

CHAPTER - III :-

CULTURAL REVOLT BY PHULEY

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CHAPTER - III :-

CULTURAL REVOLT BY PHULEY

Mahatma Jotirao Phuley started his theoretical work by launching an attack on Hindu society and its culture. He was not only opposed to Hindu social values but he also opposed Hindu cultural values as a whole because cultural values shape the minds of the people. This cultural interpretation was used in his movement to sharpen his attack. He opposed Hindu culture and established his own cultural view that was based on the local customs, dieties and tradition of the Marathi People. This cultural view was not based on any ancient Sanskrit or other text but it was based on folk ~~and~~ tradition of Maharashtra. In the present Chapter, we shall study cultural interpretation of Hindu society by Phuley.

1) NATURE OF BRAHMINICAL SLAVERY :

In 1873, Jotirao published a book e.g. "Slavery". "Slavery" connotes a condition of bondage in which human beings are bought and sold, and forced to work without payment.¹ That kind of slavery was abolished in Britain in the year 1833, in Russia 1863 and in America in 1865. Jotiba was the supporter of freedom, therefore, he dedicated this book to the good people of United States as a token of admiration.² He points out that "The day that reduces a man to slavery takes from him the half of his virtue."³ This period was very significant in the history

of Maharashtra as it basically and essentially deals with a very vital aspect of the Maharashtrian life of the period - the cultural.

Jotiba always hated slavery whether it is social, religious or economic. According to Jotirao, "This system of slavery to which the Brahmins reduced the lower classes is in no respect inferior to that which obtained a few years ago in America. In the days of rigid Brahmin dominance, so lately as that of the time of the Peshava, my Shudra brothers even greater hardships and oppression practiced upon them than whatever the slaves in America had to suffer. To this system of selfish superstitions and bigotry, we are to attribute the stagnation and all the evils under which India has been groaning for many centuries past. Shudra and Atishudra has been in fact a - proverbial milch cow. He has passed from hand to hand. The Brahmin had at last so contrived to entwine himself round the Shudra in every large or small undertaking, in every domestic or public business that the latter by custom quiet unable to transact any concern of movement without his aid."⁴ Phuley points out that under the guise of religion the Brahmin had his finger in every thing big or small, which the Shudra has undertaken.

Phuley further pointed out, "Due to superior education and cunning monopolized all the higher places of emoluments, the ingenuity of his ways is past finding out, as the reader will find on an attentive perusal of this book. In the most -

significant village as in the largest town the Brahmin is the all in all, the be all and the end all of the Ryot. He is the master the ruler⁵ Such was the dominance of Brahmins.

Jotiba knew perfectly well that the Brahmin would not descend from this self raised high pedestal and meet his conbee and low caste brothern on an equal footing without a struggle⁶. Therefore, Jotirao Phuley wanted to start a struggle to end the Brahmin slavery and for that purpose he made a historical study of ancient Indias to show that infact Brahmins were foreigners or Iranion Aryans. He continued to use the term Arya for them and interpreted mytns and Puranas of Brahmins from rational point of view⁷

He was of the opinion that the Brahmins were considered earth borne Gods and they fought against Rakashasas who were the original inhabitants of the land. Their leader was the most violent and cruel Pershuram. They waged very protracted wars against the original inhabitants of the land. They succeeded in their war because of their supremacy in the art, of archery and existence of specially trained warrior class - Kshatriyas⁸.

2) LAW AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DOMINANCE :

He made it clear that the Brahmin laws had no exist^ence among the people originally. It was an after creation of their deep cunning is evident from their own writings. He condemned these laws because the highest rights, the highest privileges,

and gifts the everything that would make the life of a Brahmin easy, smooth going and happy were given to them. Everything that would conserve or flatter their self pride was specially inculcated . But as against this the Shudras and Atishudras were regarded with the supreme hatred and contempt and commonest rights of humanity were denied to them. Their touch nay even their shadow was deemed a pollution. While a shudra to kill a Brahmin is considered the most heinous offence, he could commit and the forfeiture of his life is the only punishment his crime is considered to merit.

