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JYOTIRAO PHULE : A Revolutionary Social Reformer

Jagannatham Begari

The paper is an attempt to comprehend Jyotirao Phule's contribution towards the upliftment of sudratishudhra, toilers, peasants and women. It also highlights the social and economic spheres during the pre and post Peshwa's regime. Paper also tries to focus the influencing factors of Phule that made him to start the radical anti-brahman movement. The paper also intends to look into his contribution towards the girl-child education and their empowerment. The Aryan and non-Aryan theories and the issues of imperialism, Brahmanism and its evil practices which made Phule a social revolutionary. The Study also reflects on Phule's understanding of backward class movement and its influence on the Dravidian movement in particular and Dalit Bahujan movement as well as Sarwajan in general. In other words, paper tries to assess Phule's contribution towards reconstruction of Indian society as a whole.

Introduction:

Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890), or Mahatma Jotiba Phule as he is popularly known was the first person in modern India to launch a movement for the liberation of caste-oppressed toilers and women irrespective of the caste. What were social reformers like Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda were to the elitist cultural nationalism, Phule was to the freedom struggle of India's long-suppressed humanity. Phule was inspired by the egalitarian philosophy of Buddha and Kabir and was an admirer of the emergent liberal democracies of the west and the ideology of social revolution. He presented a socio-cultural analysis that was deeply critical of caste-varna domination. He saw Brahmanism both as the ideological and institutional system of monopolizing knowledge and power by a particular class which excludes, divides and dominates other groups in the society. He argued that even before trying to overturn the material power of the upper castes, it was necessary to step out of the ideologies of Brahmanism for which proper access to knowledge was an essential prerequisite. He thought if both Women and sudratishudhra do not get education, they would not be able to emancipate themselves. So he started a massive work of education by starting various schools in and around Poona. Phule exposed the Brahmanical pretensions and appreciated the Christian missionaries for their noble work in school education. He termed this understanding of knowledge as Tiritiya ratna, the 'third eye', which was the means to end Brahmanic hegemony.¹

Influencing Factors on Mahatma Jyotirao Phule:

Hanlon O' Rosalind has traced various influential factors that made Phule a social revolutionary thinker and an activist. These included family, school, the local community, the social system, the religion, heterogeneity of the institutions, individuals, newspapers and the British administration. The new vernacular press was also one of the significant agents in changing his personal life and to participate in the social reform movement. Along with these

influential factors, he also got the help, cooperation and encouragement from some of his friends from Brahmin community. They were Babu Padmanji, Moro Vithal Valavekar and Krishanarao Raṭhnaji Sangle shared common social concerns towards the upliftment of shudras and women. The informal discussions with his friends were important influential factors. He was also inspired by Mitchell's arguments on caste, religion and psychological similarities. These factors made him think about reforming Indian social system.² The ideas of Phule challenged the traditional beliefs, and those ideas led to enlargement of the opportunities and individual mobility. With the help of this mobility, he fought for a provision in employment. The features of missionary activity were also important in intellectual development of young Phule. In 1848, Phule turned to reform of traditional Hindu society as the most important issue. To reform the Hindu society, he argued that education was the critical weapon as it given the capabilities to differentiate between good and bad.⁴ The mid-nineteenth century 'official social reform' movement directed its campaign against child-marriage, sati, and promotion of women's education etc through the platforms of Brahma Samaj, Prartana Samaj and Arya Samaj. The drawback of their movements was that their activities were limited to upper castes and most of the social reformers were from the Brahmin community. Jyotiba Phule was from the lower caste and fought against Brahmanism and its evils during the period of Peshwa Bajirao-II.⁵ Phule consciously built his protest movement on the ideological and cultural bedrocks of the shramanic tradition. He also provided the leadership for the anti-caste movement in Maharashtra and his humane passion for the untouchables was infinite and his sense of justice included every oppressed caste. He had absolutely no caste bias. He demanded equality for all irrespective of their caste and community. His movement was against untruth, injustice and two-facedness of the Hindu social order which was dominated by the Brahmin supremacy. Phule viewed that the low status of shudras was due to the denial of education, so he decided to educate shudras.⁶ To comprehend Phule's contribution towards egalitarian society, it requires to comprehend the conditions that prevailed during the times of Peshwa Bajirao-II (1796-1818).

