. In May 1852 he gave it a broader base by forming a society for promoting the education of Mahara's and Manga's under the Chairmanship Sadashivarao Govande, his friend who had been in Government Service.

Jotiba tried to take up the cause of racial reforms of the upper caste women when he advocated the widow remarriages and opposed the practice of shaving the heads of Brahmin widows. He opened the orphanage for discarded children and ran a nursing home to help Brahmin widows caught in difficult situation.

The work Jotiba was constructive as well as aggressive. During this period he established new institutions and also attacked the Brahminism. From 1876 to 1882, he was a member of Pune Municipality. He was not against any individual but he hated the haughty and selfish behaviour of Brahmins. It may be noted that there were few Brahmin friends of Jotiba and he received ungrudging support and encouragement from them.

According to V.R. Shinde Satyashodhak Samaj was not against Brahmins but it was against Brahmin Priest Craft.⁸ Jotiba gradually expanded the activities and a part from this educational work, he decided to organize shudras and Atishudras of the country to fight Brahminical tyranny. He was ably supported in this all activities by his wife Savitribai who came out of her traditional occupation and stood by her husband in the most difficult period.

Jotirao was a main theoretician of Satyashodhak Samaj and he was uncompromising in his opposition to caste system and Brahmanism. Due to this and after personal reasons, he quarrelled with Bhalekar who was instrumental in taking the movement to different parts of Maharashtra. Phuley throughout his life fought for the advancement of non-Brahmin backward peasant communities in Maharashtra. He passed away in 1890 but left behind his ideology in the form of his books and an association in the form of Satyashodhak Samaj.

3) JOTIBA AND SATYASHODHAK SAMAJ :

Jotiba needed an association and a platform for the propagation of his ideals. He wanted followers and workers so that they would propagate his rational ideals among the people . To spread and propagate his ideas effectively, he established Satyashodhak Samaj at Pune on 24 Sept. 1873.⁹ The Samaj was of the view that it is not possible to make people conscious of their rights without education. Therefore, education should be given to all people so that the aim of

Samaj liberation of shudras atishudras and women from the slavery of Brahmins could be achieved. The Satyashodhak Samaj started newspaper 'Dinbandhu' in 1877. For spreading the ideas of Phuley among the people¹⁰ Samaj was the first organizational attempt to fight Brahminism. Phuley was ably supported his friends like Lokhande, Mhaske, Ghole and Bhalekar. But he was the main theoretician of the Satyashodhak Samaj.

The aim of Samaj was to improve the conditions of peasants who were exploited by people. Also it was interested in promoting education among backward classes and women. It opposed varna system and polytheism and declared that he was an agent in the form of a priest between human beings and God. Satyashodhak Samaj wanted to free people from religious superstitions and the evil Brahminical influence.

Phuley wrote several articles and books to propagate his ideals. He used both prose and poetry to attack Brahmins. Sometimes he used various forms of folk literature. He was quite bitter and aggressive in this opposition to Brahmin dominance and Brahmin ideology. He advocated the cause of Indian cultivators and told the visiting British Prince that real India lived in the slum of a peasant. He put up a big statue of peasant at the place of the congress session to impress upon the fact that the peasant was the true representative of India.

In 1873, Jotirao Phuley turned his concentration from education for the most oppressed groups of untouchables, and

women to organize the masses of middle and low-caste Non-Brahmins to launch a frontal attack on Brahminism.¹¹

Satyashodhak Samaj was a democratic movement of the oppressed classes of the society. Some of castes afterwards emerged as the dominant castes but at that time they were backward and impoverished. Therefore, the Satyashodhak Samaj belonged to a continuous movement of protest that attacks tradition such as Buddhism and Bhakti movement.

As a social religious reform organization the Satyashodhak Samaj bears a comparison with other, more famous Samajas the Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj with which it shared a secular and rationalistic approach and the Arya Samaj with which it shared a mass base and opposition to the Caste System. It is true that the Satyashodhak Samaj was limited to Marathi-speaking areas and did not spread outside Maharashtra, it might be described as a regional organization.

