

CHAPTER - IV :-

SOCIAL IDEAS OF PHULEY

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- 3) Opposition to Practice of Untouchability.
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CHAPTER-IV

SOCIAL IDEAS OF PHULEY

Phuley was a great social reformer who wanted to establish a society which was free of exploitation and misery. His social ideas were based on his cultural interpretation as he showed there that the entire Hindu social order was a result of deep conspiracy of Brahmins. They hatched this conspiracy to keep Shudra masses down and to perpetuate their dominance. The result of this conspiracy was - 1) deeply divided unjust caste system, 2) oppression and degradation of women, 3) inhuman and cruel practice of untouchability and 4) superstitious backwardness of Shudras and Atishudras and women due to lack of education. He described the nature of injustice meted out to the majority community of the society and suggested a program to fight this injustice.

1) OPPOSITION TO CASTE SYSTEM :

Jotiba Phuley's social thoughts are centred around the injustice meted out to the Shudra, untouchable and at the hands, of Brahmins. His book 'Priest-Craft Exposed' also deals with the same theme. Phuley was opposed the caste system in general and Brahminism in particular. He argued that the caste system in India was a Brahministic machine for the exploitation of the non-Brahmins. He thought that irrespective of the rule of different kings, and rulers in India. Casteism is the main pillar of exploitation.<sup>1</sup> He knew that with the help of British rule scientific, technical and industrial social system can be

established in place of the caste system. So he waged struggle to end the caste system as it was responsible for India's ills. He was of the opinion that caste system was perpetuated by Brahmins through 1) priestcraft, 2) their hold over administration and 3) the religious books. The first important aspect was that the Brahmins enjoyed special status in the society as they were the priests who worked as agents between God and Man. Through, their priestly occupation they tried to show that they were indispensable for the people. The priest was present everywhere and by performing various rites, he tried, to extract money from the people. In the first chapter of "cultivators Whipcord", Phuley graphically showed how Brahmin priest exploited the poor peasants.<sup>2</sup> He said Brahmin priest always wanted to extract money from others to fill his own money bag.<sup>3</sup> They used this money for enjoying the life. He condemned Brahmins for eating food without doing any work. He said "Fie upon your life, you consume food without doing any work".<sup>4</sup> He took objection to their eating fresh food at first on the pretext of ritual superiority, when other people including the workers who had constructed the house at the time of 'Grahshanti' were made to wait. Therefore, he declared that Brahmin should not be allowed to work as a priest at the time of important functions like marriage and the people should take resort to the Satyashodhak marriages which are organized by the Satyashodhakas. Abolition of the institution of Priests is the first important program he envisaged and asked the non-Brahmins not to allow the Brahmins

to act as the agents between man and God.

He asked the people to follow Satyashodhak marriages and elaborated in detail how such marriages could be arranged. He believed that the marriage was a mutual contract between a man and woman and it was necessary for the development of a well-ordered society. In his 'Mangalastaka' he said the same thing and emphasized the fact that a man and a woman are equal and marriage is a contract. In his marriage programme, both bride and bridegroom took the view that they would strive hard to establish the right of men. They would give education to all the people and they would follow the principles of - 'Satyadharma'.<sup>5</sup>

The second important reason of caste system was Brahminical hold over the administration. The Brahmins of Pune were quite powerful in those days as they were supported and benefitted by the Peshava rule. They continued to yield power because after the establishment of British rule, they monopolized Government services e.g. he pointed out that in British Government all important posts are held by the Brahmins as in village level. He pointed out that it is Kulkarni, at Mahal it is Mahalkari, at Taluka level, A Mamlatdar and in the Collector Office it is the P. A. of Collector who is powerful.<sup>6</sup> In the Revenue Department there are many Brahmins. These Brahmin officers wanted to perpetuate their power.

Also, the Brahmin teachers appointed in village, were

untrained, selfish, ignorant and they ~~were~~ cared more for their ideas of purity than commitment to teaching. He suggested that Brahmin hold over the administration should be broken as would help the removal of caste system. They also fought old Brahmin morality to students.

Thirdly, casteism was a part of Hindu religion at the main teaching of Manu Smruti is advocacy of Varna system. He asked the people to burn down Manu Smruti as 'Manu Smruti' is partial.<sup>7</sup> He rejected Hindu religion and established his own Satyashodhak Samaj based on principle of equality, liberty and fratarnity.

