

HINDU SOCIAL REFORM

HINDU SOCIAL REFORM
The Framework of Jotirao Phule

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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
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Dedicated to:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891-1956)

Father of Indian Constitution
and the Liberator of Lower Classes of Hindus

who acknowledged Mahatma Jorirao Phule
as one of his Three Great Gurus (others being Buddha & Kabir)
and described him as

“the greatest *Shudra* of modern India who made the
lower classes of Hindus conscious of their caste-slavery”

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Preface

About ten year ago, when Mahatma Jotiba Phule Chair was founded by Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra in the Department of History and its charge was handed over to me keeping in view my interest in Dalit Studies, I discovered that very little had been written on the social reform movement launched by Mahatma Jotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890) who was, as a matter of fact, the most radical reformer of nineteenth century India and has rightly been called as the 'father of Indian social revolution'. I was surprised to know that most of the professional historians (including stalwarts like Charles H. Heimsath) who have dealt with the subject of Indian/Hindu social reform, have either ignored the reform movement of Phule or have made just passing remarks about it in their respective researches. While conducting the academic activities of the Mahatma Phule Chair, I started my initial investigation in Phule's framework of Hindu social reform. Finally, I planned a research project on the theme. The Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla generously offered me its prestigious Fellowship for this project, for which, I want to express my sincere feelings of gratitude.

While visiting various parts of India, particularly Maharashtra, where Phule hailed from, I was able to meet and discuss with many persons who had deep knowledge of the contributions of the great reformer. Without their guidance and insights, my study would not have taken the proper shape, though some of them may, naturally, find themselves in disagreement with what I have written. In particular, I would like to acknowledge with thanks, the kind help, support or attention which the following persons gave to me: Prof. Hari Narke, Prof. Deepak Gaikwad, Prof. Sanjay Sonawane, Prof Dalip

Ukey, Prof. Vijay Khare and Prof. Manohar Jadhav of Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU), Pune; Prof. Umesh Bagade of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwara University, Aurangabad; Prof. S. Victor Babu, Prof. Shashi Kumar and Prof. Sunil Gorla of Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow; Prof. Rajesh Karankal and Prof. Sandesh Wagh of Bombay University, Mumbai; Prof. Pradeep Aglave of Sant Tukadoji Maharaj University, Nagpur; Prof. Murzban Jal of Indian Institute of Education, Pune; and Prof. Subhas Chander Saini of Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra. I am also grateful to Dr. Rajendra Shejul, Ms. Madhulika, Dr. Vijay Kadam and Mr. Rajender Phule who helped me in arranging some materials and also in Marathi translations. I must not forget mentioning the name of Professor Makrand R. Paranjape, the dynamic Director of IIAS, Shimla, who has always been a very inspiring figure to me during the entire period when I was Resident-Fellow in the Institute.

Archives and Libraries provide the crucial link between a researcher and his research material and I wish to thank all the helpful officials of National Archives of India, New Delhi; IIAS Library, Shimla; Jayakar Library, SPPS University, Pune; Gautam Buddha Central Library, BBAU, Lucknow; S.T.M. University Library, Nagpur, Dr. Ambedkar Study Centre Library, KUK etc.

I would not be able to find sufficient words to express to my gratitude my late parents (Sh. Balwant Singh & Smt. Shanti Devi) who gave me everything, even when they had nothing and sacrificed their life to change the destiny of mine and my brothers. Also I cannot forget to say my heartiest thanks to my better-half Ms. Suman Lata, who has always given me her support and encouragement in all of my academic endeavours and, for this project too, she convinced me to join the IIAS Fellowship, though I was somewhat reluctant in view of my domestic liabilities. I must specially thank my sweet son Saksham Singh who has typed this lengthy manuscript. How could I forget to remember my dear daughter Nilakshee Chahal, who is, truly, a big source of my energy!

S.K. CHAHAL

Introduction

The objective of the present study is to make an historical, comparative and critical analysis of the framework of Hindu social reform as proposed by Jotirao Govind Phule (1827-1890), a radical social reformer of nineteenth century Maharashtra, who visualized Hindu society free from *Brahmanic* hegemony and exploitation. Phule showed extreme concern for the suppressed sections of Hindu society and started a crusade against 'Brahmanism' and the 'slavery' it imposed upon the *Shudras*, *Atishudras* and women for centuries. It is pertinent to note here that while inscribing his famous historical work, *Who were the Shudras*, to the memory of Mahatma Phule, Dr. Bsbasaheb Ambedkar (1891-1956), the chief architect of *Indian Constitution* and another champion of the weaker sections in modern India, describes him as "the greatest *Shudra* of modern India who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign rule."¹ This tribute sheds sufficient light on the historic contribution of Phule in the field of Hindu social reform. His contribution could be understood by recognition of the fact that he initiated a new tradition of radical social reform in India, which was further strengthened by Ambedkar and later came to be known as the 'Phule-Ambedkar tradition of social reform'.²

1 B.R. Ambedkar, *Who were the Shudras: How they came to be the Fourth Varna in Indo-Aryan Society*, Thacker & Co., Bombay, 1946; see *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. VII, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, p. 12.

2 The 'Phule-Ambedkar tradition' of social reform, also called as

Popularly known as ‘*Krantisurya*’ (Sunlight of Revolution) among his followers, Jotirao Phule was the first public intellectual, activist, reformer and social revolutionary from among the non-Brahman Hindus in modern India. He was mentor/motivator of many reformers of the next generation in India. It is well known that Ambedkar called him as one of his three great Gurus (teachers), the others being Buddha and Kabir. But only a few people know that Swami Vivekananda, another champion of social reform, and Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest of Hindu reformers and one of the nation-builders of India, also took great inspiration from him. “Him I call a Mahatma,” said Vivekananda, “whose heart bleeds for the poor.”³ Similarly, paying a worthy tribute to Phule, Gandhi, while he was in Yarwada jail near Poona in May 1933, said: “Jotiba was a real Mahatma.”⁴

In fact, Phule was the leader of the people associated with the ‘little tradition’ in Maharashtra, which was characterized by his struggles for destroying *Brahmanic* feudal and patriarchal orders,

‘*Dalit-Bahujan* movement’ in academia nowadays, is one of the most radical protest movements in modern/contemporary India having different dimensions, e.g., social, political, spiritual (neo-Buddhism/*Navyana*), cultural, economic, academic/literary (Dalit Studies and Literature) etc. For a thematic understanding of the tradition/movement see: Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of An Indian Identity*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 1995; Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, Sage Publishing India, New Delhi, 1996 and *Post Hindu India: Discourse in Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution*, Sage Publishing India, New Delhi, 2009; Braj Rajan Mani, *Debrahmanising History*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 2005, rept. 2013;; Murzban Jal, *Why We are not Hindus*, Askar Books, New Delhi, 2015; Preeti Nath Saxena, *Dalit Paradigms: Concept and Theory Building*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2017 etc.

3 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phule: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Publication, Bombay, 1964, Third Edition, 2013, p. 278.

4 *Din Bandhu*, ‘Mahatma Phule Special Number’ 25 November 1849, quoted by Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

by a dynamically radical programme for achieving social reform in Hindu society.⁵ The tools used by him were not very dissimilar to those applied by his contemporary upper caste social reformers: he founded primary schools for the poor pupils, wrote books, brought out journals and pamphlets and mobilized the masses.⁶ But his approach was sharply different from them. Since he hailed from the lower strata of Hindu society, he naturally came out as, to apply Antonio Gramsci's term, an organic intellectual.⁷ In other words, his

5 M.H. Jadhav, "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra: Review of Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra by J. R. Shinde", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 17, 26 April, 1986, p. 740.

6 *Ibid.*

7 For understanding the ideas and works of Antonio Gramsci, see: Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebook of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1978; Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1991; Carl Boggs, *The Two Revolutions: Antonio Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism*, Southend Press, Boston, 1984; Carl Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists*, Berg, New York, 1999; Renate Hobul, *Anonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, 1992. Gramsci evolved a package of concepts in the process of understanding the inter-relationship between the state and civil society in the western as well as the eastern Europe including the former Soviet Union during the inter-war period. Apart from hegemony, Gramsci talked of allied concepts such as historical bloc, traditional and organic intellectuals, passive revolution, counter-hegemony etc. While going through academic discussions on the application of Gramscian notions to modern Indian context, it was found that historians like Bipan Chandra have applied his concepts to understanding the movements of Mahatma Gandhi. (See: Bipan Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 13-15). This author is, however, of humble opinion that prior to Gandhi, Phule was the first social leader of modern India to be called, in real sense of the term, an organic intellectual of a counter-hegemonic project, as he not only himself hailed from the lower strata of Hindu society, but also represented their worldview as against the *Brahmanical* hegemony (which had roots in Peshwai regime) and the colonial hegemony. Nevertheless, like Bipan Chandra, the author has used the Gramscian notions in an amended form since the exercise of

social location largely helped him to develop his approach which was totally ground-laying and based on a perspective from below or that of lower classes of Hindu society. He viewed the problem of Hindu social reform from this perspective. He also laid a foundation for envisioning a utopia for independent republic of India, one that looked to the remembrance and recreation in modern form of the 'kingdom of Bali'. In colonial times, he himself made his concrete contributions to move in this direction, including an emphasis on radical socio-religious reforms, modern mass education, affirmative action and agrarian reforms, etc.⁸

As a matter of fact, Jotirao Phule (alongwith his wife Savitribai Phule) was among the first in modern India to declare war on *Brahmanic* culture and religion. His critique of the whole structure of hierarchy and oppression; his deconstruction of *Brahmanical* myth-history and attempts to suggest its alternative; his subversion of *Brahmanic* religion and scriptures; his highly gendered view of women's oppression and symbiosis between caste and patriarchy; his superb exposure of the emerging extreme nationalism as an extension of the self-strengthening movement of the *Brahmanic* elites; and above all, his distinct brand of socio-cultural radicalism based on uniting all the oppressed whom he called *Shudra-Atishudras* (and whom Savitribai called *Stree-Shudra-Atishudras*, adding women in the phrase) have not been properly highlighted in the scholarly writings.⁹ Hence, there are numerous possibilities to explore Phule and his intellectual contributions with new perspectives.

hegemony in a colonial society by the colonial rulers and the leaders of different segments of society including indigenous elites as well as the lower classes/castes occurs in a context different from an independent capitalist society. The nineteenth century Indian society was based on caste which gave birth to more stagnant forms of classes, i.e., castes, of which some were very high and 'sacred' and some were extremely low and 'unsacred'/'untouchable'. Since Phule voiced the grievances of the lower castes, it would not be incorrect to call him an organic intellectual of a counter-hegemonic project.

8 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2008, p. 184.

9 Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *A Forgotten Liberator:*

Some social scientists have recently claimed that Jotirao Phule, like Michael Foucault and much before him, suggested, in his own way, a theory of hegemony and saw a close relationship between knowledge, power and privileges. Foucault in his power/knowledge paradigm countered all knowledge systems as 'regimes of truth' propounded by the hegemonic powers of the time as every discourse seems to follow the "well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict."¹⁰ Phule also saw Brahmanism as a kind of 'regime of truth' and a hegemonic system of dominance and exploitation for monopolising knowledge, power and privileges by a particular class which uses these to dominate, exclude, and exploit other groups in Hindu society. He, therefore, earnestly felt the need to cut out the ideology of Brahmanism from Hinduism. This, according to G.P. Deshpande, indicates a clear understanding by him of the relation between knowledge and power, much before Michael Foucault:

Phule was ... first to attempt at transforming plural categories of history into singular or universal. He talked about knowledge and power much before Foucault did. In fact, Foucault's post-modernist analysis came at a time when Europe had literally seen an 'end of history' whereas Phule's effort was to change the world/society with the weapon of knowledge.¹¹

Well, the connection between knowledge and power is quite old otherwise Galileo would not have suffered at the hands of clergy in the sixteenth century for speaking truth to power. To this end, Deshpande's statement may be true, though Phule and Foucault are

The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule, Mountain Peak, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 5-6.

10 Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Psychology Press, London, 2002, p. 373. For a more comprehensive understanding of the Foucaultian theory of hegemony and his paradigm of Power/Knowledge also see: Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (edited by Colin Gordon), Pantheon Books, New York, 1980; *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1970; *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Vol. I, Penguin, New Delhi, 2002.

11 Quoted in Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

not comparable in terms of time, space, vocation and their lifelong objectives. More importantly, unlike Foucault, Phule was not a conventional academic, in any sense. The fact of the matter is that Jotirao was basically a down-to-earth social reformer who launched a radical reform movement in the colonial Maharashtra, in accordance with his peculiar framework of Hindu social reform. The purpose of his reform movement was to 'liberate' the *Shudra-Atishudras* from the thralldom of Brahmanism in particular and to initiate a reformation in Hinduism in general.

Despite such contributions, Phule is still better known in Maharashtra and not often discussed outside the region, the reason of which is, perhaps, that the Indian academic community overwhelmingly thinks and writes in English, and its access to vernacular writings is still very limited.¹² Though some keen observers of the social scenario in Maharashtra like Narayan Mahadeo Parmananda did acknowledge his greatness during his life time¹³, it is only in the recent decades that there is increasing appreciation of his services and sacrifice in uplifting the downtrodden masses. In fact, the later generations took considerable time in understanding and appreciating the profound significance of his unflinching espousal of the 'natural rights of all women and men', which remained till the end of his life, a major theme of his writings and a goal of his actions. In any case, Phule has now risen above the horizons of contemporary India, like a phoenix. His sane and powerful voices for a casteless world are now being heard, bringing into prominence the egalitarian dimension of his movement.¹⁴

We should note that Phule was first a social reformer and then a thinker. Unlike many other social reformers of his times, he was

12 Ashwini Deshpande, *The Grammar of Caste: Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 32-33.

13 P.G. Patil (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule - Selections*, Vol. II, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 199, pp. xv & xxi.

14 Victor Paul, "The Relentless Truthseeker", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *A Forgotten Liberator: The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule*, Mountain Peak, New Delhi, 2008, p. 80.

not simply a master of word-craft; but actively worked, alongwith his wife Savitribai Phule and other associates, to eradicate the social evils. He started thinking because he wanted to do something concretely for initiation of religious reformation in Hindu society. Hence, his framework of Hindu social reform was an outcome of his thought process, especially in terms of the interests of the lower caste Hindus whom he was especially concerned about. In striking contrast to the high caste social reformers of his times, he believed that one's radical ideology must be complemented by radical practice. An ideologue-activist, as Deshpande emphasises, he grappled with almost all important issues that the then Hindu/Indian society faced – religion, ritualism, caste, mythology, politics, education, gender problem, poverty, village, agriculture, etc. Thus, his range of ideas and concerns were deeper and broader than that of any other social reformer or even political leader of his times.¹⁵

Since, the theme of this research is titled 'Hindu social reform', let us first discuss this concept before familiarising ourselves with terms like 'Hinduism', *Brahman Dharma* and *Brahmanical* social order, and also Phule's understanding about it. As many students of history know, this concept was first of all used by the well-known historian Charles H. Heimsath who is known for his masterpiece entitled *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* published in 1964.¹⁶ In this book, Heimsath has attempted to look into the various movements and specific 'crusades' of social reform and estimated their relative importance for the social reform movement as a whole and for modern India history. The stalwart historian has used the concept of 'Hindu social reform' in very broad, though vague, terms in his book: "I may later found myself for error, but I have now come to accept the view of Professor R.C. Majumdar that the Hindus and Muslims in nineteenth century formed "two distinct communities"

15 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction)*, LeftWord, New Delhi, 2002, rept. 2016, p. 20.

16 For details see: Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey), 1964.

and that “in social and cultural matters, they lived in two water-tight compartments as it were.”¹⁷

I have borrowed the term from Heimsath, though not in the meanings as has been explained by him (particularly not withstanding his theory of ‘two distinct communities’). It is true that Jotirao Phule tried to present his movement as a ‘universal movement’ through his conception of ‘universal religion of truth’, the social reform movement launched by him was mainly confined to the Hindu society. As a matter of fact, Phule’s movement was really one of the toughest ‘crusades’ waged by the then reformers against Hindu orthodoxy and unjust social order based on *Varna Vyavastha* (a hierarchical social order based on four primitive castes, with the exception of *Avarnas*/Untouchables, which later on gave birth to caste system) and *Brahman Dharma*. Though he (and also many other reformers of his times) did not frequently use the term ‘Hindu’¹⁸ which actually was not very popular in those days, but it does not make any big difference because he was fighting for the cause of the lower caste Hindus whom he called *Shudra-Atishudras*. Moreover, it is significant to note that his framework of Hindu social reform was one of the most dynamic frameworks of his times, which was altogether different from that of the high caste reformers of nineteenth century who represented the so-called ‘mainstream’ tradition of Hindu social reform.

Here, the question arises what does the term ‘Hinduism’ mean? Actually ‘Hinduism’ is a taken for granted term which has been broadly used for the people of India.¹⁹ The term ‘Hindu’ is derived

17 *Ibid.*, p. x.