Despite the regional character of Samaj, Phuley was supported by a large number of Non-Maharashtrians. For example, one letter of Madras well wisher is published 'Dinbandhu' on 11st September, 1896, he would gladly translate Satyashodhak literature into Telgu and Tamil.¹²² At that time there were Telgu followers and friend of Jotiba. Ramkrishna Sayana Motadu, Polas Rajana Lingu, Jaya Yalappa Lingu, Jaya Karadi Lingu, N. S. Wadnal. Raju Babaji Lamage, a friend of Jotiba, he had helped the Satyashodhak Samaj and also other

contractors from Kamathipura.¹³

Phuley's followers Bhalekar and Lokhande played a very important role in the Satyashodhak movement. Bhalekar was instrumental in starting newspaper as well as spreading the ideology of Samaj in different areas of Maharashtra. His role cannot be minimised¹⁴. Other leader was Lokhande, who worked in the City of Bombay. Lokhande played a very important role by establishing trade unions in Bombay. Thus, Satyashodhak Samaj movement was instrumental in starting a trade union movement in Maharashtra.¹⁵

In terms of organizational growth we can distinguish four phases of the movement.¹⁶

- 1) In the first phase (1873 to 1890) it took roots in cities of Pune, Bombay region.
- 2) In the second phase (1890 to 1910) it was taken to Kolhapur, Belgaum and Vidarbha districts.
- 3) In the third phase (1911 to 1919) Samaj became influential in some of the districts of Nagpur and Marathwada region.
- 4) In the fourth and last phase (1919 to 1930) Samaj played an important role in Non-Brahmin movement and ultimately in 1930 most of its important leaders joined the National movement led by Mahatma Gandhi.

Satyashodhak Samaj had begun its social activities

with opening of schools for untouchables and women. During its initial period it was not supported by the aristocratic and feudal Non-Brahmin element. But it was gaining ground among middle classes and peasants who realised that education and social reforms were necessary for their salvation. The movement was supported by the contractors and businessmen who were oppressed by Brahmin bureaucracy. Due to such a wide support the Samaj became quiet a mass based movement.

While describing Phuley's movement as a cultural revolt. Dr. Gail Omvedt pointed out that the main principle of Satyashodhak propaganda was the deplorable conditions of lower classes in Verna System and miserable condition of peasants in a colonial economy. The Samaj tried to spread its movement on the basis of these ideas. She says that Marutirao Navle put forward following four principles of Samaj :

- 1) The Samaj tried to fight caste and communal prejudices.
- 2) Established schools and hostels.
- 3) Engouraged love marriages and simple marriages.
- 4) Opposed evil practices of Brahmins.

The opponents of Satyashodhak charged the Samaj that it simply sought replace Brahmin priests by their own priests and predicted the rise of a new privileged class. It is the opinion of Dr. Gail Omvedt, "the tendency was indeed - exemplified when the Maharaja of Kolhapur set up the 'Ksatrajagadguru' in 1920,¹⁷ but it was a move resisted by most

Satyashodhakas including several Maratha ones. But it cannot be forgotten that it was Shahu Maharaja who represented second revival of Samaj and followed some of the policies of Phuley vigorously.

Mahatma Phuley was a guide and philosopher of Satyashodhak Samaj and in different phases of its existence, the Samaj tried to take forward the movement social advancement. The Samaj represented a radical ideology which was based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity and it vigorously attacked the feudal nature of the Brahmanical orthodoxy.

4) PURPOSE OF THE STUDY :

Jotirao attacked the old Hindu feudal society directly and British colonial system indirectly for impoverishing the Indian cultivator. He put forward radical programme of social regeneration. He guided the down-trodden castes in Maharashtra and showed them the way of self-development. In different phases of political development in Maharashtra. Phuley's ideas continued to guide the Maharashtrian people. Though some of the ideas of Phuley were implemented, the caste and communal divisions continued to exist in the society and the expansion of modern education politicized and radicalized hitherto neglected and the most backward sections of society.

Phuley was considered as their teacher by such important leaders as Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil, V. R. Shinde and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who led the social movement of reconstructing in the changed situation he has again become a centre of new - resurgence in Maharashtra as more and more backward classes are coming under the influence of modern education. They are drawing inspiration from the ideology of Phuley, because its main basis was freedom of Shudras, ati-shudras and women from the feudal oppression. It is interesting to note that today Phuley is not supported by those who supported him hundred years ago, but now he is supported by the backward sections of society. Some of them call him their "Marx".

The purpose of the present study is to analyse social and political thought of Jotirao Phuley. It is true that there exist a number of biographies of Phuley and also a large number of articles are written on different aspects of Phuley's social and political ideas, but there exist no work which systematically and coherently deals with his social and political thought. Present work is a humble attempt in that direction.

The method of the present work is content - analysis and the most of the research is done in the Library. Social and political thought of Phuley is analysed through the historical framework.

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