Peshwa's Rule and Social Degradation of Sudratisudhra:

The Brahmins venerated Bajirao-II as an incarnation of Krishna and Shiva. In his regime, they got pleasures, privileges and exemptions that did not exist under the original Maratha system founded by Shivaji. The dakshina for Brahmans that poor could not afford got enormously inflated. He also extended generous financial support to large number of Brahman scholars to enable them to pursue scholarly pursuits.⁷ In the era of Bajirao-II, the caste system had become more rigid. The Brahmins were responsible for the nastiest kinds of atrocities on the lower castes. Some scholars observed that the rules of purity-pollution were strictly and ruthlessly observed in those days. People of lower castes such as mahars, mangs, chamhars, bhangers, and dhedhs had to tie earthen pots to their waists while walking

on roads. They have to sit down on the road, when they notice a Brahman on their way. They should not come out in the afternoon because their shadow would pollute the place. The untouchables were allowed to walk on roads only if they tied the branch of a tree to their waist: the branch served the purpose of sweeping the earth and erasing their vile footprints. The untouchable mahars were not allowed to build their huts too close to an upper caste village.⁸ Though learning was not formally forbidden to the lower classes during this period, the privileged class did everything in its capacity to stop children of the lower classes from going to schools. For instance, when Govindrao sent his son to a school, his Brahmin clerk argued that learning was not the dharma of a shudhra, and persuaded him to take the child away from school.⁹ During Peshwa's tenure, there was a lot of corruption, selfishness, prostitution. He exposed the brahmanical self-interest and incarnation to promote the past traditional order. In his regime, Severity of punishment was lesser to Brahmins. He provided foodstuff to 40,000 poor Brahmins who did not participate in production. The Brahmins praised him as manifestation of Shiva and Krishna. Even During the time of drought, he helped the Brahmins but not the other poor deprived sections, peasants, women, and farmers. Amrutharao Brother of Bajirao created problems for the poor people. If farmers did not pay the tax, punishment was very severe. Even in the case of women, punishment was severe. Hence, the common people committed suicide. The death of Peshwa Bajirao-II in 1898 brought relief to several sections like farmers, women, atishudras, and sudras who suffered in his rule but Brahmins were upset as they got dividends from the king for doing nothing.¹⁰ These social conditions made Phule work for women, atishudra, etc. Braj Ranjan Mani has argued, Phule saw his own movement as a continuation of those of Buddha, Kabir and Tukaram, communicating it to the people through popular plays, songs, and tracts, and organization building for the upliftment of all backward marginalized communities. He was the only one who led a campaign to debunk the myth of the golden Hindu era that was being projected by the contemporary nationalist leadership. He confronted the nascent elitist nationalism, contending that a society divided by caste and social slavery could not constitute a genuine nation. Those claiming to represent the nation were actually sought to maintain them as a basis for their power.¹¹ It is against this backdrop Phule's life should be assessed.

Life of Jyotiba Phuley :

To comprehend Phule, his concerns and his struggle, it is essential to figure out his life and career. Phule was born in 1827 in a family of fruit and vegetable growers (Mali) in Pune. When he was eight years old his mother died. His father did not remarry. He arranged a maid at home to look after his son Jotiba. She was very humble and sincere. She treated Govind as her own son. In those days education as pointed out earlier was confined only to Brahmins. Disciplines like Philosophy, Sanskrit, Vedanta and law were the subjects in all public and private schools and were accessible to Brahmins but not shudras, atishudras and