"The Brahmin is styled the lord of the universe even equal to the God himself he is to be worshipped served and respected all". A Brahmin can do no wrong⁹. To save a life of Brahmin any falsehood may be told. There is no sin in it. The feet of a Brahmin are holy let a Brahmin not give temporal advice nor spiritual counsel to Shudra. If a Shudra cohabit with a Brahmins adultress his life is to be taken. But if a Brahmin goes even into the lawful life of a shudra he is exempted from all corporal punishment.¹⁰ There were hundreds of ordinances of worse character of Brahmins. A Shudra though emancipated by master is not released from state of servitude for being born in a state which is natural to him, by who can he be divested of his natural attributes. Therefore, it can be clearly seen that these Brahminical laws were created to serve their own interests.

Therefore, Phuley pointed out that the history of Brahmin dominance in India and the slavery under which it has

retained the people even up to the present day demanded strongest condemnation because it was the result of heartlessness of Brahmins . The most immoral, in human unjust actions and deeds have been attributed to that being who is our creator, Governor and who is all holiness himself!¹¹.

Jotirao asserted that the vedas were not God, inspired, they were man made. The vedas fomented divisions in society. The theory that the Brahmins sprang from the mounth of Brahma, Kshtriya from his arms, Shudras from his feet. It was a galling and flagrant myth. According to him, Narada stirred up quarrels among the Kshtriyas and make the world safe Brahmins. The condemned him as villain!¹² He condemned 'Manusmruti' as an unholy work which prescribed slavery for the Shudras. He had nothing but praise for the mighty personality of the Budha.¹³

In his book "Slavery" Phuley tried to analyse the Brahmin religious books. He was of the opinion that in these books even the so called Gods were depicted in bad light for example, Lord Brahmadeva the creator world is described in these texts in bad taste.¹⁴ Phule though that discription is stupid fictitious and irrational. It is fabricated to mislead the ignorant superstitious people.

The real cause of miserable conditions of Shudras is in fact slavery that Brahmins imposed on them, which is three fold: Political, Economic and Cultural. It has a long history and it can be reinteprated with the help of their own sacred

books from rational point of view. He subjected Hindu concept of ten incarnations of Vishnu to rational criticism and made it clear that they narrated nothing else but the advance of Aryans in India.

3) REINTERPRETATION OF TEN INCARNATIONS OF VISHNU :

Phuley reinterpreted the Hindu sacred religious literature to show how the invading Aryans had conquered the the indigenous people through force, treachery and use of religious propaganda. Thus it is the opinion of Phuley that Brahmins were foreigners - Iranian Aryans who attacked and conquered our contry. In slavery he tried to reconstruct the ancient Indian history with the help of Brahmanical myth of ten incarnations of God Vishnu. He pointed out these myths could be representing the advance of Brahminism in the country. He discussed story of ten incarnation as follows.

1) Matsya or incarnation of fish - He thinks that the original inhabitant the king of peasants or Kshetrapatis Shankhasur was killed by the Aryans who came via sea and the name of their cruial leader was Matsya.¹⁵

2) Kaccha or tortoise - He thinks that in the second incarnation the Aryans led by Kaccha expanded their territory by defeating and driving away the kings of the local people and enhanced their power.

3) Varah or boar - Varah was the third leader of the Brahmins who defeated the king of peasants - Hiranyaksha who ~~the~~ was the brother of Hiranyakashayapu, while increasing Aryan territory

he brought other peasant Kings under his dominance.¹⁶

4) Narsimha - Narsimha was the fourth leader of the Aryans who was very selfish, cruel, crafty, strong and cunning. He wanted to kill Hiranyakashyapu, who was very powerful. Therefore he followed the policy of cunning and duplicity and sowed seeds of treason in the minds of the young prince Pralhada through a Brahmin teacher. This dirty work was done to create ground for killing his father. Therefore, wicked Narsimha, followed the policy of deception, changed his dress, assumed the form of man - Lion and treacherously killed the King Hiranyakashyapu. But after this treacherous act he was chased away by followers of Kshetrapati and Hiranyakashyapu's son Pralhad became the King. Pralhada realized the nature of cunning and expediency of Brahmins and ably saved his state from them.