18 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society: Non-Brahman Movement in Western India 1873-1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976; rpt. Manohar, New Delhi, 2011, p. 108. Omvedt claims that Phule hardly used the term ‘Hindu’. But the fact is that we occasionally find references of the term in his writings as we will come to know in our subsequent discussion. Some historians further claim that the term was a ‘colonial construct’ which is also incorrect because the radical medieval saints like Tukaram, Kabir, Raidas and Nanak and have frequently used the term in their poetry.

19 For a critical understanding of Hinduism see: Max Weber, *The*

from Sindhu, the river Indus. It was during ninth to tenth century AD, the Indian subcontinent as a territory came to be known as 'Hindustan' or 'Al-Hind' and its inhabitants as 'Hindustanis' or 'Hindus' in Arabic. Though the term had come into usage in medieval times, it was mainly the colonial period which saw the consolidation of India or 'Hindustan' and its people with 'Hinduism', interpreted as being the primal religion of the subcontinent. This was the 'construction' of Hinduism, done partly by the colonial masters and partly by the Indian elites (like W.C. Banarjee, M.G. Ranade, Balgangadhar Tilak etc.).²⁰

The Hindu religion, as it is described today, is said to have its roots in the *Vedas*, the poems of Indo-Europeans whose incursions into the Indian subcontinent took place few centuries after the earliest urban civilization in India, the Indus valley or Harappan civilization. Hinduism has been a unique phenomenon of spirituality linked to a particular way of life. Many scholars believe that it is an ancient and profound religion. It was a naturally evolved religion. Although its stability had been broken from time to time by invasions and disturbances, it has maintained a fair degree of continuity. Its greatest virtue has been its elasticity, its pluralism. With a core in the religious tradition going back to the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, it has brought forth many faiths, sects and even 'religions' (like Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism) – all born out of the same fertile continuum

Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism (tr. & ed. By Hans Garth & Don Martin Dale), London, 1958; S. Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Hinduism*, Paper Missile, London, 1923 and *The Hindu View of Life*, Unwin Books, London, 1965; B.R. Ambedkar, *The Philosophy of Hinduism*, New Delhi: Amazon Digital Servicers Ltd., 2018; W.J. Wilkins, *Modern Hinduism: An Account of the Religion and Life of the Hindus in Northern India.*, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 1975; Shashi Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu?*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2018 & *The Hindu Way: An Introduction to Hinduism*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2019; Irawati K. Karve, *Hindu Society: An Interpretation*, Deccan College, Poona, 1961.

20 Gail Omvedt, *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 2-3.

of tradition, all part of India and Hinduism's contribution to the world.²¹

Since it was not founded by any individual-prophet, the element of plurality from the very outset remained one of the main characteristics of Hinduism. It was on this account that many faiths, sects, sets of belief, institutions, dogmas, customs etc. emerged in Hinduism, of them some were not only un-uniform, but even contradictory to one-another. As normally happens, here too the vested interests exploited the situation. Using their hegemonic position in Hindu society, they claimed the systems, beliefs and dogmas favouring their interests to be the 'crux' of Hinduism. The *Brahman Dharma* or *Brahmanic Hinduism* was the outcome of such a state of affairs. The main themes of the *Brahman Dharma* were the identification of the orthodoxy with acceptance of the authority of *Shastras* and the Brahmans and the idea of *Varnashrama Dharma*— the four-fold system of castes and stages of life – as the ideal socio-religious life. *Advaita*, the identification of a self or *Atman* within each individual with the universal '*Brahman*' (alongwith the theories of incarnation, *Karma* and rebirth) was the favoured philosophy. As it developed, *Brahmanism* had accounted for the emergence of an unequal and hierarchical social order based on *Varna Vyavastha*. The material base of this order lay in village social economy based on the institutions of caste, *Jajmani* and untouchability.²²

The *Brahman Dharma* and its theories, rituals and institutions had its roots in the Vedic age, particularly the later Vedic period when the Brahmans – the priestly order – strengthened their position in Vedic religion and soon succeeded in establishing their hegemony in the religious and social life. Things cannot be understood unless we clear the cobweb of faction that has been woven around the *Veda* and Vedic religion. Some parts of the *Vedas* composed in ancient India bear out the fact that the Vedic people fought many battles with other indigenous inhabitants whom they called *Dasa*, *Dasyu* and *Rakshasa*, and succeeded in subjugating them due to their use of horses and possibly some better arms. Gradually, they settled down

21 *Ibid.*, pp. vii & 1-2.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

amongst other native people, but antagonisms persisted. In all likelihood, the Aryans devised the system of *Varna* in purely secular terms – primarily to retain their superiority and impose their hegemony over the ‘low-born’ people.²³

As we attempt to examine critically the Vedic natural and social worldview, it emerges that the supposedly ‘immutable’, ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’ hierarchical distinctions between the ‘higher’ and the ‘lower’ orders, which provided the basis of the *Brahmanical* social order, are drawn on the principle in which the strong consumes the weak. It is for this logic that *Prajapati*, the lord of all creatures, is portrayed in the *Kathopanishad* as manifest on earth in the form of a series of mouths: “The priest is one of your mouths. With the mouth, you eat rulers The king is one of your mouths. With that mouth you eat the commoners.”²⁴ As such, in the hierarchical division, the Brahman or priest eats the next most important, that being the *Kshatriya* or ruler, who in his turn eats *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. Thus, the higher order lives, feeds, and thrives on the lower. The image of the lower orders as ‘food’ for their superiors is not just symbolic but the quint-essential *Brahmanic* hierarchical vision of social, political, economic and cultural relations within the society. Doniger and Smith explains it as under:

The *Veda* depicts a life where I gain only at your loss, my prosperity entails your ruin, my continued existence depends on your death, and my eating requires that you become food. It is an order of things seemingly most advantageous to the one with greatest physical strength and military might, the biggest fish, the top dog. The rank order of the eaters and the food in the natural world is straightforward: the physically more powerful eat the physically less powerful. And the principle supposedly holds when it comes to the social world.²⁵

The hierarchical order based on *Varna Vjyavastha* was given religious and spiritual sanctity and, as such, mere mortals could not challenge it. Anyone who is desirous of his well-being must turn

23 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

25 Wendy Doniger & Brian Smith (eds.), *The Law of Manu*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1991, rpt. 2014, p. xxvii.

for all-important sacrifices, to the Brahman who would offer sacrifice on his behalf. The renowned historian Romila Thapar, while pointing at Mauss's comprehension of sacrifice as the procedure of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds, reflects on the bipolarity of sacred and profane causing social distance in caste society as follows:

The purity of *Brahmana* was partly derived from his condition of sanctity at the time of *Yajnya* and the exclusion of other castes may have measured in terms of their social distance from sacrificial enclosure. Thus, the *Khyatriya* was frequently the *Yajmana*, he who has the sacrifice performed, and could, therefore, be admitted as a participant. The other castes were at the best observers from the distance.²⁶

The notion of purity-pollution widened social distance in society. It also turned out to be a basis of relations of dominance and subordination in the *Brahmanical* social order. A scholar of the subject expresses it as under:

... While a Brahman (has) superhuman status, the *Shudra* is subhuman all the way. The subhuman *Shudra* cannot become man, in fact, he does not want to become man as he has killed the man in himself. He has the mind but he does not think, he has a will to act but he chooses not to act. The *Shudra* is passivity/servility personified; he does act but is acted upon. This is so because, as Manu says, "slavery is inborn in the *Shudra*." He is supposed to submit to Brahmans and gods who oppress him and bring to him all the miseries and sorrows of the world.²⁷

The *Shudra* was given the name *Padaja* – 'born from the feet' implying thereby that God created the *Shudra* to be the eternal slave. Initially, the lot of the *Vaishyas*, the producing class, was slightly better than the *Shudras*, though these two were often clubbed together as *Paap-Yoni* (those born of sin). The *Vaishyas* were often bracketed with the *Shudras* for serving the Brahmans and *Kshatriyas*. The later Vedic period, during which various *Arayankas* and *Brahmans*

26 Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, OUP, New Delhi, 1993, p. 37.

27 Jalalul Haq, *The Shudra: A Philosophical Narrative of India's Super-Humanism*, Institute of Objective Studies, Delhi, 1997, p. 17.

were composed, witnessed the systematic segregation of all producing communities – peasants, artisans and labourers – as *Shudras/ Avarnas* (outcasts), who were characterised by the adjectives like ‘*Krishnayonih*’ (black people), ‘*Dasyu Vamshah*’ (descendants of *Dasyus*) and ‘*Tvacham Krishnam*’ (black skinned).²⁸ This legitimized the superiority and hegemony of ‘*Arya-Bhat*’ (orthodox Brahman) people over the lower orders. Treated like social invalids, *Shudras* and *Avarnas* were supposed to be fed and to be clothed with the remnants of food and clothes of the higher orders. They were not entitled to hear the *Vedas* or wear the sacred thread. They were kept out of all *Yajnas* and *Anusthanas*.²⁹

The *Varna Vyavastha*, according to Manu, was the creation of God, and the Brahmins, who are at the pinnacle of the hierarchical order, are the living ‘embodiments of God on earth’ (*Bhudeva*). In his own words, “A Brahman is a great god, whether he is learned or imbecile; and the Brahmins should be respected in every way, even if they indulge in crime.”³⁰ On the other hand, his (Manu) rules regarding *Shudras* are that they are not entitled to education, to amass wealth, or to bear arms. A Brahman can take away all possessions from a *Shudra*, since nothing at all can belong to him as his own.³¹ Women, similarly, are debarred from property and other rights. Manu places all women, irrespective of their caste, in the category of the ‘lowly *Shudra*’ and expects them to surrender body and soul to men.³² Ambedkar describes the implications of such directives against the *Shudras* and women in the following words:

The Brahmanism began an onslaught on both the *Shudras* and the women in pursuits of the old idea, namely servility, and Brahmanism did succeed in making the *Shudras* and women the servile classes’ *Shudras* the serfs to the three higher classes and women the serfs to their husbands. Of the black deeds committed by Brahmanism... this one is the blackest. There is no parallel in history for so foul deeds

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

29 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

30 Wendy Doniger & Brian Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 317-319.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*, p. 417.

of degradation committed by a class of usurpers in the name of class domination.³³

According to Manu the supreme duty of the king, is to enforce this hierarchical social order under the guidance of his Brahmins. His divinely ordained duty is to sustain and strengthen the '*Varna Dharma*'. Manu, however, makes it very clear that no matter how mighty a king be, he is inferior to even a ten-year-old Brahmin boy. A priest and a hundred year old ruler should be regarded as father and son, and of the two of them, the priest is the father.³⁴

Like the *Shrutis-Smirits*, the *Bhagwat Gita*, the finest philosophical text of *Brahmanic* Hinduism and its most popular scripture, centres on the philosophy of *Varna Dharma* through its specious glorification of '*Karma Yoga*' and '*Swadharma*'. The *Gita* is honoured more often than read and understood far less than it is recited.³⁵ It's much glorified concepts of *Swadharma* (one's religiously ordained duty) and '*Nishkama Karma*' (action without desire for the fruits of action) are embedded in the idea of unwavering performance of duty of the caste to which one belongs.

Apart from *Dharma*, the other word used for duty in the text is *Karma* (literally means action). A reader having a little bit of common sense can see that *Karma* is used in the text to mean duty as laid down in the *Chaturvarnya/Varna Dharma*. The 'natural' duty of the Brahmin is acquiring religious knowledge and intellectual perfection. While the *Kshatriya* is obliged to rule the masses; agriculture, tending to cattle and trade are duties of the *Vaishya*. However, it is on the 'natural' slavery of the *Shudra* that the *Gita*, like other *Brahmanic* texts, lays the most merciless emphasis: "Service is the natural duty of the *Shudra*." Hence, like other *Brahmanic* works, the *Gita's* overriding concern, too, is to extol the *Varna-Jati* ideology.³⁶

Nevertheless, we also hear from the mouth of lord Krishna himself: "For those who take refuge in me, be they even of the sinful

33 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. III, p. 336.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

35 D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Vikas Publication, Delhi, 1965, rpt. 1992, p. 209.

36 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

breeds such as women, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*...” That is, all women and all men of the working and producing classes are defiled by their very birth, though they may in afterlife be freed by their faith in god who degrades them so casually in this one. Not only that, the god himself had created such differences: “The four-caste (class) division has been created by me”; and this is proclaimed in the list of great achievements.³⁷ Hence, Dr. Ambedkar rightly concludes that *Gita* presents a “philosophical defence of *Chaturvarnya*”:

The first instance one comes across in reading the *Bhagwat Gita* is the justification of war.... Another dogma to which the *Bhagwat Gita* comes forward is to offer a philosophical defence of *Chaturvarnya*. It, no doubt, mentions that *Chaturvarnya* is created by God and, therefore, is sacrosanct. But, it does not make its validity dependent on it. It offers a philosophical basic to the theory of *Chaturvarnya* by linking it to the theory of innate, inborn qualities in men. The fixing of the *Varna* of man is not an arbitrary act, says the *Bhagwat Gita*, but it is fixed according to his innate, inborn qualities.³⁸

This religious philosophy strengthened the *Brahmanical* social order based on caste during the course of history. As a matter of fact, caste has for centuries been the major civilizational fault-line in the Indian sub-continent, and on this account, India remained the most iniquitous society on the earth.³⁹ Ambedkar further expresses his opinion about the devastating effects of caste on the Hindus in the following words:

The effect of caste ... on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste had destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste had made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation to the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy.⁴⁰

37 D.D. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

38 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. III, pp. 361-362.

39 Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

40 B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste with A Reply to Mahatma Gandhi's Criticism*, Samata Prakashan, Nagpur, rpt. 2004, p. 46.

Needless to say that the *Brahmanic* religion not only affected adversely the social, political, economic and cultural life of the Hindus, but had even determined the course of Indian history. Here, the highly critical remarks of Fredrick Hegel, the German philosopher of the nineteenth century, on the ‘history of *Hindoos*’ are noteworthy:

The *Hindoos* have no history.... The admitted diffusions of Indian culture had been a dumb, deedless expansion. Thus, the people of India have achieved no foreign conquests, but have on every occasion been vanquished themselves.⁴¹

The similar remarks were made by Karl Marx in the following well-known passage:

Indian society has no history, at least no known history. What we call its history is but the history of successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.⁴²

Hegel further saw in ideology of the ‘*Hindoo*’ culture a deprivation of man of his personality and freedom: “the morality which is involved in respect for human life is not found among the *Hindoos*.”⁴³ In the actual organization of society, the multiplication of divine forms was paralleled by the multiplicity of castes. This was recognized by Hegel to be an advance over an undifferentiated society, but then was immediately condemned by him as establishing “the most degrading spiritual serfdom.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Marx not only condemned the so called ‘Indian village communities’ as being “contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery”, but also stressed their isolation from political events, which adversely affected the destiny of India through the ages.⁴⁵

41 Fredrick Hegel, (tr. by Sibree), *The Philosophy of History*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, rpt. 2004, p. 142.

42 Iqbal Husan (ed.), *Karl Marx on India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, rpt. 2011, p. xx.

43 Fredrick Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

44 *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

45 Iqbal Husan (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

On a profound note, it must be stated here that we cannot accept the above mentioned statements of Hegel and Marx uncritically. Like all thinkers, both of them were men of their times. Several of their views on Asia and Africa were ill-conceived. While Hegel had gone to the extent of calling all Africans barbaric, Marx too was overcritical of India and such criticism was not necessarily informed by sound empirical understanding. Hence, today we can't take their ideas on India at a face value. But while we read the contemporary lower caste observers in India like Jotirao Phule and scholars like Ambedkar, who provide sufficient empirical information on the nineteenth century India, the picture emerges almost the same.

Needless to explain as to why Indians lagged behind socially and civilizationally, deteriorated intellectually and morally, lost freedom and suffered so much in the past. According to Premnath Bazaz, all such sufferings were chiefly caused by the acceptance of the ideas, theories and dogmas enshrined in *Brahmanic* scriptures like *Gita* by the people of India:

The argument that the Indians accepted the *Gita* as their scripture but failed to live up to its ideals does not hold much water. When one argues that the *Gita* has been the most adored and popular scripture and its teachings are etched in the heart and mind of every Indian, it is absurd to contend that the sufferings of the people have not been caused by the acceptance of such scriptures.⁴⁶

Jotirao Phule clearly identified *Brahman Dharma* as a hegemonic system which was historical, constructed over time and perpetuated, rationalized and made sacrosanct the dominance of the Brahmans and also their ideology of social hierarchy, particularly through its strategies of disseminating knowledge (religious/ philosophical/secular) in Hindu society. Notably, he always used the word 'Brahmanism' instead 'Hinduism' which was, as G.P. Deshpande points out, basically an ideology/system of *Brahmanic* dominance (*Brahmanache Varschaswa* or *Brahman Varschaswad*).⁴⁷ Not only Phule, even Ambedkar, who claimed himself to be a 'disciple' of Phule and has

46 Quoted in Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

47 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

generally been regarded as an ‘anti-Hindu’, also went on to argue, “you will succeed in saving Hinduism, if you kill Brahmanism”, and for this it was required that “you must destroy the religion of the *Shrutis* and *Smritis*.”⁴⁸ Hence, there was nothing sacred or divine about Brahmanism as it was based on unjust religious, social and moral ideas. But since it presented itself as divinely ordained, it was necessary, Phule felt, to oppose this system in its entirety and dismantle it ultimately.