women. These sections never thought of education for their community. Phule was educated in Marathi-medium school during Peshwa's rule; and continued education in an English medium secondary school. In 1848, he established a school that was the first anywhere in India that worked for downtrodden girls. Brahmins were shocked and fearing a high caste backlash, they tried to kill Phule. Hence his father turned his son and daughter-in-law (who taught in the school) out in 1849. Out of his interest, Phule had run the school and set up more schools between 1848 and 1852 that admitted girls of all castes. For his contribution to educational activities he was felicitated by the Department of Education. He established a night school for working people. Outraged by his 'subversive' activities, the reactionary elements made an abortive attempt on his life in 1856. In 1860s, he joined the widow remarriage campaign. In 1863, he established a home for offspring born of illicit relations. Phule's father died in 1868; the same year he threw open the water tank in his compound to the untouchables, *Gulamgiri* was published in June 1873 and followed up with the founding of *Satyashodak Samaj* on 24 September 1873. He worked as a member of the Pune Municipal Council in 1882-86. He deposed before the Hunter Commission for Education on 19 October 1882. He was honoured in a massive public meeting with the title of Mahatma on 11 May 1888. He died in Pune on 28 November 1890 after a prolonged illness.

He was a product of the oppression of his social environment. Within a decade of collapse of Peshwa rule in 1818, Phule faced the indignities and humiliations as other lowered castes faced. The power and glory of the Brahmin Peshwas who became de facto rulers of the Maratha kingdom after Shivaji's death but later it declined following the ascendancy of the British. But most of the posts in the fading Peshwa administration were reserved for them. Above all these humiliations made him work for a new society.¹²

Satyashodak Samaj : The Vision of a New Society:

Phule had a vision of a fundamental change in the society. He believed that the toiling castes constitute the overwhelming majority of Indian population. They should chalk out their own path, outside the Brahmin fold, to form a new society on the principles of equity/castelessness, rationality and justice. To promote such a society, Phule and his colleagues founded the *Satyashodak Samaj* in 1873. A set of principles that the Samaj drew up shortly after its formation included belief in equality of all human beings. Main objectives of organization were: members were exhorted to spread truth and right thinking among people, make them aware about their rights and social problems, malpractices were to be targeted and public education was accorded the highest importance. In fact, Phule argued that by educating shudras, it could be possible to bring shudras into the mainstream. According to him, education was the weapon to bring to an end their humiliation at the hands of the Brahmins. Members were advised to make every effort to spread education by teaching women and children and dissemination of improved techniques in agriculture. Weekly

meetings of the Samaj were held in Pune where they discussed the issues like social reform, widow-remarriage, mass education, encouragement of swadeshi goods, freeing people from superstitions and astrology, and encouragement of simple marriage ceremony at minimum expense.¹³

As Deshpande (2002) argued, Phule was the first to think of Indian society in terms of class. He argued that all those who produce society's wealth were shudratrishudra. They are suffering in the name of untouchability at the hands of the elite. He called them as bloodsucking consumers of society's resources. He made every effort to bring together all labouring classes- kumbhis, malis, dhangars, Muslims, bhils, kolis, mahars, and mangos- under an umbrella organization to wage a morality-driven and knowledge-based struggle against brahminical falsehood. His movement was based on the idea to unite the peasant castes with the untouchables and Muslim masses. His broad-based community of the oppressed consisted of all those who were at the receiving end of the brahmanical system. Hanlon O' Rosalind has noted that one of the aims of Phule was, Tiritiya Rathna. It convinces his audience that the heterogeneous collections of social groups that fell within the category of exploited did share common interests and a common social position. While rejecting the notions of high and low, pure and polluted, inhuman, aggressive and oppressive nature of Brahminism, Phule preached his idea of universal brotherhood and in the principles of human equality and dignity. This brotherhood transcends all artificial divisions of social position, language, religion and nationality. That is why he felt closer to liberal foreigners than to the self-serving conservative compatriots.¹⁴

Education : An Instrument of Emancipation and Empowerment :