In his 'Sarvajanik Satyadharma' he rejected the concept of caste arguing that basically there is no caste difference among human beings. As there are no castes in birds and beasts,<sup>8</sup> there are no castes in men because all human beings are by nature similar to one another. The caste difference is ~~cheated~~ created by Brahmins to cheat and mislead the people. He strongly opposed the idea of linking caste with occupation ~~saying~~ that occupation of a particular person cannot be a ~~criteria~~ criterion for determining anybody's class. As our own mother in our childhood perform the function of a Scavenger but because of that we do not put her in that caste, He also made it clear that caste cannot be based on merit because sometimes wise people beget foolish sons and foolish fathers beget wise son. This can be made clear by the fact that all the children of Brahmin are not

as brilliant as Shankaracharya.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, caste system has no basis whatsoever except the fact that it was a clever mechanism of Brahmins to deceive Shudra and Atishudra.

Thus he opposed caste system and suggested remedies to overcome it. According to him the Brahmins were mainly responsible for the sorry state of affairs of this country. India could not emerge as a strong nation but they did not realise it. He said, "at present not one had the moral courage to do what only duty demands and as long as this state of matter continues sect distrusting and degrading sect, the condition of Shudras will remain unaltered and India will never advance in greatness and prosperity."<sup>10</sup> Thus, Phuley was an uncompromising opponent of the caste system and wanted its abolition for the prosperity and advancement of the country.

## 2) BELIEF IN EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN :

Jotiba Phuley was one of the first Indian to advocate the principle of equality between men and women. He believed in the equality between all men irrespective of caste, creed, colour, sex, and nationality. He regarded that all human beings are equal and free and declared that one law should be applicable to man and woman.

According to Phuley, all men and women can be considered their brothers and sisters. Those who believe in this principle were considered as followers of truth. Every

man and woman is given a right to freedom of expression, in writing, speaking and publishing.

When Jotirao was asked to make a comparative estimate of man and woman he categorically declared that woman is better than man as she is more kindhearted and compassionate. He considered men cruel, inhuman, crafty<sup>11</sup> and pleaded that men and women should be treated equally and women also should be given Government jobs according to their qualification. Phuley considered the whole world as one family and treated women as the important section of it.

According to him, "Women are more compassionate and humane than men."<sup>12</sup> They should be given education and freedom. In fact he advocated the remarriages of widow, he thought that the Brahminical practice of shaving heads of widows was highly ~~and unjust~~ unjust and tyrannical. He was not only orator for the cause of women but he was their friend and guide. He was moved by deep compassion, therefore, he established nussing home to help out women in distress. He started the first women school in Maharashtra. He was of the view that women are weaker but men are greedy, selfish and courageous. All the evil in the world caused due to jealousy and cunning.<sup>13</sup>

He criticized the religious books for not treating women equally. Laws are created by men and, therefore, women are unjustly treated those they do a very important work of rearing children.<sup>14</sup> He pointed out that whereas men marry many women,

woman is allowed to marry one man and after his death she is not allowed to remarry. In some cases, she is asked to commit ~~A~~ Sati after the death of her husband but no husband is asked to commit 'Sata' when his wife dies. He also criticized the practice of unequal marriage (marriage between an old man and a young girl) and pointed out that such evil practices were responsible for the moral degeneration of some women. But wicked and smug Brahmins had no realisation as repentence of this as they were interested in their affairs.<sup>15</sup>

Phuley was the supporter of emancipation of women and wanted that women should be encouraged to take part in every activity. Given an opportunity they prove more capable than men. He had a soft corner for women and considered their services to the society more important than men as they maintained household and reared and brought up children.

### 3) OPPOSITION TO PRACTICE OF UNTOUCHABILITY :

Phuley's opposition to untouchability can be considered as a part of his opposition to caste system. It was his firm belief that untouchability was irrational, unjust, cruel and inhuman.

Jotirao issued a pamphlet called the 'Kaifiyat'<sup>16</sup>. It is a statement regarding the conditions of the untouchables. In it a Mahar and Mang were imagined as stopping the carriage of Queen Victoria, who was passing through their village on her tour of India. They narrated her the most miserable conditions

under which they have been living since Peshavai, Though due to the establishment of British rule their condition was improved, but still they were not allowed to move freely and were not allowed to use public wells to take potable water. They requested the Queen to redress their grievances as they were her loyal subjects. The Queen promised them that she would look into their complaints.