As we attempt to understand the making of Mahatma Phule, many things draw our attention. The struggles of local *Kolis* and *Ramoshis* on the one hand and *Paramhansa Mandali* and its pioneers like Dadoba Pandurang and Balkrishna Jayakar and also his friend, the great Parsi reformer, B.M. Malabari all had influenced the mind of Jotirao Phule in the earlier phase of his life. Historians commonly believe that intellectually, Phule was greatly influenced by Thomas Paine (1737-1809), an English-born American religious radical and political activist who inspired patriots in the American Revolution of 1776.⁴⁹ No doubt, Paine’s treatise *Rights of Man* (1791) which was called ‘*Bible of the poor*’ and also his other book namely *The Age of Reason* (1794) had deep imprint on Phule’s mind, but the most critical input was provided to him by the home-grown *Shramanic* and radical *Bhakti* traditions based on equality, reason and religious radicalism, coupled with his own experiences and observations of the socio-economic realities of his times. He appears to be a gifted scholar and, as suggested, was one of the earliest organic intellectuals of modern India. His authored many writings which include plays, poems and polemical works – foremost of which are: *Trutiya Ratna (The Third Eye)*, *Brahmananche Kasab (Priestcraft Exposed)*,

48 B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste with A Reply to Mahatma Gandhi’s Criticism*, pp. 75-83.

49 For understanding the ideas and works of Thomas Paine, see Howard Fast (ed.), *Selected Works of Thomas Paine*, The Modern Library, New York, 1964, Bernard Vincent, *The Transatlantic Republican: Thomas Paine and the Age of Revolutions*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2005; Frank Smith, *Thomas Paine: The Liberator*, Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York, 1938; R.R. Fennessy, *Burke, Paine and the Rights of Man: A Difference of Political Opinion*, Martinus Nizhoff, The Hague, 1963.

'*Gulamagiri (Slavery)*, *Shetakaryacha Asud (Cultivator's Whipcord)*, *Satsar (The Essence of Truth)*, *Ishara (Warning)*, *Asprashyacha Kaifiyat (Untouchables' Apologia)* and *Sarvajanik Satyadharm Pustak (A Book of Universal Religion of Truth)* etc.⁵⁰

As we go through Phule's framework of Hindu social reform, it clearly emerges that he was totally committed to the annihilation of the old established order based on Brahmanism and systems like *Varna Vyavastha*, caste, untouchability and gender inequality and all socio-religious traditions, customs and practices causing violation of human rights of the people in any form. In 1848, the same year which also saw publication of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* in Europe, he dared to establish the first school for Untouchable girls, the most depressed section of Hindu society, in Poona. It was Phule who advocated first in India the inter-caste marriages and other such relations for the eradication of caste inequalities. He was the pioneer of non-Brahman movement in India and was, perhaps, the only non-Brahman reformer who was more concerned to the cause of Untouchable than that of his own caste fellows. He was for equal rights of all women and men. Actually, he was the first Indian advocate of human rights. He equally believed that enlightenment of lower caste people and women was the only way out to combat social inequalities. He pointed out in the opening lines of his highly thought-provoking treatise *Shetakaryacha Asud (Cultivator's Whipcord)*, that lack of knowledge/education led to lack of wisdom,

50 With few exceptions, Phule authored most of his writings in Marathi, the language of *Marathi-Manus* or the common man of Maharashtra, as he was writing not for the elite, but basically for the lower caste people in order to awaken them and revolutionize their minds. Most of his writings have been reprinted in the edited/translated collections or selections like: D. Keer & S.G. Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule* (Marathi), Maharashtra State Society for Literature and Culture, Bombay, 1969; Y.D. Phadke (ed.), *Mahatma Phule: Samagra Vangmya* (Marathi), Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Ani Sanskriti Mandali, Bombay, 1985; P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.* Vols. I & II; Asha Mundlay (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Vol. III, Mumbai, 2002, Mahatma Phule Source Material Publication Committee, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2002; and G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*

which led to lack of morals, which led to lack of progress, which led to lack of money, and which ultimately led to the smashing of *Shudras*.⁵¹ To him, the acquisition of knowledge by the down-trodden sections of Hindu society was emancipatory and was key to all problems of the downtrodden.

Phule also saw the subjugation of women, along with that of the *Shudra-Atishudras*, as a part the larger hegemonic design and structure of relations inherent in the ideology of Brahmanism. He tried to link subordination of women with a structure of relations in Hindu society that might be recognized as akin to patriarchy. Among the nineteenth century social reformers, Phule alone was able to stand outside the *Brahmanical* patriarchy and his rejection of orthodox religion enabled him to adopt a radical approach to gender inequality too. He wanted that the traditional family and marriage system should be reformed in the light of reason and gender justice. His critique of *Brahmanic* Hinduism implied the view that the abolition of the *Brahmanical* systems would ensure the end of patriarchy as well.⁵²

Phule was, perhaps, the only reformer of modern India who felt the need of complete reformation in Hinduism. Influenced by Protestantism, Phule, through his lower caste protest movement, tried to provide an 'internal critique' of Hinduism whereby he was preparing the Hindus to initiate reformation in their society in the new age of modernity. On the other hand, the 'mainstream' tradition of Hindu social reform, i.e., the Rammohan Roy tradition aimed to 'repair' or revitalize the Hindu social systems and, hence, its approach was 'piecemeal'. Its limitation was that it tried to reform some of the traditions, customs and practices of the orthodox Hindus. In contrast, Phule sought a complete change, a radical reformation in the old orthodox religion itself.⁵³

51 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshapnde (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 117.

52 Uma Chakravarty, *Rewriting History: The Life and Limes of Pandita Ramabai*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1998, p. 65.

53 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance" (Report on a Seminar organized by Centre for Social Studies,

In 1873, Phule published *Gulamagiri (Slavery)* one of his most controversial and hard-hitting treatises, which was a virtual declaration of war on the Brahmanism. He also included in this book a 'manifesto' exhorting everything to discard caste. He insisted that no language could be too harsh to characterise the selfish heartedness and consummate cunning of the *Brahmanic* ideology by which Hindu society has been governed so far.⁵⁴ He presented in his treatise a marvellous critique of the *Brahman Dharma*.

Being an organic intellectual, Phule not only anticipated the hegemony in *Brahmanic* religion and culture, but also came out with an original and, of course, dynamically radical framework of Hindu social reform to provide an alternative model to the *Brahman Dharma*. In his alternative model, he, alongwith other things, came out with his own idea of *Satyadharma* (religion of truth). And to materialize his conception of *Satyadharma*, he founded in 1873 *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Society of the Researchers of Truth) in Poona. The set of principles the *Samaj* drew up shortly after its formation included belief in equality of all human beings. Members were exhorted to spread truth and propagate righteous conduct among the people and make them aware about man's natural/human rights as well as social obligations.⁵⁵

Significantly, Phule also comes across as an authentic and extraordinary spokesman of the poor peasantry. There was hardly anyone among his contemporary caste Hindu reformers who sincerely bothered about the lot of peasantry. But Phule was the first social activist who made agriculture and the lot of cultivators one of his central concerns⁵⁶ In his *Shetaksaryacha Asud*, he not only depicted the peasant pauperisation caused by the colonial and *Brahmanic* exploitation. He referred to the tolls, taxes, debts, injunc-

Surat on 9-10 January 1991), in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 21, May 25, 1991, p. 1326.

54 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, see G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

55 G. Bhadru, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest Movement in 19th Century", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, 2002, pp. 845-846.

56 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

tions and rites/superstitions the *Shudra* peasants were suffering from and described how the little money, the cultivators had, was drained away by the cunning and selfish orthodox Brahmans (*Bhatjis*), moneylenders (*Shetjis*) and Government officials (*Latjis*). He also came forward with several plans and suggestions for peasant upliftment as well as agrarian reforms and agrestic transformation in rural India, especially Maharashtra.⁵⁷

While it is true that to reform Hindu society Phule waged a crusade against Brahmanism and *Brahmanical* social order during his life time, it must be remembered that he made a clear distinction between Brahmanism and Brahmans as a caste group. He recognised that all the Brahmans of his times did not support *Brahmanical* social order and a number of Brahmans also wanted to change it. Despite his ideological differences, he had friendly relations with Brahman reformers like Ranade and Dayananda Sarasvati. He did not hate even the orthodox Brahmans and was kind enough to forgive them if they would have restored to the *Shudra-Atishudras* their due human rights. He had many admirers, collaborators and friends among the Brahmans in his lifetime and later. What is more, Acharya P.K. Atre, a Brahman by birth, made a famous film on Mahatma Phule and his life in 1954. Hence, Phule's ideas have had an appeal across all the sections of India's society till date.

The issue, in fact, to Phule – and to us too – was that social inequalities were extremely deeply-rooted in Indian/Hindu society, much more so than the economic inequalities. Therefore, to fight the social inequalities based on caste hierarchies and gender discrimination, which still exist in India with all its rigidities as it was in the preceding time, and to initiate the 'real' social reform desirable for the purpose, Phule's framework of Hindu social reform is invariably relevant today in order to achieve social justice.

As we cast a glance on the historiography and literature available on the subject, it appears that only a small amount of literature has been produced by scholars on Jotirao Phule's life, works and ideas. There are only a few works which deal with our subject of the

57 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, see G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

study. Such authors whose works are relevant to our research are: Dhananjay Keer, Gail Omvedt, Rosalind O'Hanlon, M.S. Gore, J.R. Shinde, G.P. Deshpande, Gopal Guru, Braj Ranjan Mani, Adi. H. Doctor, Thom Wolf, Aparna Devare, Umesh Bagade, etc. Dhananjay Keer's (1964) is actually a biography of Phule written in a classical literary style. Keer has ably identified the fact that Phule's was actually a critique of Brahmanism and not of Hinduism. The biographer describes him as the 'father of Indian social revolution' and 'pioneer of the first non-Brahman movement' in India.⁵⁸ Gail Omvedt (1976) in her comprehensive study on the non-Brahman movement in western India discusses in detail the roots of non-Brahman movement in Bombay presidency and describes Phule's movement as a "cultural revolution" against the *Brahmanic* religion.⁵⁹ Rosalind O'Hanlon (1910) has come out with a full-fledge research work on Phule and his movement in which she has explored the protest ideology and movement of Phule and its impact on the caste-ridden Maharashtrian society. The author comes out with the conclusion that Phule's movement was a 'low caste protest' against *Brahmanic* Hinduism, object of which was to construct a 'new moral community' as against the system of regressive hierarchy which engineered divisions and schisms among the oppressed Hindus.⁶⁰ M.S. Gore (1989) deals with the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra with particular reference to the role of Jotirao Phule in it. He opines that new members of his society chiefly belonged to the *Mali* and some other non-Brahman castes who found its ideology attractive, for, their low ritual status as *Shudras* in Hindu society remained still unchanged in colonial times, despite their increasing affluent position in professional terms. The most likely way to acquire this ability lay in organization.⁶¹ J.R. Shinde (1985) argues that when

58 See Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*

59 See Gail Omvedt, *op. cit.*

60 See Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002 (First published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985).

61 See M.S. Gore, *Non Brahman Movement in Maharashtra*, Segment Books, New Delhi, 1989.

the hegemonic tradition in Hinduism was being thrown away, Phule felt, something new must be introduced in its place so that the new entrants might not feel a vacuum. Hence, he came out with his idea of new reformed religion. The nature of his religion was more social, more public, and more universal than individualist. Hence; he named it ‘universal religion of truth’.⁶²

G.P. Deshpande, in his translated and edited assortment of Jotirao Phule’s writings (2002), suggests that religion and caste are at the centre of Phule’s thoughts who argues that Brahmanism was an ideological system of monopolizing knowledge/power by a particular class and there was nothing ‘sacred’ or ‘divine’ about it.⁶³ Kancha Ilaiah (2005, 2009), a renowned scholar of Dalit Studies, in his controversial and though-provoking writings points out that Phule was the only person whom both Ambedkar as well as Gandhi acknowledged as one of their Gurus, for, it was Phule alone, who in the nineteenth century worked from a “comprehensive scheme for India’s social, political, economic and spiritual transformation.”⁶⁴ Gopal Guru (2012) suggests that Phule traced the history of social antagonism in India and situated the experience of the *Shudra-Atishudras* in its framework. In his methods, the *Brahman Dharma*, its scheme of social order and mythology had become the subject of critical historical and sociological/anthropological enquiry, and such a method of analysis has significance for the historians.⁶⁵

Braj Ranjan Mani’s (2005) is an intelligent attempt to explore the initiatives of non-Brahman reformers/intellectuals including Jotirao Phule to counter Brahmanism and their struggles to dismantle it.⁶⁶ Adi. H. Doctor (1997) analyses the views of Phule about

62 See J.R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987.

63 See G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*

64 See Kancha Ilaiah, *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism*, Samya, Kolkata, 2005; and also *Post-Hindu India: Discourse in Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution*, Sage Publishing India, New Delhi, 2009.

65 See Gopal Guru, *The Cracked Mirror*, Oxford University Press. New Delhi, 2012.

66 See Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*

Indian history and Aryan invasion. He suggests that Phule made Baliraja, the mythical king of inhabitants, a 'symbol of oppressed humanity'.⁶⁷ Srividya Natrajan (2011) in her animated portrayal of *Gulamagiri*, Phule's most hard-hitting writing, points out that 'fantasy' and 'reality' were crucial to Phule's struggle in which fantasy of king Bali was presented to fight with *Brahmanic* myths and power.⁶⁸ Thom Wolf (2010), in his scholarly article, argues that Phule saw the necessity and need for an 'alternative of Manu worldview' and sought a 'comprehensive alternative to the 3000 years old system' for total transformation of India – political, economic, social and spiritual.⁶⁹ Aparna Devare (2011) suggests that Phule was one of the earliest voices from 'margins' that challenged the 'colonizers' as well as 'native' elites. Through his strategy of 'mythologizing history', Phule exposed the *Brahmanic* religion from his own discourse of 'subalternity'.⁷⁰ While refuting Devare's proposition, Umesh Bagade (2015), in his brilliant research article, suggests that, Phule was not mythologizing history, but 'historicizing mythology' to expose the 'hegemonic functions of mythology' and *Brahmanical* pedagogy.⁷¹

Some other notable scholars/writers on Phule are: T.L. Joshi (1992), Hari Narke (1993), Nalini Pandit (1989), Sharad Joshi (1989), Bharat Patankar (1998), Arvind Deshpande (1998), Mahesh Gavaskar (1999), Sharad Patil (2002), G. Bhadru (2002), Govind Pansare (2004), Uttam Kamble (2005), Sham Kadam (2008), J.V. Naik (2007), N.L. Gupta (2008), L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (2009),

67 See A.D.I.H. Doctor, *Political Thinkers of Modern India*, Mittal Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 1997.

68 See Srividya Natrajan, *A Gardner in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2011.

69 See Thom Wolf, "India Progress-Prone: 21st Century India and the Baliraja Proposal of Mahatma Phule", Oakes Worldviews Bulletin, Vol-7. Issue-2, Lucknow.

70 See Aparna Devare, *History and the Making of a Modern Indian Self*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New Delhi, 2011.

71 See Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge: Phule's Path of Alternative Education", in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No 1-4, S.P.P. University, Pune, January-December 2015.

Ramchander Guha (2010), Sharmila Rege (2010), Jagganath Begari (2010), M.H. Jadhav (2011), Madhura Damle (2014), Nagaraju Vedapalli (2013), etc. Unfortunately, no serious attempt has been made so far on the part of the established or the so-called 'mainstream' historians of India to understand the historical crusade of Phule against *Brahmanic* domination, caste oppression and exploitation, social and gender injustice and his efforts for initiating reformation in Hindu society. This study is a comprehensive and critical attempt in this direction, with special attention to his framework of Hindu social reform.

My methodological framework is based on an approach what I have been calling a 'Phule-Ambedkar' perspective. My methodological premise can be described in a simple way like this: there are conflicts and contradictions in each society, and Hindu society was not an exception in this matter. These conflicts and contradictions have a material foundation in the socio-economic relations of the society, they also appear at the ideological and ideational level also. In Hindu society, from its earliest times until colonial ear (and even beyond), the shaping of these conflicts and contradictions has been heavily structured by caste (at the 'material' level of socio-economic relations) and Brahmanism (at the ideological level). The colonial era saw many complexities in the historical developments in Hindu society. Though the colonialism helped the *Brahmanic* elite to consolidate itself in many ways, it also gave new scope – through education etc. – to the lower caste masses. This gave birth to new conflicts and contradictions in Hindu society marked by new ideologies and movements of the lower caste Hindus against caste and Brahmanism. The reform movement of Jotirao Phule was the most radical of this type during the nineteenth century.