In the year of 1813, the British India decided to open schools. In the charter of 1813, they allotted one lakh rupees as special grant to education. After this act, many changes took place in education system in India. It affected the life of people and influenced social issues and created awareness among the people. It had impact on their social and economic position. In the 19th century, missionaries started Marathi schools in Poona. As a result, conflicts aroused between the local Brahmins, as there was one group of Brahmins supporting the education in missionary schools and one group opposing it. The First Governor General of India-Thomas Boobington Mecalay gave a statement in favour of western education on February 2, 1835 and subsequently Lord William Bentink decided to impart and implant the western education. This was an important landmark and an opportunity for lower classes to access education. But many fundamentalists from Brahmin community argued that lower classes should not study, as education ought to be confined only to Brahmins. Orthodoxy Brahmins also argued using pen with ink was against Hinduism and they also had a notion that studying in missionary schools was shameful to Hinduism as they believed that children pronouncing and writing certain names of animals and birds was against the Hindu philosophy.

Contrast to this negative notion, Phule supported missionaries to establish schools as he strongly believed that through education, women and atisudras may possibly develop in all spheres of life: political, economic, social and cultural.¹⁵

Phule's reconstruction of the past and linking it to the oppressive present was one part of the attempt to fight the inegalitarian system and brahmanical ideology. A more essential and continuing way to change the existing power structure was through the means of education. The kind of education that he stood for was modern and scientific. It could work as a means for social change and transformation. As a staunch rationalist, he laid maximum emphasis on spreading education and wanted to use knowledge as a weapon to bring an attitudinal change. He believed that it would lead to 'Cultural Revolution' as well as technological progress. For him, the acquisition of knowledge by the oppressed was emancipatory and his pedagogy was informed by a clear understanding of knowledge and power. One aspect of his rationalism can be seen in the Satyashodak Samaj with its primary emphasis on "truth seeking". It is most significant in this context as the truth seeking was seen as a quest guided by the individual's own reason, not by the dictates of any religious guru or authoritative text. This was an important contribution of the Satyashodak Samaj.¹⁶ Hence Education is basis for every movement and to unite all the sections to struggle against Brahminism. He understood the crookedness of the Shastras and questioned the very essence of Shastras.¹⁷ Phule viewed that "education must be rational and reasonable as it provokes and stimulates our minds and gives us a sense of what is good and what is bad". Taking inspiration from Phule, Ambedkar and other social visionaries emphasized education and its importance in their social works. Later, it got reflected in the words of Ambedkar: "Educate, organize and agitate".

Women's Liberation :

Gail Omvedt argues, "System of Manu treats women as shudras or dasa irrespective of their caste and Varna". Phule's notion of women was totally different from that of Manu as he considered women as shudratrishudra. That included Brahmin women. Phule himself adopted the son of a Brahmin widow as his own son. The practical social reform efforts involved in aiding the traditional Brahmanic women and sudratisudhra. Gail Omvedt pointed out that Phule did not use the common word "manus" (human being), but insists on using 'stree-purush', thus emphasizing gender differentiation, while pleading for equal and common human rights for women and men. Phule was convinced that the family and marriage system must be reformed altogether.¹⁸ He does not do so as a liberal paternalistically concerned for the uplift of some lower order of being, but as a radical philosopher, he was aware of a revolution in social relations has to be brought about between Brahmin and non-Brahmin. He realized based on the conditions, untouchables were seen not as a group unique within India but as the most oppressed section of the masses, but he saw them as a part of the

original community of the peasants. Hence, for orphan boys, he opened orphanages (Anathasrama), maternity homes for women (Sutikagrha). With regard to the issue of Women's liberation, Phule was one of the very few male social reformers in history who deserves the respect of women. His depth of feeling on the matter was deep enough that he was ready to attack one of his co-workers, Krishna Rao Bhalekar who had written a severe criticism of a book published by Tarabai Shinde. In the book, she compared men and women and how women were treated as subordinate to man and inferior in all spheres of life. Phule replied in 1885 with a scathing attack which was more severe than attacks on Brahminism. Bhalekar's writings were attacked as representative of the old beliefs. The issue was the formation of a new equalitarian husband–wife relationship; the goal was breaking down of the old authority structure within the family. Phule believed that as long as there was inequality in the family, there could be no true equality in the society; this would perpetuate suppressor of women and of the low caste untouchables.¹⁹