5) Vaman - Grandson of Pralhada was Bali who symbolized all good qualities. He was the lord of all land and ruled with remarkable sense of justice. Khandoba, Mhasoba, Bhaviroba who are considered as local deities in Maharashtra were infact the officers in the Government of King Bali. Brahmins ~~xxx~~ under the leadership of a new leader - Waman wanted to capture Balis Kingdom but they knew that he was just and could not be defeated by force. Vaman attacked Bali and following a very treacherous policy defeated him. But he also could not compleety conquer Balis Kingdom as other supporters and followers of Bali came in and drove them away. Banasura was one of the supporters of Bali, but he was treacherously

defeated by Brahmadeva and successfully converted the peasant warriors in to Shudras and Atishudras.

6) Parshuram - After the death of Brahmadeo Parashuram became the leader of Brahmins who was very wicked powerful, cruel and ~~vill~~ vile. He did not hesitate to kill his own mother. He was a very good archer. After the death of Brahma the Kshetrapatis ~~of this land~~ gathered together to free their enslaved brothers. For that purpose, they waged 21 battles against this wicked Parshuram but he defeated them in one and all battles. All the officers of Kshetrapatis like Khandoba, Mhasoba, ran away and took shelter in the hilly areas. Parshuram had exterminated Kshatriyas without showing any mercy and compassion . But in these protracted wars Brahmins also lost their kith and kin. Meanwhile all Kshetrapati got scared of Brahmin, because they thought that Brahmins knew magic and some evil incantation. But Brahmins because of violence and loss wrought by Parshuram slowly deserted him and ultimately he was defeated in the art of archery by a young Kshetrapati of Ayudhya Rama. The wicked Parshuram lost the battle, ran for his life and settled down in Talkonkan and perhaps due to repentance of his evil deeds. Phuley surmises that he might have committed suicide.

After Parshuram Brahmins succeeded in converting the sons of Kshatriyas to their side as is evident from the stories of next two incarnations Rama and Krishna. He criticized 'Ramayana' 'Mahabharata' and 'Bhagavata' for telling lies and for not telling true nature of morality. He did not think that these

false stories could be true for example if Janaki had really lifted the bow of Parshuram, how was it that she was easily carried off by Ravana. Rama followed several immoral and treacherous policies to defeat Ravana.¹⁷ As far as Krishna is concerned Phuley reserves choicest abuses for him. He points out that the 'Bhagavat' is full of false and fictitious stories that are patently outrageous. Krishna practiced several immoral things, Therefore, Phuley wondered that how such a person could be considered as God.¹⁸ Therefore, he pointed out that 'Isapniti' was better than these books because at least it teaches people what is the essential nature of morality. He claimed that all Gods including Ganapati are nothing else but the instruments of Brahmans to exploit Shudras.¹⁹ He has used harshest language to describe Ganapati and made it clear that it was a fabrication of the imagination of Brahmans. Phuley is of the opinion that 'Vedas', 'Mahabharatha', 'Ramayana' and 'Bhagawata' are the means through which Shudras were subjected to the mental slavery. Therefore he argued that to maintain the Varna system Brahmans developed a complicated system of worship of Gods. This was a clever ploy to keep people superstitious. He said "All Gods, all false stories about existence of heaven are nothing else but fabrications of Brahmin cheat to deceive and mislead the people. Idolworship and several other religious practices that Brahmans taught Shudras to follow were a clever ploy - to loot people and to extort money from them."²⁰

4) CRITICISM OF MARATHI SAINTS :

He denounced the Maharastrian Saints - Mukundraj,

Dnyaneshvar and Ramdas who did not have the courage to condemn the wicked acts of Brahmin. These saints described the wickedness of Brahmins as 'Karmamarga' and their Vedanta as path of knowledge and salvation and did not raise their finger against exploitation of the Shudras.