Here it should be clarified that Phule does not talk of terms like reformation, patriarchy, feudalism, capitalism, class conflict, productive forces and revolution, nor has he used theoretical categories like subjugated position, hegemony, power/knowledge, base/superstructure etc. as these terms were not available to him. In this respect, G.P. Deshpande observes:

Caste, then, for him, was a category both of the base and the super-structure of Indian society. To be sure, Phule does not use these terms. They were not available to him. But his emphasis on understanding caste in terms of the agrarian productive process as also in terms of power and dominance is un-mistable.⁷²

Nevertheless, Phule's descriptions, observations and analysis provide theoretical outlines suggestive of some of these categories. We should not attribute these terms to him, but we should have to acknowledge that Phule has hinted conceptual categories like hegemony, social conflict, patriarchy etc. Further, the use of such theories/categories could be helpful for understanding, interpreting and locating the initiatives and ideas of Phule in his historical time. We have, therefore, used some of these terms/categories, though critically and in a different sense and context, for understanding Phule and his framework of social reform.

This study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Among primary sources, Phule's writings and speeches (published by the Government of Maharashtra and some individuals like G.P. Deshpande etc.) have been extensively used. Of course, collected/selected works of some other reformers like Thomas Paine, M.G. Ranade, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar etc. are also used to have a broad and balanced understanding of the subject. Some archival data concerning the subject (there is no much material in National Archives of India pertaining to Phule and his movement) have also been used. Newspapers and periodicals of the period under study and the official records, reports, gazetteers, etc. further have been utilized. The laws of established research methodology of history have been strictly followed. The 'archival-cum-library technique' of the research has been mainly applied. Since Phule did not discuss the issues/problems using modern research techniques and tools of scientific scrutiny, the interpretative approach has mainly been adopted to analyse his thoughts and ideas.

The following research questions were marked which are being answered within the broad discourse pertaining to the subject of study:

72 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

- (1) In which historical context did Jotirao Phule emerge in the colonial Maharashtra?
- (2) How to understand the making of Mahatma Phule? What were the factors, inspirations and influences that shaped his life, career and mind?
- (3) What was the critique of 'Brahmanic Hinduism', its social order and its exploitative character as presented by Phule?
- (4) What were Phule's approach as well as programme for Hindu social and religious reform? What was his concept of *Satyadharma* (religion of truth)?
- (5) What induced Phule to found his reformist society *Satyashodhak Samaj* in 1873? What was its agenda and what were its initiatives to bring about radical reformation in Hindu society?
- (6) What were the limitations and what is the relevance of Phule's framework of Hindu social reform in India today; etc.

In view of these research questions, the following propositions, based on the methodological perspective suggested above, have been suggested in the study:

Some frameworks of Hindu social reform were put forward by the high caste Hindu reformers in nineteenth century India, i.e., during the period of Jotirao Phule. These frameworks were, however, generally *Brahmanical* in their nature and, according to Phule, were insufficient and unsuitable especially for the cause of lower caste Hindus. Since Phule himself hailed from the lower strata of Hindu society, he naturally emerged as, to apply Antonio Gramsci's term, an organic intellectual. In other words, his social location largely helped him to develop his perspective. He examined the problem of Hindu social reform from this perspective. He also had had a clear idea of the declining state of Hindu religion and society in his mind while viewing the problem. Accordingly, he came out with a dynamic framework of Hindu social reform which was altogether different from that of other reformers of his times.

In his framework, Phule at the outset presented a critical

estimate of *Brahmanic* religion, which historically emerged as the dominant phenomenon in Hinduism. He underlined the defects, contradictions and limitations of Hindu society based on *Varna Vyavastha*, and also the *Brahmanic* scriptures, theories and dogmas which supported it. He also exposed the orthodox's strategies of exploitation. To Phule, 'Brahmanism' or *Brahman Dharma* was mainly accountable for the deteriorating state of Hindu religion as well as society, and particularly that of its lower caste sections. In addition to the *Shudra-Atishudras*, he also saw the subjugation of women as a part of the larger hegemonic design inherent in the ideology of Brahmanism. He, on this account, stressed that it was necessary to throw out this ideology from Hinduism in order to reform the Hindu society. And to achieve this goal, he advanced a dynamic framework of Hindu social reform in which he underlined the need of complete 'reformation' in Hinduism as well as adoption of the idea of equality as one of the core principles of the 'reformed' Hinduism. As such, he represented the true 'reformation' in India as he expressed most strongly, the values of equality and humanism, the use of rationality and the notion of progress.

Phule also presented an alternative '*Baliraja* model' to *Brahman Dharma* which was broadly based on his concept of *Satyadharm*a (religion of truth). This model was based on a utopia of '*Baliraj*' (kingdom of Bali). In order to actualize his utopia and materialize his concept of *Satyadharm*a, he founded *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Society of the Researchers of Truth) in Poona in 1873. Major principles of the *Samaj* included belief in equality, morality, fraternity and rationality and a complete commitment to equal human rights of all women and men. The *Samaj* became the centre-stage of the Hindu reformation movement in Maharashtra and some other parts of western India which tried to transform the *Shudra-Atishudras* into a 'new moral community' and a leading agency of the reformation movement. Through his reform movement, Phule took some crucial measures for socio-religio-economic liberation and upliftment of the oppressed/marginalized sections of Hindu society which included his initiatives for mass education and

agrestic transformation. Phule envisioned that with the adoption of his framework of social reform, a 'reformed Hinduism' might have emerged.

In view of the organic insights and contributions of Phule, it emerges that his framework of Hindu social reform appears to be full of potentials which was not only significant in his times, but is also highly relevant in the present context. We know, the issue of social reform in Hindu society is still lying unresolved and has been emerging as a burning issue in contemporary India. The existence of the institution of caste with all its medieval characteristics, frequent occurrence of atrocities on the lower caste people and increasing caste conflicts are the few examples to understand the seriousness of the problem. Hence, the 'father of Indian social revolution' mattered and, of course, still matters in India today.

In addition to Introduction, an extended Glossary and a comprehensive Bibliography there are following six chapters in my monograph:

Chapter-I traces the historical context in which Jotirao Phule emerged in Maharashtra. The chapter firstly describes the polity and society in the pre-colonial Maharashtra which was in deteriorating state, particularly during the period of last Peshwa Bajirao-II. The chapter then throws light on the social structure including important institutions existing in rural Maharashtra during our period of study. The chapter finally discusses the process of colonization started with the advent of British East India Company in 1818 and the socio-economic transitions occurred in Maharashtra up to the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter-II attempts to understand the making of Mahatma Phule. At the outset, the life history of Phule has been briefly sketched. Then an effort has been made to examine the inspirations, influences and other factors that shaped his mind. Major writings of Phule and his insights therein have also been briefly discussed. The chapter finds out that since Phule hailed from the lower strata of Hindu society, his grounded social location, in addition to his experiences and inspirations, largely helped him emerge as an organic

intellectual. Resultantly, he could develop a 'perspective from below' or that of the downtrodden sections of Hindu society, and from this perspective, he attempted to pioneer a reformation movement in Hindu society.

Chapter-III probes Phule's critique of the *Brahmanic* religion and society as well as his critical exposure of the *Brahmanic* mythology, scriptures and theories. His attacks on the orthodoxy's strategies of exploitation have also been described. It has been brought about in the chapter that since Brahmanism was a system of caste-slavery so far as the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* were concerned, Phule countered, criticised and also rejected it *in toto* as a 'religion' to be accepted.

Chapter-IV focuses on the framework of Hindu social reform advanced by Phule. His alternative model to *Brahmanic* Hinduism, particularly his '*Baliraja*' utopia of India's transformation, has been discussed at the outset. Phule's social and religious philosophy has also been examined in the chapter with particular reference to his idea of equality as well as the conception of *Satyadharm*. The chapter reveals that Phule envisioned a popular form of 'reformed Hinduism' wherein he dreamt of an egalitarian and moral society based on his conception of the 'religion of truth'.

Chapter-V describes the movement of social reform launched by Phule, especially after the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, for the upliftment of *Shudra-Atishudras*. It throws light on the crucial measures/initiatives taken by the *Samaj* under the leadership of Phule for making a change in the socio-religio-economic code of Hindu society. The chapter explores that the *Samaj* tried to transform the *Shudra-Atishudras* into a 'new moral community' and a pioneering agency of reformation movement in order to initiate all-round reforms in Hinduism.

Finally, Chapter-VI, the Epilogue, is a summarized and critical overview of the entire research work, and it also substantiates my major findings and hypothesis.

S.K. CHAHAL

Maharashtra before Mahatma Phule

(1)

Identity Formation and Polity

Linguistic regions constitute an important element in the making of Indian society. A region is not just geographical concept, but it implies a fusion and integration of physical, social and cultural elements. Linguistically, India can broadly be divided into 24 regions. Nowadays, there are total 29 linguistic states (Telangana was created in 2014) in the country. Among these states, Maharashtra occupies an important place as the only region in the south of the Vindhyas with Marathi, its language, belonging to the Indo-Aryan family of languages. The term 'Maharashtra' literally means a 'great country'. In the present state of Maharashtra, which came into existence on 1 May 1960, three Marathi speaking areas have been incorporated, namely western Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Marathwada. The state is located between 16°40' and 22°10' degree northern latitudes and 72°06' and 80°09' degree east longitudes. Its 825 kilometres western boundary borders the Arabian Sea, 750 kilometres long eastern boundary touches Chhattisgarh, the southern boundary of 1,875 kilometres touches Telangana and Karnataka and 1,725 kilometres long northern boundary touches the states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.¹ Hence, geographically the state of Maharashtra occupies almost the central position in between south and north India, and this is also reflected in the making of its society, culture and history.

Before the birth of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Maharashtra region

1 *Maharashtra State Gazetteer*, (ed. A. S. Pathak), Gazetteers Department, Government. of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2009, p. 1.

had come under the British colonial rule. It was incorporated in the Bombay presidency, which then consisted of the regions of Sind, Bombay (city and island), Deccan, Konkan and some north-western parts of Karnataka. Kolhapur also came under the political suzerainty of the British rule. Nevertheless, the local ruler and his autonomy were kept intact to a great extent.² The Marathi speaking region was divided into three political territories as well as 18 princely states under the British regime. The Konkan and Deccan were parts of the Bombay Province which also included the Guajarati-speaking region and several districts of Kannada-speakers (see Table 1.1). Vidarbha was a part of the Central Provinces alongwith several Hindi/Hindustani-speaking districts of the present-day Madhya Pradesh. Marathwada, however, remained a part of the Muslim-dominated princely state of Hyderabad.³

TABLE 1.1
LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN BOMBAY PRESIDENCY (PERCENTAGE)⁴

<i>Area of Division</i>	<i>Marathi</i>	<i>Gujarati</i>	<i>Kannarese</i>	<i>Hindustani</i>
Bombay (city and island)	52.17	26.80	0.15	11.56
Deccan	89.32	1.52	1.05	6.02
Konkan	93.3	2.63	0.05	3.55

As a matter of fact, the people of the entire Marathi-speaking areas, whether within or outside the Bombay presidency, historically constituted one people and were unique in their culture, habits and mind-set. They had a strong sense of linguistic or cultural identity or 'nationality'.⁵ It is on this account that Maharashtra is also con-

2 J. R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: Nineteenth Century Maharashtra*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 1.

3 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society: Non-Brahman Movement in Western India*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976; rpt. Manohar, New Delhi, 2011 (hereafter: *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*), p. 32.

4 *Imperial Census of India, 1881: Operations and Results in the Presidency of Bombay including Sind* (ed. J.A. Baines), Government Central Press, Bombay, 1882, pp. 38-41.

5 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

sidered to have a stronger tradition of historiography than any other region of India.⁶

The rise of Maratha 'nationality' or linguistic/cultural identity was chiefly the result of geographical and some historical factors. The rivers Narmada and Tapti, which define the northern border of Maharashtra, provided a barrier to any intruder from the north. Besides, the eastern branches of the Ghats running parallel to the Arabian coast, constituted an ideal base for armed resistance against an intruder. As a result; right from the beginning of the Christian era almost up to the end of thirteenth century; the region was ruled by indigenous Hindu dynasties such as *Satavahanas*, *Chalukyas*, *Rashtrakutas*, and *Yadavas*.⁷ However, it was only the *Yadavas* (whose rule continued from about eleventh to thirteenth centuries) who were the first Marathi-speaking rulers of the Deccan. The continuity of the Hindu rulers was broken in 1294 AD when Ramachandra Yadava of Devagiri was defeated by Allauddin Khalji. Subsequently, the Deccan remained under the subjection of the Delhi Sultanate till 1315 when the Muslim nobles of the region revolted against Mohammad Tughlak and established an independent *Bahamani* state.⁸

It is pointed out that it was the *Mahanubhavas* who produced the earliest Marathi literature and first talked about Marathi cultural identity in popular terms. According to Gail Omvedt, there had been several heterodox movements in ancient/medieval Maharashtra, challenging the cultural dominance of the *Brahman Dharma*, and the *Mahanubhava* cult was one among them (others being Buddhists, Jains, *Lingayats* and *Nathas*) which was radically opposed to the *Brahmanic* orthodoxy and caste and had a strong base

6 Bernard Cohn, "Regions: Subjective and Objective", in Robert J. Crane (ed.), *Region and Regionalism in South Asian Studies*, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1967, pp. 23-25, quoted in Bhima Ranganathrao Raskar, *The Study of the Economic Ideas of Mahatma Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwara University, Aurangabad, 2015, p. 73.

7 *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency* (ed. James M. Campbell), Vol. I, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1896, pp. 587.

8 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Part-II, pp. 250-51 & pp. 587-90.

of support, particularly among the lower castes and Untouchables. The hostility to the cult among more orthodox Hindus is directed from this historical fact.⁹ It was, however, not the *Mahanubhava* cult but rather the slightly later 'Varkari' sect, which became most influential in Maharashtra and continued to be popular till the eighteenth century. The preachers of the *Varkari* sect were *Bhakti* saints like Namdev (1270-1350), a *Shimpi* or tailor (who, according to an earliest hagiographer Anantdas, was the "first *Bhakta*" or the pioneer of the *Bhakti* movement in Maharashtra¹⁰); Dnyaneshwar (1275-1296), a son of an outcaste Brahman; Eknath (1533-1599), again a radical Brahman who opposed untouchability; and later on in the seventeenth century Tukaram (1598-1688), a *Kunbi* and the most popular *Bhakti* saint in Maharashtra. Omvedt suggests that there was a definite influence from the *Lingayat* movement on the *Varkari* sect as Basavanna or Basava (1105-1167), founder of the *Virsaiva* or *Lingayat* movement, had himself served in Mangavedha (now in Maharashtra and also the hometown of famous Dalit saint of the period, Chokhamela).¹¹ R.C. Dhere, a renowned scholar of the subject, further suggests that "Buddha's limitless compassion" was reflected in the *Varkari* sect.¹² The sect, however, contained a large element of compromise with caste orthodoxy and anti-caste egalitarian impulses. Unlike the Jains or the *Lingayats*, the *Varkari* sect never turned into a caste. At Pandharpur temple (of the folk deity Bittagal/Vitthai/Vithoba/Vitthal), the religious centre of the *Varkaris*, a tradition of pilgrimage procession (*Vari*) including men and women of all castes, developed. Though the *Varkaris* had a temple, but the saints (like Namdev, Tukaram, Chokhamela etc.) wrote often of dancing

9 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 37-38.

10 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2008 (hereafter: *Seeking Begumpura*), p. 67.

11 Gail Omvedt, *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2012 (hereafter: *Understanding Caste*), p. 20.

12 R.C. Dhere, *Sri Vitthal: Ek Mahasamanvay (Sri Vitthal: A Great Confluence)*, Sri Vigya Prakashan, Pune, 1984; quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, pp. 44-45.

on the river sands and meeting Vitthal everywhere, much more than that of viewing the temple itself. To the saints like Tukaram, according to Omvedt, Pandharpur emerged like a '*Begumpura*' (city without sorrow) – a utopia envisioned by a great *Dalit* saint of north India Ravidas – where there was no hierarchy, where everyone was equal, powerful and prosperous:

They've organised a game on the river sands
 The *Vaishnavas* are dancing, ho!
 Pride and worth they trample underneath their feet,
 At one another feet they're falling, ho!
 Engrossed in music and entranced
 Are my simple sisters and brothers, ho!
 Pandits, meditators, yogis, *Mahanubhavas*,
 All have won unequalled powers, ho!
 Forgotten is the pride of Varna and of caste,
 Each humbling before the next, ho!
 Mind have become as pure as melted better,
 The stones themselves will melt at last, ho!¹³

Further, in Tukaram's 'Pandharpur utopia', which was located on the bank of river Bhima and protected by the supreme deity 'Bali' (who 'protects the protectors'), time and death could not reach and it was so full of love and company of saints that none would desire to go to *Vaikuntha*, the Vaishnava paradise, let alone run after the Moksha of *Brahmanic* authority.¹⁴

The fact of the matter is that a great tradition of *Bhakti* emerged in Maharashtra, mainly in *Varkari* movement, which was a coherent of men and women from all castes including Namdev, the tailor; Gora, the potter; Savata, the gardener; Tukaram, the cultivator; Kanhopatra, the prostitute; Janabai, the 'woman of the people' and Chokhamela and Karmamela, the Untouchable saintly figures. Ultimately, in Tukaram's powerful climatic expressions, the god became a weaver, a gardener, a maidservant, a cobbler, a potmaker, a common labourer forced into bondage. It was Vitthal who cared

13 A poetic composition by Tukaram, quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, pp. 33-34 & 123.

14 *Ibid*, pp. 122-123.

for Janabai, combed her hair; and when Chokhamela was accused by the Brahmans of polluting the Pandharpur temple and whipped, it was on Vitthal's back that the marks appeared.¹⁵ It should be pointed out that these themes were so persuasive that they ran all the ways through saints of *Varkari* sect in pre-modern Maharashtra upto Jotirao Phule's radical reform movement in modern India.