Mahatma Phule made strenuous efforts to reform the condition of the deprived (neglected) untouchables and women. He was very confident that education could be liberating source for the disregarded women. Hence, he regarded as the foremost among the social reformers who opened schools for women and shudras. He strongly opposed the practice of tonsure of the hair of the Brahmin widows. He put up the demand before the Hunter Commission for imparting universal compulsory primary education.²⁰

Aryan and Non-Aryan Theory :

To comprehend Phule's contribution, it is indispensable to assess the Aryan and non-Aryan theory. This ideology is based upon identification with the peasant masses and attachment to revolutionary values of equality and rationality. But a complete ideology must contain not only basic values, but also an explanation of the present state and condition of society. As a mass ideology, Phule was for abolition of the caste system, how it has to be eradicated was a challenge. His theory could be understood through the theory of exploitation based on Indian culture. Because of his "non-Aryan theory", people paid homage to Phule as a "Mahatma" and a man of the people". Not dealing with his theory of exploitation is to refuse to take his philosophy seriously. Two points must be noted here: first, in any society, upper class ideologies are distinguished from mass ideologies by the fact that they nearly always hold an organic and functionalist view of society, in contrast, mass ideologies take a polarizing view and focus on exploitative and the irreconcilable conflict of interests between different sections of society. Second, Phule's theory of exploitation focused on cultural and ethnical factors rather than economic or political ones. It is true that he was highly concerned with the economic and political aspects of exploitation, but the objective conditions of nineteenth century colonialism made it almost impossible to come to an adequate understanding of economic matters to visualize political solutions. Therefore, the cultural

and ethnic aspects of mass-elite relationships were emphasized. This approach reflected a good deal of Indian reality. So it is necessary to replace Brahman culture by non-Brahmin masses.²¹ Therefore, non-Brahmin ideology developed by Phule, thereafter, it was termed as a cultural revolutionary ideology. The purpose of the "non-Aryan theory" was to establish a cultural and racial basis for the unity of the Maharastrian masses and more or less excluded Brahmins but did identify them as the peasant majority. This theory was central to his concept of the exploitation of the masses. It sought to give a cultural and ethnic foundation for the unity of the masses. Later, Ambedkar, and Periyar, and others who desired liberty for shudras, wanted their followers to be proactive. Basis for Phule's exploitative theory was rejection of caste system and complete break up with the Hindu social order and embracing of a better system.²²

As Gail Omvedt argued, Phule was different on many issues, from his other contemporary social reformers. Most of the social reformers come from Brahmin background, and they strived for reforms within Brahmanism without questioning Brahminism, whereas Phule was entirely different from them. Phule said Brahmanism was the cause for inequalities in the society. O' Hanlon brought Phule's ideological critique of Hinduism, hegemony of Brahminism and corruption. He argued "Phule struggled against both Hindu religion and the Hindu society and argued that the Brahmins have to be attacked because their hegemony was so conspicuous and they exercised their hegemony over heterogeneous category of shudratrishudras". Phule himself had the vision to speak on behalf of not only of the shudras but also of the ati-shudras or untouchables.²³ He was a revolutionary in his ideas and was more practically oriented than other social reformers. These characteristics made him a revolutionary social reformer. On the issue of colonialism and Brahmanism, Phule has taken support from the British rulers and Christian missionaries to promote education of atisudras and women. O' Hanson argued "Though Phule was blamed by orthodox Hindus that he was in favour of British and encouraging conversions from Hinduism to Christianity, he refused to get entangled in that criticism". His basic argument was that the first priority was to reform our society and then get freedom for India. He argued that both the characteristics: Brahmanism and Imperialist British hegemony had similarities. But he argued first priority was to reform Brahmanism and provide the education for poor, the exploited masses, untouchables and deprived sudras, atisudras and women. Then, fight for freedom from the British. He himself was a product of the oppression. He was for annihilation of social oppression and inequalities. He waged struggle at all levels by developing a radical re-interpretation of Indian history and mythology. O' Hanson, argued that the missionaries were quickly absorbed by thinkers such as Phule who were able to attack the social-evils existed in their society without having to embrace Christianity. Such thinkers resounded the echoes of this critique and looked for it in their own intellectual tradition and were able to use their familiarity with the Western secular literature to put Christianity itself into question.²⁴