The Brahmin Marathi saints like Mukundraaj, Dasopant, Ramdas and Dnyaneshvar wanted to support Varna system. - Therefore, they translated treacherous Sanskrit things in Marathi and misled Shivaji to fight against Muslim. If Mukundraaj had any compassion for Shudras why had not he written this Marathi books before Muslim attacked ? Phuley says, " The real thing is that these Brahmins did not want Shudras and Atishudras to be Muslims, therefore, they wrote these books to misled them."²¹ Thus Phuley saw emergence of Marathi saints as a clever ploy of Brahmins to maintain their dominance. He criticized the cult of Vithoba at Pandharpur and ridiculed the behaviour of Warkaris.²²

He criticized Dnyaneshvari very violently and called Dnyaneshwar shrewd 'Deshastha Brahmin of Alandi'. He quoted some verses from Dnyaneshvari and criticizes them by showing the contradiction between Krishna's teaching in Geeta and Dnyaneshwari and his actual behaviour in his life. He came to the conclusion that Dnyanoba's teaching is against universal morality and it does stand to ~~be~~ the scrutiny of reason.²³

Ramdas was very badly criticized by him because he

created misunderstanding between Shivaji and Tukaram. He is of the opinion that Ramdas did not know truth, he knew how to protect the interests of his caste. He was man of considerable cunning and misled Shivaji because he was illiterate.²⁴

5) CULTURAL REVOLT - AN INTERPRETATION :

The preceding discussion clearly showed that Phuley raised the banner of revolt against entire Indian cultural tradition, symbolized in the Brahmin literature. Dr. Gail Omvedt calls it a "cultural revolt". She points out that India has a history of cultural revolt and normally the Kshatriya Castes raise in revolt against the Brahminical caste arrogance and irrational orthodoxy. All these movements represented fundamental, cultural revolts against the caste system, challenging its underlying principles and holding^{up} ideas of a different social order in which equality of caste and equality of women was a crucial point. Phuley was one of the greatest rebel against caste system as he rejected all the cultural values of Brahminism enshrined in their holy books.

Dr. Omvedt shows that the culmination of Phuley's analysis was the emphasis on 'Bali-Rajya' kingdom of Bali. This was in a sense his reply to the elite's use of Ram, Ganapati or Kali. It was a symbol that united Maharashtrian peasant masses. Bali was an ancient symbol of the peasantry and at the same time represented a sort of 'golden age', expressed in the Marathi saying "ida pida jayo balila Raj yevo," (let sorrows

and unhappiness go, let the Kingdom of Bali come")²⁵. Bali's Kingdom in addition served as a focus around which positive interpretation of other peasant deities of Maharashtra was made. Phuley's approach to such peasant and low caste, deities as Khandoba, Jotiba, Martand was favourable in contrast to his hostility to the Sanskritic deities.²⁶

She is of the view that because of this approach Phuley was saved from a good deal of unnecessary arguments qualification, compromises and logical inconsistencies. He did not for instance waste much breath arguing over the relative merits of different parts of the Hindu scriptures. He simply treated them as legends which may offer some 'insight' in to past Indian History and as a products of group (Brahmin Aryan) seeking to establish control over the minds of the people²⁷.

As it has been rightly pointed out in ancient period when the wars were fought, the concept like 'native' and 'foreigner' had no meaning and in the later period, there was such an intermixing of castes that it was difficult to find out who were the real 'sons of soil'.²⁸ Phuley's constant harping on the fact that everything happened due to cunning of Brahmins was not completely correct because the establishment of Varna system and Brahmanical dominance was a complex historical process.²⁹ His Aryan - Non theory was not accepted because in the case of Maharashtra it was irrelevant as Marathi culture was influenced by the 'great

Indian Culture' and Marathi was basically an Indo-Aryan language. Also Phuley's historical interpretation was not based on solid historical facts because he used mythological accounts to tell history. It was a good cultural interpretation but bad history.

Thus while concluding arguments and discussion it can be said that Phuley gave a very original cultural interpretation of Brahminism, and tried to Sharpen. The differences between the two, but most of the cultural interpretation was not followed by his followers because they were not ready to go out of great Indian culture as they did not have any alternative culture except Islam or Christianity. Secondly, Hindu religious Gods like Rama and Krishna were the living cultural symbols and saints like Dnyaneshvar and Randas were respected by the Marathi people for their cultural contribution. They could not be renounced. Thirdly, as pointed out by Dr. Omvedt, in the later period, due to growing militancy among the Muslims, the concept of Hindu unity became dominant. Therefore, to assert Hindu nationality, Phuley's cultural interpretation was deemphasised.^{30.}

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