Jotirao made important contribution to the solution of the problems of untouchability. It was he who created leaders from amongst the untouchable classes. He used to visit localities of untouchables and encouraged the energetic and intelligent men from among them to be active in society to do social work to write them. One of his followers, Walangekar, wrote many articles in 'Dinbandhoo' and 'Sudharak'. He awakened Mahar, Mangas to their miserable conditions.<sup>17</sup> Jotiba started some institutions to promote the interest of untouchables. He used to make stirring speeches to awaken caste Hindu to throw open schools for them. Jotiba said that there was no one high or low in the society. All are equal and should sink their all difference.

Phuley thought that the untouchables were ill-treated in the society especially by Brahmin. The historical reason for this ill-treatment was that Mahar and Mang fought the Aryan more courageously.<sup>18</sup> They were not allowed to touch Brahmins. They were not allowed to shed their shadow on the Brahmins as it would be sacrilege. Brahmins devised several ways and means to

create differences and divisions between the Shudras and Atishudras, who were in fact brothers - in habitants of Balisthan. But the caste system was a deadly deviced that ruled Shudras and they started regarding Atishudras as untouchables.<sup>19</sup> The untouchables were ill-treated during the Peshavai as they were sacrificed at the base of every new building to propitiate the evil spirits and were forced to work as bonded labours.

Phuley pointed out that Brahmins did not have compassion and even if a Mang died of thirst he would not let him touch his well.<sup>20</sup> Even the minimum basic human rights were denied there. Thus Jotirao argued that there cannot be any difference between Mahar and Brahmin as both of them are human beings having similar type of soul, limbs etc.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, he advocated the cause of emancipation of untouchables from the bondage. He was of the view that the spread of education among these communities, as well as their struggle to end the dominance of caste system would improve the miserable condition of untouchables.

#### 4) ADVOCACY OF EDUCATION :

Phuley realised the impotence of education in the advancement of the backward classes in the country. He was sure that English education was bound to inculcate the great ideas of liberty, equality and fratarnity among the Indians, who were deprived of these ideas in the Hindu social system. During the Hindu period, education was limited to Brahmins but now due to British rule, it was given to anybody who wanted to have it.

Though Phuley was greatly thankful to the British Government for starting secular education here, but he had certain reservations about it.

The Government education policy was biased and it gave more importance to higher education. At the cost of primary education. At the time of Phuley, the higher education was nothing else but high class education. As these educational facilities were cornered by Brahmins and as a result of it, they continued to dominate Government services. Therefore, he termed the British educational policy as utopian and argued that, "The system of high caste education is pernicious ! As the Government was spending a large part of revenue on the education of higher classes."

Jotirao submitted a statement for the information of the Education Commission, which was set up in the year 1882. In his detailed statement, he discussed the different educational problems of the country. The first important aspect of education policy is its spread in the different parts of the country. He expressed his opinions on primary education and higher education.

1) PRIMARY EDUCATION :

He is of the opinion that primary education is very much neglected in our country. The number of schools are below the requirement of the Community. Therefore, he pointed out 'A good deal of the poverty, their want of self reliance , their

entire dependence upon the learned and intelligent classes is attributable to this deplorable state of education among the peasantry.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, he demanded that more educational facilities should be provided in the rural areas and to the Shudra cultivators. Therefore, he asked the Government to increase the number of schools. He also suggested special instituting of scholarships and annual prizes that would encourage students to send their children to schools. This could create in them a taste for learning and education. He made it clear that the primary education should be made compulsory for the children of certain ages. He further added that if Maharas and Mangas and other lower classes' number is large enough their should be separate schools for them because they would not be allowed to enter the schools of other caste Hindus.

According to Jotirao Government collect a special cess for education purposes but this Fund was not spent for the purposes for which it was collected. Because it was not utilized to spread higher education. He pointed out that the teachers employed in the primary schools were almost all Brahmins. Some of them were untrained. They were not useful for spreading education among the people. According to Jotirao, those teachers who belonged to the cultivating classes should be appointed who would be able to freely mix with them and ~~better~~ understand their problems much better than Brahmin teacher who generally holds himself aloof under religious prejudices. He also suggested that to improve the position of

teachers better salaries should be given.