Phule's Views on Social and Economic Sphere:

In Phule's thought, dharma and caste are at the Centre. Phule rarely uses the term Hindu or Hinduism, but he refers to Brahmanism instead. In his view Hinduism originates in the smritis. He was convinced that these books (smritis) were part of the brahmanical attempt at creating those texts that would rationalize and perpetuate their domination. As the brahminical position claimed the chaturvarna system to be god-given and eternal. Phule rejected this pseudo-religion along with the text that upheld the chaturvarna. Therefore, he argued for its complete rejection and reconstruction. He sought to create dichotomous conceptions of the Hindu social structure.²⁵ For Phule, Brahmanism was historical and it has been constructed over time. Since it was the ideology of oppression and dominance, it has to be opposed and ultimately smashed. There was nothing sacred or divine about it as it pretends as if it is itself as divinely ordained. It was necessary to oppose the system as a whole. He also attacks the avatarakalpana. It is also a way of dissolving the apparent contradiction between polytheistic ritual practice and monotheistic metaphysical positions. Which may not stand the scrutiny of either history or even plain reason. He rejected Brahmanical history from a shudhratrishudra perspective.²⁶ He emphasized the bipolarity of the Varna system which has two other implications: one, it meant Phule was not looking at it as a system of endlessly regressing hierarchy, where there is always someone, somewhere, who is lower than the lowest. In other words, his main emphasis was to demonstrate the basis on which the oppressed can come together and unite, rather than on the endemic divisions and splits themselves; two, he rejects the centrality of the pollution principle. This does not, of course, mean that Phule was blind or indifferent to pollution principle. His attacks on brahmanical dharma necessarily involved rejection of the notions of pavitra and apavitra (pure and polluted), sprishya and asprisha (touchable and untouchable), and so on. He also attacked the moral degeneration of Brahmins under Peshwas. On these scores, his attack on Brahmin hypocrisy is remarkable. He also attacked the exploitative and oppressive nature of Brahminism. Equally unforgettable contribution was his karmavipaka, the doctrine of Karma, which traces all suffering, including individual suffering and more importantly, social status, to the Karma of previous births. This doctrine, again, is in many ways central to the social system and metaphysics of Brahminism, for the Brahmin's preeminent position derives its authority from it. Naturally then, Phule trains his polemical gun on this doctrine as well. Phule's orientation is essentially toward the peasants and their problems. This is shown in very concrete and almost graphic description of the peasant amidst his poverty, with his scanty food and clothing and how officials and money-lenders harassed peasants. In his Gulamgiri, Phule considered peasants and untouchables together as a community of the oppressed, suffering slavery under Brahmin masters.

Sudratisudhra, Dalit Bahujan and Sarvasamaj : An assessment:

Phule was first social revolutionary who struggled against Brahminism that humiliated and exploited shudratrishudra in the name of purity, impurity and smritis. To counter Brahmanism, Phule viewed the unity among the shudratrishudras as indispensable. In contemporary times scholars have coined Dalits and Dalit Bahujan that subsumed sudratisudhra. Phule emphasized peasant as a part of shudratrishudra and called them as "Baliraja". Baliraja in his usage is the peasant, it means, the common man. It must be reiterated that Phule does not see the village leaders only as Baliraja, his orientation is towards the village modernized in terms of equality: the revolution in personal relationships remains central unlike many of his contemporaries or followers. He almost never refers to the "patil" or never identifies with the interests of the village headman nor accepts that arrangement as foundation of the traditional village community. This is clear in his "Gulamgiri" where he denies Brahmanic tradition and termed it as anti-equalitarian (anti-Bali) and traces the growth of nationalism in the West: the English and he learnt patriotism from the Greeks. He gave the importance to the peasant (Bali) and thereby developed a democratic nationalism. He held that the American Revolution made the common man (Bali) the centre of their society.²⁷ Hence Phule considered farming community of 'Shudras and Ati-Shudras' as his base to condemn the exploitation of the British and Brahman-dominated bureaucracy. It may not have the earlier traits or strict non-Brahmin movement but still it has been always addressing identity of non-Brahmin movement.