In a nutshell, a strong tradition of opposition to caste, at least in the religious sphere, was incorporated by the *Varkaris* in their cult. The morality and tolerance which this sect preached, the religious equality and brotherhood it fostered and the pride in Marathi language and culture which it generated are supposed to have reduced caste barriers and created something similar to a 'national' consciousness among the Marathi speaking people.¹⁶ Accordingly, it prepared the background for the rise of Maratha power in the seventeenth century.

Here, it is significant to note that the term 'Maratha' implies many complexities. At the simplest level, it seems to have been used on its own to denote all the Marathi-speaking people. This was certainly the sense that the European observers and scholars of eighteenth century (like Grant Duff etc.) understood the term in, and to them it was not in any sense caste-specific. They used it for all, whether Brahman priests and ministers or *Kunbi* cultivators and soldiers or artisans or tradesman who had lived through the great region.¹⁷ It appears that with the rise of Maratha power under Shivaji (1627-1680), who was a *Kunbi* by caste, the usage of the term, perhaps unconsciously, got associated with rulership, with mastery over the land and, most of all, with military powers and heroism. It was during his times that the *Asal* (pure) or elite Maratha families (directly belonging to the clan of Shivaji, approximately ninety-six in number) began to claim a genealogical link with the old kingly

15 *Ibid*, pp. 83-84.

16 J. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, Deccan College, Poona, 1960, pp. 104-105, quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 38-40.

17 See James Grant Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas*, (ed. S.M Edward), Vol. I, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1921, (First published in 1826).

Rajput families of northern India. They also claimed the *Varna* status of *Kshatriya* that was 'appropriate' to the ruling community in those days.¹⁸

Prior to these developments, the ordinary *Kunbi* families accepted the *Varna* status of *Shudra*, but, during the course of time, they also began to call themselves 'Marathas'. Thus the process of upward mobility among the *Kunbis* started. The claim of ordinary but some well-to-do *Kunbi* families was even accepted in the circles of elite Marathas during nineteenth century. This is evident from the common Marathi proverb, '*Kunbi majhala Maratha jhala*', means 'when a *Kunbi* becomes prosperous, he becomes a Maratha'.¹⁹ The *District Gazetteers* of the Bombay presidency published from 1880s onwards, particularly the *Bombay District Gazetteer*, is another example of this, where the fluidity of the division between Marathas and *Kunbis* can be noted. The difference between the two was a matter of status only, and this was frequently overcome: "*Kunbis* are socially lower than Marathas. But a well-to-do *Kunbi* calls himself a Maratha and poor Marathas freely and openly marry with rich *Kunbis*."²⁰ Later on, in the twentieth century, the term, again, transformed into a broad social category in which almost every social group working on the land could claim inclusion.

The time in which Shivaji arose, Aurangzeb led a series of attacks in order to re-establish his political suzerainty over the Deccan and subsequently destroyed some of the local Muslim kingdoms. The political vacuum was, however, intelligently exploited and soon filled up by Shivaji, the local chieftain, to establish an independent Maratha kingdom. In this way; after a break of three centuries after the *Yadavas*, a Hindu kingdom was established once again by him over some parts of Maharashtra. Notably, Shivaji hailed from a

18 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002 (First published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), pp. 16-17.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

20 *Maharashtra State Gazetteer: Greater Bombay District*, Vol. XXIV, Bombay, 1886, p. 89.

Kunbi family/clan of humble origin (i.e., *Bhosale*), who traced their descent from a headman or *Patil* of a village near Poona. Though his more distant ancestors claimed headman rights of some villages, but his grandfather (Maloji Bhosale) and grand-uncle appear to have been ordinary peasants who rose by their ability in the service of a Maratha feudatory of the state of Nizamshah of Ahmednagar.²¹

After assuming power, Shivaji had engaged Gaga Bhatt, a Brahman of Banaras, to investigate the lineage of the *Bhosale* family, and who, after much persuasion, declared that the *Bhosales* could claim a direct line of descent from the *Sisode/Sisodia* Rajput kings of Udaipur. Now, like the *Sisodes*, the *Bhosales* were representatives of the solar line (*Surya Vansha*), directly descended from the mythical Hindu hero Lord Ramchandra.²² Accordingly, Shivaji assumed the title of *Chhatrapati* in 1674 in hugely expensive coronation ceremony presided over by Gaga Bhatt, though he had afterwards to have a tantric ceremony that was actually performed with a marriage to a girl belonging to the Untouchable (Mahar) community.²³ He also tried best to legitimize his high standing by making further efforts to establish his newly acquired *Kshatriya* status, for instance, contracting several marriages into the aristocratic families.²⁴ The common myth of Shivaji as '*Go-Brahman Pratipalak*' (protector of cows and Brahmans) began to be established from the day of his coronation. It is also from here, as pointed out earlier, that the *Kunbis*/Marathas began to claim for a *Kshatriya* status, though the orthodox Brahmans always objected to their claim and continued to stress upon their *Shudra* status.

Interestingly, there have been conflicting cultural themes/traditions associated with Shivaji in the history of Maharashtra. His movement for independence against the Mughal overlords was identified by the *Brahmanical* elite as a resurgence of the 'Hindu nationalism' on the one hand, his efforts to abolish/minimize the

21 *Ibid*, pp. 590-93.

22 Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, Longmans, Green & Company, London, 1929, pp. 202-211.

23 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 131.

24 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 41-42.

powers of traditional feudatories (like *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Kulkarni* and *Patil*) on the other hand became part of a continuing tradition of Shivaji as a “common man’s king”.²⁵ Notably, Shivaji appears to have been inspired personally in religion by pre-Aryan deities (like Bhawani) and saints like Tukaram whom, according to popular beliefs, he himself came to meet, though there are no evidence to support this story.²⁶ He was, however, orthodox in his patronage of Brahmans and gave at least some recognition to Samrath Ramdas (1608-1681), an orthodox Brahman saint, who is taken as an advisor/Guru of Shivaji, though there is only scant evidence that he had met him (Shivaji) at an early date or directly inspired him.²⁷ Ramdas had also no connections with the *Varkari* sect, rather he established his separate sect (which has been usually called *Maharashtra Dharma*) which gained widespread support among the traditional elites of Maharashtra, particularly Brahmans, and urged a strong political drive for the protection of Hinduism from Muslim encroachment. It was, in fact, Shivaji’s successors that inspired Ramdas in the ‘political’ section of his major work *Das Baudh*.²⁸ Nevertheless, his sociological significance lies in that he inspired the orthodox interpretation of Maratha upsurge from the time of Shivaji, which remained prominent in the elite circles as well as politics of Maharashtra. The *Brahmanized* image created by the elite intellectuals, from Ramdas on till Lokmanya Tilak, gradually got widespread publicity through popular songs and myths, and later on plays, novels and movies, despite the attempts by the lower caste reformers like Jotirao Phule and his non-Brahman associates to depict him as a “Shudra king” or the “king of farmers.”²⁹

In any case, the successors of Shivaji were not as competent as he was, and, as is well known, this paved a way for the emergence of *Peshwas* as the de-facto rulers of the region.³⁰ Here, some histo-

25 Jadunath Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

26 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 127.

27 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 40-41.

28 M.G. Ranade, *The Rise of the Maratha Power*, Manaktala & Sons, Bombay, 1961, p. 78.

29 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 132.

30 Literally, the term *Peshwa* means prime minister of the Maratha

rians have also claimed that before the rise of *Peshwas*, there were anti-Brahman tensions in Satara court; and Sambhaji (1657-1689), son of Shivaji, on this account, developed a strong hostility to the local Brahmans and associated himself with the tantric traditions from north India. In the context of this hostility, some of his orthodox Brahman ministers conspired against him to have the younger son crowned in his place. In reaction, Sambhaji had put to death, a large number of them. This was no less than an open warfare, and Sambhaji's reputation as a drunkard profligate has to be seen in this context.³¹ In the end, it was evidently the *Peshwas* who betrayed him to his Mughal enemies.

The *Peshwas*, who were by caste 'Chitpavan Brahmans' (literally means, sacred-hearted Brahmans), became the rulers of Maharashtra in 1689. Within a few years after the appointment of Balaji Vishvanath (1660-1720) as *Peshwa* (Prime Minister) by Shahuji Maharaj, the grandson of Shivaji. the *Peshwas* usurped all political power from the successors of Shivaji.³² However, except for great administrators like *Peshwa-II* Bajiro-I and *Peshwa-IV* Thorale Madhavrao, all other *Peshwas* were incompetent rulers. Particularly, the last *Peshwa* Raghunathrao or Bajirao-II (1775-1851) was a worthless profligate ruler.³³ Under the *Peshwas*, the political system in the region resembled a confederacy of some Maratha chiefs who, though they recognised the suzerainty of *Peshwas*, but were, for all practical purposes, independent. It helped the Marathas to successfully extend their territories until their defeat in the third battle of Panipat in 1761 at the hands of Ahmad Shah Durrani. Further, they came into

empire. Originally, the *Peshwas* were subordinates (ministers/administrators) of the *Chhatrapati*.

31 Jadunath Sarkar, *The House of Shivaji*, Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1948, pp. 218-220, quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 44.

32 Ramabai Ranade (comp.), *The Miscellaneous Writings of Late Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.G. Ranade*, Published by Mrs. Ramabai Ranade, Bombay, 1915, p. 536.

33 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *Contribution of Phule and Shahu to Caste and Religion*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 1987, pp. 30-31.

conflict with the rising colonial power in the country, the British East India Company. Since this period also witnessed the tension between the Maratha chiefs and the *Peshwas*, the British intervened on behalf of the *Peshwas* and in 1803 forced the Maratha chiefs to cede large portion of their territory and accept British overlordship. This placed *Peshwa* Bajirao-II under the British tutelage. But when he tried to retain his freedom, he was quietened on 5 November 1817 at Kirki, near Poona. He finally surrendered on 3 June 1818 and became a pensioner of the new colonial state.³⁴ Thus, the whole of Maharashtra passed under the British control. Needless to say that the fall of the *Peshwas* took place not simply due to Europeans' superior military power but also the administrative and social weaknesses of the *Peshwas* itself. And, history witnessed the decline of the *Brahmanical* oligarchy led by the *Chitpavans*.

As we cast a glance on the composition of the local elite in medieval Maharashtra, we come to know that they were mainly from the Maratha, Brahman and *Kayastha* (*Prabhu*) castes. The *Deshmukhs* or the big *Watandars/Zamindars* were largely from the high-status Maratha families. Under the *Adilshahi* and *Nizamshahi* kingdoms, many *Deshmukhs* rose to the position of court noblemen and commanders. Some of them became *Jagirdars* and a few (such as Shahaji, the father of Shivaji) could even be the king-makers. The Brahmins were appointed as diplomats and administrative officers. The *Kayasthas* were commanders of forts and also bureaucrats.³⁵ In the reign of Shivaji, a balance of power was maintained amongst the different elite caste groups at the court and in administration.³⁶

Since the rule of *Peshwas* was accompanied by a gradual frag-

34 Ravindra Kumar, *Western India in Nineteenth Century: A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra*, Rutledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968, p. 5.

35 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number: Caste and Class in India*, Feb. 1989, Vol. XIV, No. 7/8 (hereafter: "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989), pp. 426-427.

36 Ramabai Ranade (comp.), *The Miscellaneous Writings of Late Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.G. Ranade*, Published by Mrs. Ramabai Ranade, Bombay, 1915, p. 536.

mentation and decline of the power of Marathas, which led to their ultimate defeat at the hands of the British East India Company, the quality of their Government, especially that of the last *Peshwas*, Bajirao-II, has always been a sensitive issue. Nevertheless, it is certain that prior to the *Peshwas*, Shivaji's administration emphasised on merit and talent wherever he found it. His army mainly consisted of local Maratha peasantry while Brahmans, *Prabhus* and *Saraswats* manned his civil establishment. However, as the *Peshwas* rose to power, the complexion of the services slowly began to change. They used their power for caste aggrandizement. From the time of Balajirao, his castemen found favour in administrative as well as military services. It is pertinent to note that the *Peshwas* brought young *Chitpavan* boys from Ratnagiri to Poona, offered them educational facilities at state cost and finally absorbed them in the administration. Brahmans were now mostly appointed as army commanders and bureaucrats. *Jahgirs* and *Inams* were bestowed upon them. The Maratha administration now became *Brahmanical* and the principal offices of Government were in the possession of Brahmans.³⁷ As a result, the inequalities based on caste started becoming stronger in Maharashtra.

Maharashtra, under the *Peshwa* rule, did represent a relatively 'closed society'.³⁸ It is paradoxical that the Maratha state was born on the crest of a movement of religious reform that had attacked Brahmanism and laid stress on social equality. Since the Brahmans enjoyed a powerful and superior position under the *Peshwas*, this eventually led to disparities between Brahmans and non-Brahmans in all walks of life. Most of the non-Brahmans including *Prabhus* and Marathas were treated like *Shudras*. They were not permitted to take up independent professions. In fact, whatever *Manusmriti/Shastras* had prescribed for the *Shudras* was strictly enforced by the *Peshwas* on all of the non-Brahmans. In this respect, Hiroshi Fukazawa, a Japanese historian of the subject, has observed that

37 R. Umpathi, *A Historical Study of the Life and Achievements of Jotirao Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Periyar University, Salem, 2007, pp. 26-27.

38 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

“according to traditional ideas, Hindu rulers were morally bound to protect, maintain and strengthen the status-order of society”, and there was a “certain ideological traditionalistic reason” behind the *Peshwas*’ support to *Brahmanical* social order which was also reflected in their “concept of *Dharma*”.³⁹ Under their rule, one of the most important functions which the state had to perform was its active support to the *Brahmanical* elite and its socio-religious values, and more importantly to protect, maintain and strengthen the social status quo. They enforced the ‘established code of conduct’ in affairs like inter-caste/inter-regional matrimonial or sexual relations or illicit sexual intercourse (which was called *Badkarma*), inter-caste dining, association with the outcastes/Untouchables, conversion to other religions/sects, violation of wedding rules, violation of rules of hereditary professions, violation of rules of *Varna Dharma/Puratan Chal* (ancient usage) etc.⁴⁰ The state forfeited the caste-status and excommunicated/expelled those who behaved against the established code of conduct and order. Moreover, the state also ordered those to be excommunicated, who ignored the command of the ruler (*Peshwa*) and continued to associate with one who had been expelled out of his caste. The state officials also imposed heavy fines (upto Rs. 3000/- or even more) on the person who was unofficially re-admitted to his caste by his caste-fellows. Needless to say that those caste-fellows were also punished by the state who ‘unofficially’ re-admitted him to their caste. In addition to the excommunication, the state imprisoned the habitual ‘criminals’, particularly those who were found guilty of establishing inter-caste matrimonial/ sexual relations.⁴¹

Asides from Fukazawa, other scholars of the subject, like Hiroyuki Kotani⁴² and N.K. Wagle (whose study is exclusively based

39 Hiroshi Fukazawa, “State and Caste System (Jati) in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom”, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, Vol. IX, No. 1, June 1968 (hereafter: “State and Caste System”, *HJE*, Jan. 1968), pp. 34-43.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 35-37.

42 See: Hiroyuki Kotani, “Kingship, State and Local Society in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries Deccan with Special Reference to

on the Poona *Kotwal* papers)⁴³, further point out that the *Peshwas* state did not just uphold the *Shastric*/established norms in handling caste relationships, but also endorsed castes' own dictates concerning purity and pollution through punishing those individuals who flouted them. The state also functioned as ultimate arbitrator of societal disputes, regulator of societal norms and ritual codes and mastered over individuals and castes. In these matters, the local officials like *Kotwal* employed mechanisms such as a comprehensive system of policing and information gathering and administrating of fines (*Gunhegari*) to punish the citizens for any infractions of caste-based moral and societal codes. Wagle writes that Poona, the capital of the *Peshwa* state, was, in the late eighteenth century, a tightly regulated city with a curfew imposed from near midnight to dawn and the *Kotwal* police used to do close ward patrols after 11.00 p.m.⁴⁴ He supplies numerous instances of collection of *Gunhegari* by the office of *Kotwal* from such 'criminals', particularly those who were found guilty of being involved in *Badkarma*. Dietary codes, particularly regarding the sharing and eating of cooked food within and without the caste, were also strictly imposed. Eating of food or even drinking water, accompanied by sexual relations, with an individual regarded as lower in status incurred sever consequences. Breaches of code of pollution and food exchange were equally enforced with regard to commercial relations, and inter-caste (or inter-religious) purchases could also be construed as violation of food/pollution codes. Even entertainers and prostitutes had to strictly follow such rules. For instance, the prostitutes were forbidden to employing Brahman cooks, even to feed their Brahman clients, and Brahmans were also

Rural Functions", in Nobarn Karasimha, (ed.), *Kingship in Indian History*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 237-271.