While discussing the different aspects of the syllabus he pointed out that the rudimentary knowledge of general history, general geography, grammar and elementary knowledge of agriculture is also necessary and few lessons on moral duties and sanitation should be included. He proposed that number of primary schools should be increased. Prizes and scholarships to pupil, and other allowances to the teachers as an encouragement tend to render these schools more efficient. The Municipalities should also give grant-in-aid to Secondary and Private Schools conducted by Educational Department. The funds for primary education should be in the hands of Director of Public Instruction. If educated and intelligent men are appointed on different Committees, these funds may be safely entrusted to them. Ignorant and uneducated men like Patil, Inamdar should not be allowed to exercise any intelligent control over the funds.

## 2) INDIGENOUS SCHOOLS :

Jotirao discussed the problem of indigenous schools and said that the indigenous schools existed in a good deal in cities, towns, large villages, where there was a Brahmin population. From the latest reports of Public Instruction it was found that there were 1049 Indigenous Schools with about 27,694 pupils in them. The boys are generally taught the multiplication table heart, a little Modi writing and reading and to recite a few religious pieces. In those schools fees charged only 2 to 8 anas. The teachers generally came from

Brahminical society. At that time no arrangement existed in the country to train up teachers for indigenous schools. According to Jotirao, the indigenous schools could not be turned to any good account unless the present teachers were replaced by men from the Training Colleges. According to Phuley, "Grants-in-aid should be paid to such schools unless the Master is a Certificated one. But if certificated or competent teachers be found, grants-in-aid should be given and will be productive of great good."<sup>23</sup>  
~~aid should be given~~

### 3) HIGHER EDUCATION :

The Government has created facilities for higher education but the masses has been neglected. Higher and wealthy classes such as Brahmins and Prabhus were concerned only with higher education. But the middle and lower classes faced many difficulties in higher education. Therefore, he argued that the entire educational machinery (Ministerial and Executive) should be in the hands of the Government. The Government should take care of primary and higher education. He suggested that educated men of ability who do not succeed in getting into Public Service, may be induced to open schools for higher education on being assured of liberal grants-in-aid.

He was of the view that Missionary Schools although some of them are very efficiently conducted do not show good results. Therefore, he made it clear that Government Schools were superior to any other schooling system. The course has no practical element. The higher education should be neatly arranged. The

books on the subject for Matriculation Examination should be published in Government Gazzettees as is done in Madras and Bengal.<sup>24</sup>

He was of the opinion that the content of course should be practical and it should help students in their practical life. The new system is good to turn out so many clerks and school masters. He also suggested to encourage private students which would make private studies popular and secure larger diffusion of knowledge in the country.

He made it clear, "The system of Government scholarship at present followed in the Government Schools is also defective in as much as it gives undue encouragement to those classes, only who have already acquired a taste for education to the - detriment of other classes. The system might be so arranged that some of these scholarships should be awarded to such classes amongst whom education has made no progress."<sup>25</sup> He was of the view that abstract concept of merit was unjust. He pointed out, "The system of awarding them by competition, although abstracted-ly equitable, does not tend to the spread of education among other classes."<sup>26</sup>

He also discussed the problem of job opportunities and argued that education should be job oriented. He was of the opinion that the Brahmins are more interested in Government jobs than other classes. But there are some people, who are not interested in these jobs but the problem with our education system

is that it does not afford any opportunity to these people. He said that the course of training they receive is not of technical and practical nature. Therefore, he proposed that the courses should be of practical in nature. He was sure that there would be different ways of betaking other remunerative employment. He pointed out, "The present number of educated men is very small in relation to the country at large and we trust that the day may not be far distant, when we shall have the present number multiplied a hundred fold, and all be taking themselves to useful and remunerative occupations and not be looking after service."<sup>27</sup> Finally, he requested Education Commission to be kind enough to take some measures for the spread of female primary education.<sup>28</sup> The female education was very dear to his heart.

Thus Phuley was a great <sup>opponent</sup> ~~supporter~~ of caste system, untouchability, oppression of women and high class education. He believed in the principle of equality and did not accept the Brahminical concept of Dharma. He pointed out that the Brahmins had concealed the real concept of Dharma and they were trying to link Dharma with one's own occupation. Phuley proposed wide ranging social reforms to fight priestcraft, untouchability, oppression of women, and backwardness in education. He established Satyashodhak Samaj to fight Brahminism and started Satyashodhak Marriages to end the influence of Brahmins. He pleaded for education of women and untouchables. He suggested that there should be wide ranging changes in the educational policies of the Government.

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