Gail Omvedt emphasized that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's political direction was clear and consistent throughout his life, although changing circumstances and constraints led to different political formations. The direction was to maintain the autonomy of leadership of dalits, but at the same time to seek a broader alliance or coalition which would include peasants and workers. In the 1930s, Ambedkar formed the Independent Labour Party (ILP) which came out with a bold peasant-worker action programme. The ILP not only fought only for dalit interests, but also organized joint struggles of Mahar and Kunbi tenants against the Khoti landlord system in the Konkan as well as participated fully in the major textile workers' struggles of 1938. In 1942, Ambedkar formed the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) as a party of dalits, though on all-India level. Although this was initial efforts to develop a broader movement, Ambedkar's political aspirations did not change even in his 1951 election manifesto of the SCF which declared to change the name to Backward Castes Federation.²⁸ The continuation could be seen when Kanshiram started Bahujan Samaj Party based on the unity among SC, ST, OBC and religious minorities. In the initial phase of BSP, it could not get any support but in a later stage, it gained the support from all sections of the people and formed government in Uttar Pradesh. After Kanshiram's death, Mayavathi brought the concept of Sarvasamaj (SC/ST/OBC/religious minorities and poor Brahmins). In 2007 general

elections, BSP got full majority without any political party's support.²⁹

These political developments impacted on Indian politics. The concept of Sarwajan became a political agenda of a few political parties. States like Andhra Pradesh, many organizations were formed and BSP is striving to get political support. All these developments indicate that philosophy of Phule is relevant in the present. However, there are some drawbacks in the concepts like Bahujan and Sarwajan as OBCs are not willing to accept the dalit leadership. If we see the atrocities on dalits since last two decades, we find a majority of atrocities are by OBCs. Then, how does it achieve the unity among these communities? And how could one expect the unity among them (SC, ST, OBCs and the religious minorities and the economically poor Brahmins) that too political unity among them? How far it will sustain? In spite of all these dilemmas and doubts, contribution of Phule will constitute the social, economic, political and cultural base for the Indian politics as a whole.

In the year of 1916, Justice Party was formed, Ramaswamy Nayakar emerged as a leader of backward class movement in Tamil Nadu in the 1930s and 40s and later it was developed as a Dravidian mass movement. In the year 1949 Annadurai formed DMK party. All these parties shared similar goals. They argued for abolition of brahmanical oppression perpetuated through caste system and religion. In 1920s and 30s, Adi Hindu movement sprang in the year of 1960s in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. Bihar also had such kind of Dalit Bahujan politics or 'non-brahmanical' politics continuously but the way shudra politics addresses the caste question in northern states of Bihar is not very helpful in the long run. In the late 1980s and 1990s, state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) delver into the dilemmas that prevail in Dalit and upper shudra politics and their respective ideologies, strategies and 'roles after coming to power' in the respective states. The Janata Dal led by Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP and Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar came up and influences dominant backward caste politics in the late 1980s. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged as a 'dalit-bahujan' Party. So far as the ideological standings of Samajvadi Party (SP) and Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD) are concerned, they do attack Brahmins, though the former does it in a much milder manner. In their speeches, they do attack the brand of Hinduism that stands for communalism. On the other hand, the BSP leadership always critically refers to caste-hierarchy and the prejudices against the dalits and shudras. Though the Bahujan Samaj party claims to include SC/ST/OBC/minorities, but BSP draws its main support from the SCs and the most backward castes among OBCs, but there are no anti-Hinduism symbols in SP and RJD politics. The symbols of BSP have a historical and ideological relevance. The symbol of BSP, elephant, the Blue Flag and the portraits of Ambedkar, Phule, EVR, Shahuji Maharaj lends moral support to the concept of Dalit bahujan. After formation of government in UP, there was the carving out of new districts and naming them after Gautam Buddha, Shahuji Maharaj, and Jyotiba Phule. It definitely points towards a cultural counter-revolution against the brahmanical