43 See: N.K. Wagle, "The Government, the Jati and the Individual: Rights, Discipline and Control in Pune Kotwal Papers 1766-94," in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2000 (hereafter: "Pune Kotwal Papers 1766-94," *CIH*, 2000), pp. 321-360.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 322-323.

forbidden from having sex with prostitutes belonging to very low/Untouchable caste.⁴⁵

The regulations of social codes were extended to the observation of appropriate dress codes too. The type of headgear and the way of dress worn were visible markers of the various castes. These subtle differences were the localised phenomena in Poona and the *Katwal* was meticulous in upholding the dress codes. Wagle has given the instance of a *Chambhar* couple who were booked in the middle of the night for violation of the dress code peculiar to their untouchable caste. Actually, the wife had worn a nose ring and the husband had worn the *Dhotra* in a single fold and also applied a sacred mark on his forehead. A fine of Rs. 90 was exacted from the couple for their 'crime' of violation of the dress code.⁴⁶ Apart from the Untouchable castes, the dress code was strictly imposed on the widows and if they did not shave their head or if they used colarium in their eyes or retained the *Kumkum* spot on their forehead or wore coloured cloths, they were punished by the *Kotwal*; for instance, one of such offenders had to pay a heavy fine of Rs. 212.⁴⁷

It is pertinent to note that all the non-Brahman castes were strictly commanded by the *Peshwa* state not to deviate from *Karmacharan* (traditional social conduct/norms) prescribed for them through the efforts of upward mobility, for instance, wearing the sacred thread (*Janeu*) or performing certain Vedic rites – both of which were allowed only to the Brahmans. In 1790, the Government specifically ordered the *Kayastha Prabhu* caste (an important literate caste next only to the Brahmans) to 'behave like *Shudras*' and not to recite Vedic *Mantras* (hymens) but only *Puranic Mantras* in their ceremonies/prayers and also announce the greeting word of *Dandavat* among themselves as well as Brahmans (greeting word used by Brahmans being *Namaskar*, by *Shudras Dandavat*, and by the Untouchables *Johar*).⁴⁸ In sum, maintenance of social distinction, hierarchy and

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 325-354.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 352.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 353.

48 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "State and Caste System", *HJE*, Jan. 1968, p. 42.

status quo was strictly regulated in the *Peshwa* state and the state acted as an executive power to maintain the *Brahmanical* social and moral order.

Since, the Maratha army commanders such as the *Scindias*, *Gaikwads*, *Holkars* and others carved out independent states for themselves on the periphery of the *Peshwa's* kingdom, the noble Marathas, *Prabhus* and even *Deshastha* and *Saraswat* Brahmans migrated to these states. Hence, the suspicion and antagonism bred by this narrow sectarian policy led to conflict between Brahmans and non-Brahmans in Maharashtra.⁴⁹

During the regime of Bajirao-II, Brahmans, who were, according to the Hindu tradition, supposed to remain busy in acquiring knowledge, had, by and large, forgotten their duties and became corrupt. They exploited the masses in the name of *Dakshina*, which was a notorious religious practice. The amount of money that was distributed by the *Peshwa* state as *Dakshina* among the Brahmans became enormous in the regime of Bajirao-II. A five-day spectacle of *Ramana* used to be held annually in Poona. All the Brahmans from Kashi in the north to Kumbhakonam in the south, used to flock to attend the *Ramana*. The dependence on *Dakshina* made them lazy, ignorant and greedy. According to Narain Vishnu Joshi, an observer of the nineteenth century, they were chiefly interested in '*Brahman-Bhojan*' (Brahman's feast) and considered the British to be the "residents of an inland named Calcutta."⁵⁰ The Brahmans enjoyed privileges at the cost of other classes of people. For instance, the Government of Bajirao-II helped only the Brahmans in the time of famine/need. Dhananjay Keer, the biographer of Jotirao Phule, has interestingly observed that "The noise created by serving of meals to countless Brahman beggars and the chant of their *Mantras* filled the Poona skies."⁵¹ Similarly, M.G. Ranade (1842-1901), the stalwart national-

49 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 427.

50 Narain Vishnu Joshi, *Poona: Ancient and Medieval*. Poona, 1868, p. 69, quoted in Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular, Bombay, 2013 (First published in 1964), pp. 4-5.

51 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

ist leader and reformer of Maharashtra, observes that such practices of favouring the Brahmans went to the “extent of abuse” in the time of Bajirao-II:

... The Brahman land-holders in the Kalyan Prant and also in Maval had their lands assessed at half or lower rates than were levied from other classes. In criminal courts, the Brahmans had always enjoyed the exceptional privilege of exemption from the extreme penalty of the law, and when they were confined in court forts, they were more liberally treated than the other classes. Besides these advantages, they had the monopoly of the charities freely bestowed by the State on their class in consideration of their sanity. The record which relates to the time of Bajirao-II bears ample testimony to the extent of the abuse which followed this indulgence. The *Dakshina* charity, started with a view to encourage learning, became a grant generally to all Brahmans. And Pune became the centre of large pauper population. As many as 30 to 40 thousand Brahmans were fed for days together....⁵²

All of such practices were upheld by the *Peshwa* in the name of religion. Bajirao-II used to give *Dakshina* in huge amounts to his caste-fellows. For instance, in the year 1796 he distributed two lakh rupees just in the name of *Dakshina*. In lieu of this generosity, the orthodoxy declared Bajirao-II as an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu or Shiva.⁵³

Under the regime of last *Peshwa* Bajirao-II, the *Peshwai* (the ascendancy of *Peshwas*) greatly declined. It was well known that he normally used to remain in the company of high profiled prostitutes and women of questionable character. In order to enjoy their company, he had spent a lot of money from the state treasury. Even his personal diaries indicate that he had presented Rs. 1000/- to Kashibai Pethi. He also spent Rs. 9,500/- to build up the house for his favourite courtesans.⁵⁴ Maria Graham, a contemporary observer, recorded it with keen interest in the following words:

52 Ramabai Ranade (comp.), *op. cit.*, pp. 351-52.

53 G.S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*. Bombay, Munshilal Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1986 (First published in 1946), pp. 613-22.

54 G.S. Sardesai (ed.), *Peshwa Daftar*, Vol. XXII, Government Central

But he has built a modern house for himself in another part of the town.... We stopped opposite to the windows, and saw several of the *Peishwa's* ladies. One of them was pointed out as the relighting favourite. She was the wife of one of His Highness's subjects and had the reputation of being the most beautiful woman in his dominions, on which account he sent him for her to court and took her to himself.⁵⁵

Under such state of affairs, it was said that nobody's 'life' and 'wife' was safe during his rule. Even the *Sardars* and *Jagirdars* had to send their beautiful women relatives to his palace in order to please him. If someone failed in his 'duty' to do so, he definitely became the subject of Bajirao's disfavour. According to G.S. Sardesai, the renowned Maratha historian, even the British collector of Poona was 'terribly shocked' to see that the old *Peshwa* capital had no notions of morality, that people openly conducted gambling and corruption and the scenes of vices were very common in Poona.⁵⁶

Hence, the *Peshwa* state was as immoral as any decaying empire could be. Women faced no better treatment at the hands of the ruling class. In fact, women were treated like commodities, means of enjoyment and a class of slaves. Their condition was almost like that of the *Shudras*. It is well known that *Manavadharmasastra* or *Manusmriti*, an encyclopaedic treatise on human conduct probably composed in first century AD, virtually declares women belonging to all *Varnas*, as equal to *Shudras*. Manu imposes a strict conduct and discipline upon woman, by describing her duties as follows:

By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood the female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead to her sons, woman must never be independent.⁵⁷

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), one of the earliest feminists

Press, Bombay, 1932, pp. 145-147; Quoted in Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

55 Maria Graham, *Journal of A Residence in India*, 2nd edition, Archibald Constable & Co., London, 1813, p. 78.

56 G.S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*. Bombay, Munshilal Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1986 (First published in 1946), pp. 613-22.

57 G. Buhler, *Law of Manu, V.147.8, Delhi*, 1964, quoted in Archana

of modern India and a contemporary of Jotirao Phule, had also to proclaim that not only Manu, but the entire Sanskrit literature was irrevocably and essentially 'anti-women':

Those who diligently and impartially read Sanskrit literature in the original cannot fail to recognise the law giver Manu as one of those hundreds who have done their best to make women hateful beings in the world's eye.... I can say honestly and truthfully that I have never read any sacred book in Sanskrit literature without meeting this kind of hateful sentiments about women.⁵⁸

The same prescription was powerfully at work during the nineteenth century Maharashtra. Tarabai Shinde, another feminist of the nineteenth century belonging to a Maratha landlord family, whose husband was a supporter of Phule and yet thoroughly patriarchal, has described the whole pattern of life laid down for women in these words:

What is *Stri Dharma*? Endless devotion to a single husband, behaving according to his whims. Even if he beats her, curses her, keeps a prostitute, drinks, robs the treasury, takes bribes, when he returns home, she should worship him as a god, as if Krishna Maharaj himself had come from stealing the milk of *Gavalis*.... There are a million reasons for breaking *Pativrata*.⁵⁹

As a matter of fact, the condition of women in nineteenth century Maharashtra were not better than that of domestic slaves. They provided household labour and had to follow strict decorum at their homes. They were so loaded with work for days and nights and so oppressed that Jotirao Phule compared their conditions with that

Malik-Goure, *Jotirao Phule: A Modern Indian Philosopher*, Suryodaya Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 17.

58 Pandita Ramabai, *The High Caste Hindu Women* (Originally Published in 1887), Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1982, p. 29.

59 Tarabai Shinde (Tr. by Gail Omvedt), *Stree-Purush Tulana (A Comparison between Women and Men)* (Originally Published in 1882), Ashok Prakashan, Nagpur, 1992, pp. 5-6; also see Gail Omvedt, *Understanding Caste*, 2012, p. 33.

of 'American slaves' and 'outcastes'.⁶⁰ They were deprived of nearly all of their rights as human beings. Education was a far-off dream for them. It was a totally patriarchal society, in which women were treated as second class citizens.⁶¹ Numerous misogynist socio-religious customs, e.g., female infanticide, child marriage, polygamy, widowhood, sati etc. were prevalent in Maharashtra, like other parts of India.

The *Chitpavan* Brahmans and other elite men normally married with dozens of women for dowry and lust. This resulted to an increase in the number of widows in Hindu society, particularly among the Brahmans. Another reason for the large number of widows was the custom of child marriage. Under this custom, the girls were wedded at a very tender age of 5 to 10 to aged persons; and these girls suddenly became widows in an age when they even did not know the meaning of a widow.⁶² A widow in those days was regarded 'inauspicious', 'evil' and 'killer of her husband'. She was not fed well, nor properly clothed. She was not allowed to join pleasures, parties, marriages and religious ceremonies. In the words of Phule, she was even considered "lower than a culprit or a mean beast."⁶³ She was only expected to commit suicide in the name of a religious practice called Sati. About the prevalence of this horrible practice, a contemporary writer William Hodges observes:

That most horrid custom amongst, perhaps, the most mild and gentle of human race, the Hindoos, was the sacrifice of the wife on the death of husband, and that was a means from which nature seems to shrink with the utmost abhorrence by burning.⁶⁴

The practice of slave trade was also another shocking feature of

60 Y.D. Phadke (ed.), *Mahatma Phule: Samagra Vangmya* (Marathi), Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Anni Sanskriti Mandali, Bombay, 1985, pp. 336-337.

61 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

62 W.J. Wilkins, *Modern Hinduism: An Account of the Religion and Life of the Hindus in Northern India.*, Rupa & Co., 1975, p. 212.

63 Y.D. Phadke (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 336-337.

64 William Hodges. *Travels in India*, p. 79; quoted in Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

the *Peshwa* rule. Generally, female slaves were preferred to the male slaves. Another observer of the period, Thomas Duer Broughton, comments on their duty in the following words:

Their only employment during the day being to attend upon their (master's) wives and to rub the old gentleman's legs (They were) regularly warned to be in waiting during the night and the rest instantly on the wing to their gallants of they make no scruple to talk even in their mistresses' presence.⁶⁵

Religion had been the paramount social institution among the Maharashtrian Hindus but paradoxically the Brahmans made it a tool of exploitation. In fact, Brahmans always enjoyed the highest position in the Hindu society as a mediator between God and humans. They arrogantly claimed their supremacy in these words: "The whole world is under the power of the gods. The gods are under the power of the *Mantras* written in the sacred texts. The *Mantras* are under the power of the Brahmans. The Brahman is, therefore, god on the earth."⁶⁶ As hereditary priests, the orthodox Brahmans exploited the rural masses, particularly the peasants and *Balutedars*. Phule has given a detailed description of the *Brahmanic* exploitation in his writings like *Priestcraft Exposed* and *Cultivator's Whipcord*. He remarks in the latter:

... Farmer is so exploited by the Brahman under the pretext of religion and it would be very hard to find a parallel example anywhere in the world. The ancient and cunning Aryan Brahman scripture-writers have so smoothly machinated to tie up the farmer in their selfish religion.... (Right from) the *Grabhadhaan* (ritual) to the rituals performed till he dies, various things are looted from him.⁶⁷

Actually, practice of performing various religious functions as well as explanation by the *Brahmanic* state were the main reasons

65 Thomas Duer Broughton, *Letters Written in A Maratha Camp during the Year 1809*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011 (First published in 1813), p. 27, quoted in Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

66 W.J. Wilkins, *op. cit.* p. 240.

67 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction*, Left Word, New Delhi, 2002, p. 120.

of peasants' indebtedness. Sequestration of the property of the poor farmer by the Brahman moneylenders was also a common practice in those days. It was blessed by *Peshwa* Bajirao-II himself. Dhananjay Keer gives a horrible account of the exploitation and oppression of peasants under his regime:

The farmers and the toiling masses on the farms were inhumanly harassed by the officers of the *Peshwa* and by his adopted brother Amritro. If the farmers failed to pay him the desired amount, even during the severe drought or famine, he poured over their children boiling oil from the frying-pan. Heavy stones were mercilessly placed on their backs. Flogging was performed on their stooping backs, and their heads were bent over suffocating smoke. Gunpowder was blown on their navels and ears.⁶⁸

The *Brahmanical* ruling class believed that the peasants and other lower classes of the Hindu society were born to work as slaves for them/their families/class, to produce corn, to weave cloth and to labour in the hot sun. Some moneylenders even got, under the Government documents, daughters and son of farmers to work as slaves for them till the payment of endless interest on ornament or land pawned to them was made.⁶⁹

Such was the conditions of cultivators during the period under study. It is not difficult to imagine what would be the conditions of other lower classes, particularly the Untouchables, during the *Peshwa* rule. The *Peshwas* introduced many regressive laws in order to suppress the untouchable castes like *Mang*, *Mahar* and *Chambhar* and imposed several inhuman and hideous restrictions upon them. In fact, untouchability was prevalent in Maharashtra under the *Peshwas* in its worst form. It became a state-enforced '*Dharma*', violation of which on the part of Untouchables would result in assured punishment.⁷⁰ During those days, they were treated as 'impure' creatures and regarded as not just 'untouchables', but even 'unapproachables' and

68 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

70 J.R. Kamble, *Rise and Awakening of the Depressed Classes in India*, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 3-4.

'useables' in some parts of south India (like Kerala).⁷¹ In Maharashtra, they had to live under the critical conditions. For instance, an observer belonging to the *Mang* caste later on wrote about the 'horrible' conditions of the Untouchables and the brutalities perpetuated against them during the reign of the last *Peshwa* as follows:

Formerly, we were buried alive in the foundations of buildings. We were not allowed to pass by Talimkhana. If any man was found doing so, his head was cut off playfully. We were not allowed to read and write. If Bajirao-II came to know about such a case, he would indignantly cry: 'What! If *Mahars* and *Mangs* are to read and write, are the Brahmans to hand over their writing work to them and go round shaving widows with their bags hanging from their shoulders?'⁷²

Narain Vishnu Joshi describes similar things in the following words:

In those days the Brahmans of Poona had grown supercilious and purity/pollution was strictly observed. *Mahars*, *Mangs*, *Chambhars*, *Bhangis* and *Dheds* were not even allowed to spit on the roads. They should walk with earthen pots tied to their waists. If a Brahman is noticed on the road, (they) should immediately sit down, for, the shadow not to fall (on the Brahman). Such was their misery.⁷³

Similarly, G.S. Ghurye, a renowned sociologist, writes:

It is recorded that under the rule of the Marathas and the *Peshwas*, the *Mahars* and *Mangs* were not allowed to work within the gates of Poona after 3 p.m. and before 9 a.m. for the simple reason that their bodies cast relatively longer shadows during early morning and late evening hours falling

71 S. K. Chahal, *Dalit Patronized: Indian National Congress and the Untouchables of India (1921-1947)*, Shubhi Publication, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 32-33.

72 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 5

73 Narain Vishnu Joshi, *Pune Shahrache Varnan* (Marathi), Sahitya Shahakar Sangha Prakashan, Bombay, 1868, p. 61, quoted in Mahesh Gavaskar, "Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule's Critique of Brahman Power" in S. M. Michael (ed.) *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2007 (First published by Vistaar Publication in 1999), p. 92.

of which on a member of the higher castes, especially Brahman, defiles him.⁷⁴

Some observers have further recorded that the Untouchables were required to tie black thread around their necks as a mark of identification. They were forced to walk bare-footed. Moreover, they had to drag a thorny branch with them to wipe out their footprints. They were forced to use only earthen pots and clothes of dead persons. The schools, maintained at public cost, were closed to them. During the time of *Peshwa* Madhav Rao, the Government had decreed that the *Mahars*, being *Atisudhras*, were even beyond *Shudras*, and, therefore, could not have their marriage rites conducted by the Brahman priests. They were asked to content themselves with the services of their own casteman-priests⁷⁵, i.e., the '*Medhe Mahars*'. In the Maratha region, the Hindus belonging to the 'impure' castes, particularly the Untouchables, could not enter even the outer portion of a temple.⁷⁶ They were prohibited from hearing religious hymns, discourses, teachings etc. In short, all directives and dictates prescribed by Manu were strictly enforced on the *Shudras* and outcastes by the *Peshwa* administration.⁷⁷

As such, in the times of Bajirao-II the state ceased to be the ideal protector of all classes and upholder of equal justice. Ramadasa's idea of the 'religion of Maharashtra' (Maharashtra Dharma) was "lowered down to one in keeping with the belief that the state had no higher functions than to protect the cow and the Brahman."⁷⁸ In short, the

74 G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p. 1.

75 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "State and Caste System", *HJE*, Jan. 1968, pp. 42-43.

76 R. Umaphathi, *A Historical Study of the Life and Achievements of Jothirao Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Periyar University, Salem, 2007, p. 40.

77 N.D. Kamble, *Deprived Castes and Their Struggle for Equality*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 142-43.

78 G.S. Sardesai, *op. cit.*, pp. 613-22.

Peshwai era was a period of religious deterioration, cultural demoralization and moral stagnation.⁷⁹

(2)

Social Structure

During our period of study, Maharashtra was basically a rural society and about percent of its population lived in villages. Indian village or *Gaon* (*Gram* in Sanskrit, literally means an aggregate) has been defined in the *Puranas*, as a place surrounded by cultivable lands and inhabited chiefly by cultivators and also a number of other people available to support them in cultivating crops on those lands. The term *Gram*, therefore, means an aggregate of family holdings.⁸⁰ Other names used for village in Maharashtra are *Gramma*, *Dehe*, *Mouja*, *Khede* etc. In pre-modern Maharashtra, land was the basis of formation of village communities comprising chiefly the village hereditary officers called *Watandars*, the land holders or peasant proprietors called *Mirasdars*, and the village servants called *Balutedars*. These four classes, often describes as the 'four wheels' of the village chariot (*Gaogada*) were together were known as *Deshaks*. To help the *Deshaks*, there was another class of people called *Uparis* or strangers (tenants and wandering tribes etc.) who initially had no inhabiting in the village, but got an opportunity to become a part of the village community in the course of time.⁸¹ It should, however, be kept in mind that the pre-colonial Maharashtrian village was not like an agrarian commune based on common ownership of land and equal distribution of other properties among the peasants. A clear-cut caste/class division was found in the village, particularly among the *Watandars*, *Mirasdars*, *Balutedars* and *Uparis* and also within them. The village population was mainly divided in the classes of traditional elites, peasants, artisans and depressed classes.

The village always played an important role in the social and

79 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

80 A.R. Kulkarni, *Maharashtra: Society and Culture: Medieval and Modern*, Diamond Publications, Pune, 2008, p. 52.

81 *Ibid.*

economic life of Maharashtra. As A.S. Altekar observes, the real history of India is the history of its village communities; dynasties came dynasties went, but village communities remained intact.⁸² It is pointed out that the dominant caste in rural Maharashtra before the time of Jotirao Phule was a peasant community known as *Kunbi* or Maratha. Brahmans and other high caste people were in minority not only in rural areas, but even in cities. For instance, the percentage of Brahmans in the Hindu population was only 6.2 percent in the Bombay city in 1881.⁸³ The village committee (i.e., *Panchayat*) representing the village community, was the de-facto owner of the village landholdings and it distributed these holdings amongst the peasant families, particularly belonging to *Kunbis*, *Malis* etc. All peasant families enjoyed some customary hereditary rights to possess and cultivate a landholding from generation to generation. The technology used in village agriculture and industry was pre-modern. Simple agricultural equipment and hand-manipulated tools were used for production. Hence, the peasants in Maharashtra were facing the problem of low productivity in their lands due to lack of advanced techniques and capital for their farming, which ultimately led to rural poverty. On this account, the indebtedness became a permanent phenomenon of the village communities.⁸⁴

Besides the *Mirasdars* (peasant proprietors) belonging to the *Kunbi*, *Mali* and *Dhangar* communities, the village population also included artisans and workers such as blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, weavers, washermen, oilmen, barbers and others. They all worked almost exclusively for satisfying the needs of the village community. They were called *Balutedars*. In addition to them, there was another serving class of people, treated as Untouchables, who worked as menial and agricultural labours, and they were the ones to suffer the most, in all walks of life.⁸⁵

82 A.S. Altekar, *History of Village Communities in Western India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1927, pp. 2-4.

83 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

84 A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 5th Edition, 1976, p. 11.

85 Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth*

In fact, the social structure of the region prior to the British rule was basically a variant of an all-India system or institution, i.e., caste. It, therefore, would be significant for us to have some discussion of the caste system in order to know the complexities of social structure which worked as fertile ground for the birth of a social revolutionary of the stature of Mahatma Phule in nineteenth century Maharashtra. The institution of caste has achieved much the same significance in academic, social and political debates in India as the institution of race in United States and class in Europe. Since the days of the colonial rule and beginning of the Oriental Studies, it has been common for both historians as well as anthropologists/sociologists to refer to India as a 'caste-society'⁸⁶, and to treat the caste-ridden values/ way of life of the Hindus as an all-pervading presence in Indian life. Since 1970s, however, there emerged a tendency among the scholars, of accusing the earlier specialists, of massively overstating the importance of caste. An anthropologist, Nicholas Dirks, has gone so far as to even question the very existence of an ancient pan-Indian "caste system, as we know it today"⁸⁷, dismissing the idea of caste-society as an "invention of colonial masters", involving the work of both British as well as Indian actors like census officers (e.g., H.H. Risley, J.H. Hutton, William Crooke etc.), ethnographers, Brahmans etc., who actually gave birth to a discourse of caste, particularly after the mutiny of 1857, in order to identify the Indian tradition and culture with a universal and hierarchal social system.⁸⁸ Such positions, however, puzzle the newcomers in the field especially when they come across many reformers, from Mahatma Phule to Mahatma Gandhi, for whom caste was a real force in Indian life, and certainly much more than an "orientalist's imagining."

Caste has been understood as a cultural construct by many

Century to Modern Age, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 225-232.

86 *Ibid.*

87 Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2002, pp. 60 & 196-197.

88 *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

sociologists as well as other social scientists. There is a similarity between class and caste, though it is erroneous to identify the two as identical. Morris Ginsberg in the *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* defines class in the following manner:

Classes in modern societies may be described as groups of individuals who through common descent, similarity of occupation, wealth and education have come to have a similar stock of ideas, feelings, attitudes and forms of behaviour and who, on any or all these grounds meet one another on equal terms and regard themselves, although with varying degrees of explicitness, as belonging to one group.⁸⁹

If this definition of class is accepted, almost all distinction between class and caste will be blurred and there will be as many classes as castes in Indian society. Nevertheless, the Marxists cannot subscribe to this definition of class. For them, class is defined by its relationship to the 'means of production'. To them, there are basically two classes in any community, those who own the means of production and those who work on them, i.e., the 'exploiters' and the 'exploited'. Caste, therefore, will have to be distinguished from class. The Marxist scholars look upon caste merely as a part of the 'superstructure' which will eventually disappear with a change in the 'base'/structure'. However, this view of 'structure' and 'superstructure' is rather unscientific. According to Karl Marx, even superstructure does not imply a mere apparel or a hood. It is dialectically related to the structure as cause and effect. The economic system and the class structure might determine the nature of social and political institutions and ideas in any epoch in history; but once these institutions arise and its associated ideas imprint themselves on the masses, they become as 'real' as the economic system itself. The new economic order is born from the womb of the old society and inherits many of its peculiar features.⁹⁰

Despite so many debates on caste, the issue of its origin, emer-

89 David L. Sills & Robert K. Merton (eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences (Old Series)*, MacMillan, London, 1968, Vol. III, p. 536, quoted in Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 425.

90 Michael Evans, *Karl Marx*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 52.

gence and growth in India is, however, still shrouded in mystery. In fact, the historians have, till now, not undertaken any concrete historical study of the system except for suggesting some theories of its origins. As they study the caste system, most of them take it for granted that the system developed and had continued as such spontaneously without any relationship with secular political powers during the ancient and medieval India. As compared with others, Indian historians appear to have shown very little interest in the history of caste. To be sure, there are only such works that have proved the existence (or non-existence?) of caste during the ancient or pre-modern times.⁹¹ Even till now, no concrete examination has been done on the emergence and development of caste through the ages of history.

Anyhow, regarding the origin of caste, some historians believe that the confrontation of different ethnic groups, the clash between patriarchal and matriarchal societies, the hereditary occupations and guild restrictions, the ideas of magic and pollution and the policies followed by different rulers must have contributed to the growth of caste system.⁹² The fact of the matter is that throughout the history of India, caste had been projected and defended as being 'divinely' ordained, often on the basis of its origin-myths enshrined in religious traditions. India's earliest expressions of caste-ideas can be found in the vast body of the sacred writings known as the *Vedas*. These texts are thought to have been compiled between 1500 BC and 1000 BC. One of the most famous sections of *Rigveda* (i.e., the Tenth Mandal which is called *Purusa Sukta*), describes the primordial act of blood sacrifice from which the gods created the four human *Varnas* (i.e., Brahman, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*). The victim in this cosmic creation story is the thousand-eyed *Purusa*, the first created man.

91 For instance, see N.K. Dutt, *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, Vol. I, The Book Company, Calcutta, 1931; J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India*, 3rd Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961; Irawati K. Karve, *Hindu Society: An Interpretation*, Deccan College, Poona, 1961; E. R. Leach (ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-East Pakistan*, 3rd Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962; Nicholas Dirks, *op. cit.*, etc.

92 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, pp. 425-426.

From the dismembered fragments of the sacrificed *Purusa* came each of the four *Varnas*:

When they (gods) divided the *Purusa*, into how many parts did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What were his two arms? What are his thighs (loins) and feet called? The Brahman was his mouth, his two arms made the *Rajanya* (*Kshatriya*, king and warrior), his two thighs (loins) are the *Vaishya*, (and) from his feet the *Shudra* (servile class) was born.⁹³

The sanctity of caste is further belaud in the *Bhagwat Gita*, the greatest exposition of spiritual teachings which is contained in the ancient *Mahabharata* epic. Without caste, says the *Gita*, there would be corruption of humanity's most precious standards of domestic honour and sexual propriety.⁹⁴ Similarly, *Manusmriti* also proposes a caste-based conduct supported by the dictates of criminal jurisprudence and applies the term '*Dharma*' to those ways of life which conform the laws of caste.⁹⁵

The question arises how modern social scientists sought to relate these ancient scriptural ideas to the actual history of caste as well as everyday life of the Hindus in modern India? Most scholars have been agreeing to that caste is basically a system which combines endogamy with hereditary division of labour and a highly hierarchical ordering attendant with privileges and disabilities and perpetual state of ritual impurity for certain category of people. It is true that we also find endogamy and hereditary occupations or privileges or hierarchies including treating certain communities as Untouchables in some other societies of the world. For instance, we can exemplify the existence of such a community called *Burakumin* (hamlet people), an outcast group of tanners, butchers, executioners and undertakers, living in the village ghettos in medieval/feudal era Japan.⁹⁶

However, the Indian caste system appears to be unique in combining all these elements in one comprehensive organised

93 *Rg Veda*, 2.2.1.1, quoted in Susan Bayly, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

94 Susan Bayly, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

95 *Ibid.*

96 See: Timothy D. Amos, *Embodying Difference: The Making of the Burakumin in Modern Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2011.

principle of social order having been claimed 'divinely ordained', with deep roots in religion. In view of this, a French sociologist, Louis Dumont argues that the central ordering feature of the caste system has been a religious and cultural one, i.e., its value system of purity/pollution and hierarchy is the outcome of the *Brahman Dharma* or 'Brahmanism'. Proposing his formulation as nothing less than a synopsis of Hindu civilization, Dumont declares that, "Preoccupation with the pure and the impure is content in Hindu life."⁹⁷ According to him, the value system of caste has had an important casual influence on the development of Indian civilization and it was the structure, not simple an epiphenomenon or super-structure. He also points out that this "traditional perspective" can still be called the "fundamental ordering feature" of Indian society which even encompassed the transformation made by colonialism and modern state.⁹⁸ His basic argument is that the system of caste necessarily requires a sort of "absolute purity" in the Brahman at the top, and an "absolute impurity" in the Untouchable at the bottom. Laying stress on this point, he declares: "It is clear that the impurity of the Untouchable is conceptually inseparable from the purity of the Brahman.... Untouchability will not truly disappear until the purity of the Brahman is radically devalued."⁹⁹

Significantly, such important cultural features of the caste system have also decided the nature and development of anti-caste movements in India. Not only has 'untouchability removal' been a crucial symbol of opposition to caste, but so has it been with anti-Brahmanism which lay behind all the non-Brahman movements. It also helps explain why lower castes, particularly Untouchables, always saw the orthodox Brahmans as the 'main enemy', even while facing the conservative non-Brahmans as their major oppressors, hindrance to their rise at the village level.¹⁰⁰

Dumont's model is crucial in helping us understand the cultural

97 Louis Dumont, *Homo-Hierarchus: The Caste System and Implications*, Vikas Publications, Bombay, 1970, p. 44.

98 *Ibid.*, pp. 217-228.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

100 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

essence of the caste system, yet, it is insufficient to explain how and why the institution arose? One of the most important theories of its origin is one that emphasises on its 'racial' character. Originating with the orientalist's works in nineteenth century, the theory has been an important interpretation of caste among Indians, and both, high caste as well as lower caste people, have been endorsing this theory for their own reasons. Caste, by this theory, is seen as arising in the process of an 'invasion' of the so-called Aryans, the light-skinned Indo-European people, who 'conquered' the native dark-skinned inhabitants of the subcontinent and evolved the system as a means to subjugate and divide their enemies. Thus the four *Varnas* are seen in racial terms: Brahmans, *Kshtriyas* and *Vaishyas* are considered to be descendants of the Aryan conquerors; tribal people and Untouchables as representatives of the original inhabitants and *Shudras* as, at best, a mixed group. Though the incorporation of indigenous and racially diverse groups as well as later invaders of various races and cultures in Indian society was a historical reality, it is more important to emphasize the intermixing of cultures and races in this process. Referring to the process of intermixing of Aryans, Dravidians, Mongolians and Scythians, B.R. Ambedkar, a stalwart leader of the Depressed Classes in modern India and also a serious scholar of the subject, concludes that "caste is a division of the people of same race." He remarks:

All...these stokes of people came into India from various directions and from various cultures, centuries ago, when they were in a tribal state. They all in turn elbowed their entry into the country by fighting with the predecessors, and after a stomach-full of it, settled down as peaceful neighbours.... The caste system (therefore) cannot be said to have grown as a means of preventing the admixture of races or as a means of maintaining purity of blood. (Hence) to hold that distinctions of caste are really the distinctions of race and to treat different castes as though they were so many different races is gross perversion of facts.¹⁰¹

In this context, D.D. Kosambi has come out with an economic

101 *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vasant Moon (ed.), Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1989, Vol. I, pp. 6-7.

theory of the origin of caste. He traces the pre-Aryan features of Brahmanism and the non-Aryan descent of several Brahman castes. At an earlier stage, the Brahman priest was an “unsupported individual”, often on the tribal fringe. It is with his alliance with the warrior classes that the organisation of caste system took place.¹⁰² Kosambi argues that though the old idea of *Varna* system was there, but it did not suddenly transform into caste. In fact, the Brahman priests were weakened by invasions of Alexander, growth of new kingdoms and flourishing of Buddhism. Yet, they still remained as the most important holders of the Aryan tradition. The role that these priests then began to perform was not just one of maintaining the class structure of society and winning over new tribes to caste culture. They were often brought in by kings or chieftains in the process of becoming kings and conferred land grants in return for legitimizing the rulers’ caste-status and also helping to develop their territories. Caste, according to Kosambi, though enabled Indian society to be formed out of many diverse and even discordant elements, with minimum use of violence, however, once developed, it tended to grow into a narrow institution hampering further development with the tightening of caste bonds.¹⁰³

As we analyse caste as an economic system, it appears that the institution maintains interdependence in Hindu society. There is in it no concept of individual rights, rather persons, at any levels, performing functions for society in terms of the caste position of their birth. For this, they have a right to share the produce of society; a share of grain at harvest time, was the typical image of the indigenous system, is not one of buying and selling the produce but of dividing shares of the grains heap. This is typified in the village *Jajmani* system which was found in almost all parts of colonial India including Maharashtra by different names, and is still apparent in some regions of the country. It was actually a feudalistic system of prescribed, hereditary obligations of payment and occupational and

102 D.D. Kosambi, *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, 7th Edition, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1982, p. 107.