tradition of naming districts Rampur, Laxmanpur and Sitapur. This strategy created a political fervour and sensitized the Dalit masses on these issues. These personalities represent anti-brahmanical ideology through their movements more specifically against caste and the hierarchical Varna system in general. The symbols of the BSP reflect revolt against Brahmanism in Indian culture. This has generated in UP, a socio-cultural process of 'Ambedkarisation', that accelerated and rouse the consciousness among dalits about the life and ideas of Ambedkar.³⁰

In recent times, contemporary backward caste politics do not talk of Ambedkar, Phule, Buddha who addressed the issue of caste and the need to annihilate it. One striking aspect is that despite the shudra background of Phule and EVR, they are not idealized in contemporary shudra politics. The SP and RJD are misusing and reinterpreting the symbols or using them for their political interests, but they have assumed themselves as "critical leaders" of Dalit Bahujan parties. These contradictions can be observed in the political behaviour of many offsprings of the non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu that have gone totally against its ideology. For instance "Jayalalitha furthered Brahmanic interests through temples, priesthood and appointment of archakas from the Brahmin community. This Dravidian identity formation did not satisfy the aspirations and hopes of dalits and others who were at the lower rungs of Tamil society. Unfortunately, they are committing atrocities on dalits.³¹ It is true that although Dalit-Bahujan religious formations historically operated autonomously from Hindu forms, they have never been centralized or codified. Brahmanism has consistently sought to subvert these religious forms by injecting notions of 'purity' and 'pollution', hierarchy and untouchability even among the Dalit-Bahujan themselves, while at the same time discounting dalits religious traditions by condemning them as 'polluting' or by Brahminising them.³² It is necessary to analyze the observation of satyanarayana that "it was important to look at the category of Dalit Bahujan as a check to counter the hidden culture of Brahminism and its textual history, but to check brahmanism, dalits have to stand on the ideology of Phule and Ambedkar. Without following such an ideology, the ideal of Dalit Bahujan is likely to remain historically very weak. Phule's anticipation on backward class movement has not been realized in reality. Since 1920s, there were several movements that took place i.e., Dravidian movement, Dalit movement, Periyar Ramaswamy's Movement in Tamil Nadu, Daiit Bahujan Movement in UP, Maharastra and Andhra Pradesh. The politics did not succeed and those political Parties, who claimed that they are for Dalit or Dalit Bahujan, could not succeed.³³

Conclusion:

Phule is remembered for his contribution to various fields like education, caste equality, agricultural reforms, economics, women and widow rights, human rights and social equality. He occupies a unique position among the 19th century social reformers of India. The line of

thought of Jyotirao Phule was revolutionary; it gave a clearer goal for individual freedom and self-fulfillment, complete equality and social unity than many other “reformist” thinkers of the time. People called him a revolutionary, because of his uncompromising attack on the injustice of the old society. When he stressed about participatory development, he clearly emphasized economic development of peasants, shudras and women, but other reformers concentrated more on reforming the social institutions of family and marriage with special emphasis on the status and rights of women. He emphasized more on classless/casteless society. Inspired by his ideology, Several Parties, organizations, dalit intellectuals started working. They have to push forward Phule’s revolutionary ideology. Although many political parties emerged for this cause, they did not make qualitative difference. But all these parties are striving to get political power and giving moral and political strength to scheduled castes/tribes/minorities and OBCs and encouraging dalits to become leaders. To sum up, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is a revolutionary social reformer.

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