103 *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

ceremonial duties between members of different castes/classes of the village communities.¹⁰⁴ The system included all those who performed functions for the village, from headman and village accountant through peasant and artisan castes down to the Untouchables in regions like Maharashtra. There has, however, been a long debate on the nature of *Jajmani* system (as well as the village communities) among historians and sociologists. The old 'demiurgic' theory on the system propounded by the scholars like Karl Marx, Max Weber, Baden-Powell etc. suggests that that the Indian village community was based on two pillars, i.e., *Jajmans* or the peasant proprietors and the village servants/ menials/ artisans and the latter were served or maintained not by the individuals, but by the village as a territorial whole.¹⁰⁵

So far as Maharashtra is concerned, historians like Grant Duff¹⁰⁶, S.N. Sen¹⁰⁷, A.S. Altekar¹⁰⁸, Hiroshi Fukazawa¹⁰⁹ etc. also endorse the same theory. Under the *Jajmani* system prevalent in colonial Maharashtra, the servants of village, as stated earlier, were called *Balutedars*. The agricultural castes (i.e., *Kunbis* or Marathas), often called the 'dominant castes', had a claim to the land as their customary right. But the basic concept was not one of property in the land but rather of a sort of position in the hereditary rights to perform a particular function (i.e., farming) for the village.¹¹⁰ But while the interdependent village system was maintained under the *Jajmani*

104 T.O. Boidelman, *A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System*, Locust Valley, New York, 1959, p. 6.

105 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th Century Maharashtrian Village— Demiurgic or Jajmani System?", *Hitotusubashi Journal of Economics*, Faculty of Economics, Hitotusubashi University, Vol. II, No. 2, Tokyo, Feb. 1972, (hereafter: "Rural Servants in the 18th Century", *HJE*, Feb. 1972), pp. 14-22.

106 James Grant Duff, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 24-25.

107 S.N. Sen, *Administrative System of the Marathas*, 2nd Edition, University of Calcutta, 1925, p. 233.

108 A.S. Altekar, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

109 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th Century", *HJE*, Feb. 1972, p. 25.

110 *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

system, it hampered enterprise on the land, as landholding castes were cut off from agrarian entrepreneurship as they saw themselves primarily as maintainers of the rural society.

Now let us turn to the political implications of caste. With its absolute dichotomy between 'pure' and 'impure', the system caused a clear separation of sacred and political (secular) functions. In fact, power necessarily involves one in impurities and, as a result, "the king has lost his religious prerogatives: he does not sacrifice; he has sacrifices performed by the Brahman priests; in theory power is ultimately subordinate to priesthood."¹¹¹ The 'sacred-secular dichotomy' was extended all the way down to the village level where it rationalized a system in which the 'dominant' agricultural castes performed political functions of ordering and maintaining the rural society while the Brahmans continued to perform without fail the highest sacred duties. An important tendency of the system was to hereditize positions and claims at every level. Just as men within the village claimed a share of the produce on the basis of caste functions, those who acted as feudal intermediaries also claimed a share on the basis of performance of their political/administrative functions. Hence, such representatives of the political overloads as military chieftains or accountants (known as *Deshpandes/ Deshmukhs* or *Kulakarnis*) in Maharashtra claimed their position in hereditary rights or *Watan* or a traditional family possession.¹¹²

One of the most striking outcomes of caste system was untouchability which was, in the words of B.R. Ambedkar, a 'by-product' of caste.¹¹³ By this point of Ambedkar, the process of downward mobility under the institution could be understood. As we have already come to know, untouchability existed in its worst form under the rule of *Peshwas* in Maharashtra. But actually it was an age-old institution and even Manu has mentioned the Untouchable groups namely *Antya*, *Antyaja* or *Antiyavasin*.¹¹⁴ They were also called *Avarnas* – those not belonging to any of the four *Varnas* or castes. So they were

111 Louis Dumont, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

112 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

113 *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vasant Moon (ed.), Vol. I, pp. 87-96.

114 F. Max Muller (ed.), *The Laws of Manu (Sacred Books of the East)*,

outside the pale of *Chaturvana* system. Similarly, terms like *Bahiya*, *Antyayoni*, *Asprishya* etc. were also used for them from time to time. It was about 600 BC to 200 AD when the notion of pollution, which was a form of taboo, became a “potent reality.”¹¹⁵ Here, it is also pointed out that the caste stratification and hierarchies also took place at large scale during this period.

Ambedkar writes about the drastic implications of untouchability in these words:

Untouchability is cruelty in comparison to slavery because it throws upon the Untouchable the responsibility for maintaining himself without opening to him fully all the ways of earning a living. To sum up, the Untouchables unlike the slaves are owned by the Hindus for the purposes which further their interests and disowned by them, when owing them places them under burden. The Untouchables can claim none of the advantages of an un-free social order and are left to bear all disadvantages of a free social order.¹¹⁶

Hence, untouchability, as practised by the Hindus for centuries, had led to virtual isolation, segregation and exploitation of a large number of people of their own religion, and, as such it was the worst outcome of caste system. In sum, for time immemorial, the institution of caste has been the basis of superstructure of south Asian societies including that of Maharashtra which, during our period of study, was totally a caste-ridden society and governed by the ideology of caste.

Now let us have a glance over the major castes and caste-groups found in Maharashtra during our period of study. As it has already been made clear, the Maharashtrian society during our period of study was a caste-ridden society and the institution of caste was basically a state-ordering of society, fully controlled and protected by

Vol. XXV, Chapter X-51, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 2006 (first published in 1948), pp. 21-22.

115 Vivekananda Jha, “States in the History of Untouchability”, *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, July 1985, pp. 14-16.

116 *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vasant Moon (ed.), Vol. V, p. 18.

the Government of *Peshwas*.¹¹⁷ Under such state-ordering, Brahmans became the most privileged caste, enjoying numerous hereditary rights and privileges in all walks of life. Important administrative posts at all levels and ministerial posts were in the hands of the Brahmans. There were the two dominant groups among Brahmans in Maharashtra: the *Konkanatha* or *Chitpavan* and the *Deshastha*. The *Chitpavan* Brahmans, mostly living in cities, were the most powerful elite group of the region. They were closely associated with the *Peshwa* state as a ruling class.¹¹⁸ The *Deshastha* Brahmans were closely integrated into the social structure of the villages and, as *Kulakarnis* and *Joshis*, they performed a prominent role there. *Kulakarnis* were village accountants whereas *Joshis* were astrologers who were also found engaged in the profession of performing religious rites like holding religious discourses known like *Puja*, *Kirtana* and *Bhajan* etc. Some of them also worked as priests on certain occasions like birth, marriage and death, read horoscopes and performed worship for their patrons, especially on holy or auspicious occasions such as *Ekadasi*, *Shivaratri*, *Ganesh Pooja* etc.¹¹⁹ But the highest class of Brahmans was called *Upadhyay* which provided their services as family-priests to the caste Hindus (excluding Untouchables who had their special priests from their own castes) under the *Jajmani* system. Among them, the *Paranjape* was the priest of Brahman families, whereas the *Bapat* was the family-priest of peasants and other castes.¹²⁰

The second important caste group was that of the *Vaishya* or the trader community. Actually, an important feature of Maharashtra's caste structure was the absence of an indigenous *Kshatriya*/warrior caste (like *Rajputs/Thakurs* of north India), and also trading caste of any significance (except a small *Vani/Prabhu* caste in some parts

117 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "State and Caste System", *HJE*, Jan. 1968, p. 33.

118 P.G. Gavli, *Society and Social Disabilities under the Peshwas*, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 13-14.

119 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

120 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th Century", *HJE*, Feb. 1972, pp. 39-40.

of Konkan). The traders and money-lenders in this region were migrants from the neighbouring territories of Gujarat and Sind. Actually, during the eighteenth century, with expansion of trade, commerce and finance as a result of the Maratha conquests, the Maratha rulers invited traders from other regions to come and settle down in important towns of Maharashtra. The trader in the region was often a *Bania*, *Marwari* or *Parsi* from Gujarat. The group also included *Prabhus*.¹²¹

Next important caste in the Maharashtrian society was that of the Marathas (chiefly *Kunbis*, *Malis* etc.) who were generally engaged in agricultural, horticultural military and, in some cases, trading activities. During the period of Shivaji (who himself belonged to *Kunbi* caste) the *Kunbis* claimed *Khatriya* status, though the orthodox Brahmans hardly accepted their claim and treated them as *Shudras*. Although they were mainly peasant proprietors and were a dominant caste in rural Maharashtra, their dominance or their material prosperity, however widespread, did not affect more fundamental Hindu attitudes towards the *Dharma* or code of worldly conduct considered proper for *Shudras*, and such attitudes were held both by Brahmans/upper castes as well as the lower castes themselves.¹²²

The Marathas were divided into two groups. The first group included the village and *Paragana* officers like *Patil*, *Deshmukh* and *Chaugula*, and the chief landholders (*Watandars*). The second group was that of the cultivators who were referred to as *Mirasdars*, *Thalkaris* and *Upris* in the Maratha records (*Mahajars*). *Patil*, *Deshmukh* and *Chaugula* etc. enjoyed certain rights and privileges in village communities and, hence, they occupied a special position in the village. The *Mirasdars* etc. were, however, a class of exploited peasantry.

The fourth group was that of artisans. Though in this group each caste was engaged in a specific 'trade', but they were called *Shudras* not *Vaishyas*. This caste-group included the carpenter, the blacksmith, the goldsmith, the coppersmith, the potter, the oilman, the barber, the fisherman, the pan-dealer, etc. Their social status was

121 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 426.

122 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

below that of the Maratha community.¹²³ The fifth caste-group was consisted of Untouchables and tribal people. In this group mainly *Mahars*, *Mangas* and *Chambhars* were included. The Untouchables performed some very important menial services as well as *Begar* (forced labour) in the *Jajmanil/Balutedari* system. The *Mahar* was called sometimes as *Dher Bhoomia* (guide), *Yeshkar* (watchman) and *Taral* (gate keeper). The *Mang* was called *Vajantri* (musician) and the *Chambhar* was called *Mochi* (shoe maker) or *Jingar* (sandal-maker).¹²⁴ The *Mahars* were found in almost all parts of Maharashtra. Each village had a *Maharwara* (locality of *Mahars*) on its outskirts. As noted earlier, the Untouchables were living in highly miserable conditions during the period under study.

The traditional administrative system in rural Maharashtra had also some unique features. In this system the *Watan Sanshta* (institution of *Watan*) was most important. The *Watan* held great social significance in the Maharashtrian society. It was a socio-economic institution having certain feudalistic features. The institution caused/ fixed hereditary monopoly of certain officials/persons over any possession, service or occupation in the traditional village administration/ political economy. It was a sign of prestige and dignity in those days to have *Watan* rights (in the form of land-gift and/or other privileges). All village officials were called *Watandars*; but interestingly, the *Mirasdars* and even some *Balutedars* were also entitled to have certain *Watan* rights. Therefore, the *Watan* become the root cause of many disputes in the rural society. Claims and counter-claims to *Watan* rights gave rise to excessive litigations in village feuds. It also caused conspiracies, violence, murders and deceptions.¹²⁵

The chief hereditary *Watandar* of the village was called *Patil*. His main duty was to bring the idle and barren land under cultivation and to make it fruit-bearing. He was the head of the village, the chief revenue officer, and there was also invested in him, the function of the chief judicial officer. His was a hereditary office usually held by a family of Maratha-Kunbi community. He was entitled to many

123 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 59.

124 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

125 P.G. Gavli, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

rights, perquisites and privileges and free services of the villagers, particularly the *Balutedars* and *Dalits*. He held some *Inam* land in the village. As per the directives of the state, he received a share of the total revenue collection of the village in kind and cash. He also received a share from various levies imposed and collected by the state such as marriage tax, divorce tax, transit tax (on cattle) etc. Additionally, he received some grain from each holding. From the cultivators, he took *Ghugri* (an exaction in kind), *Phaski* (a handful of nay corn) and *Hurda* (unripe *Jawar*). From artisans and village servants, he received articles such as a pair of shoes, *Pasodi* (a garment), *Cholkhan* (a piece of cloths), oil, coconuts, ghee, fowl, mutton etc. without paying for them. He also claimed free services of *Mahars*, drummers and other artisans for his private purposes.¹²⁶ Hence, the *Patil* was a very powerful officer who represented the state at the village level.

The *Chaugula/Gramani* was another important official position in the traditional village administration under the *Watandari* system. He was an assistant to the *Patil*. He served as his messenger and helped him in collecting land revenue and also in bringing back cultivators who had left their fields. He transported the revenue collection in kind from his village to the headquarters of *Paragana*. He looked after the warehouse and private storage of the village. The *Chaugula* also performed the function of *Patil* at some places.¹²⁷ He was also entitled to certain privileges and services of the *Balutedars* and *Dalits*.

The *Kulkarni* was another important village *Watandar* whose services were deemed essential. Traditionally belonging to the Brahman caste and referred to as *Gav Kulkarni* in Maratha records, he was also called *Gramlekhi*, i.e., village accountant. His main duty was to keep a record of the lands held by each individual cultivator and the revenue due from each one. He was the record keeper of total estimate of the state revenue that a village had to pay. It was also expected from him to attract peasants to the village and increase the areas under cultivation. He held some *Inam* land of around 25

126 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

127 A.R. Kulkarni, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Bighas (about 8 hectare) in the village. Historians like S.N. Sen include *Kulkarni* in the list of *Bara Balutas*¹²⁸, but the thirteen items of privileges which he received in cash, kind and free services from peasants, artisans and village servants (such as a pair of shoes, oil, ghee, fowl, mutton and free services from *Mahars* etc.) in addition to his salary, did not include the *Baluta*-remuneration. Hence, he was not a *Baluta*-servant. Though, sometimes, he also worked as an astrologer, and in that case, he became a *Baluta*-servant.¹²⁹

The *Deshmukh* was a state official in the village, also traditionally belonging to the Brahman caste. He was an intermediary between the state and the village. He held some *Inam* land in the village. He was superior to the village officials. His main duty was to supervise the work of *Patil* and, hence, he visited annually, the villages under his charge. He expected cooperation of *Patils*, *Kulkarnis* and *Shetes* (moneylenders) of his *Paragana*. He was entitled to certain rights, perquisites and privileges and free services of the villagers, particularly the *Balutedars* and *Dalits*. He claimed a share in grain, fodder and fuel from every village. He collected several things from the village free of cost such as ghee, blanket, sheep, flock, shoes, oil, earthenware, chicken etc. during the *Navaratri* festival. He also claimed several things from the shopkeepers, hawkers and vendors of the weekly bazaar. Additionally, he collected certain yearly dues from the village artisans like barbers, washermen, blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, tailors etc. He collected three *Rukas* on the sale and purchase of cattle per head. He used to get a share from the proceeds of such taxes as *Khavastaka* (i.e. tax on nobility) *Gavtaka* (a levy imposed on the entire village), tax on marriage as well as on divorce. He also received *Begar* from the *Mahar* to the extent of one of two months in a year.¹³⁰

The *Deshpande* was another state official in the village, mostly belonging to the Brahman caste. He was subordinate to the *Deshmukh*. His main duty was to keep the accounts of the village(s)

128 S.N. Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-235.

129 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th Century", *HJE*, Feb. 1972, pp. 32-34.

130 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

under his jurisdiction. Sometimes, he also acted as *Kulkarni* of the village in the absence of a hereditary *Kulkarni*. He enjoyed certain rights and perquisites in cash and kind. He was entitled to certain privileges and free services of the villagers, particularly the *Balutedars* and *Dalits*. In the articles of grain and consumption articles claimed from the weekly bazaar etc., his share was usually half the share of the *Deshmukh*. In village marriages, it was his right to receive sugar, betel nuts, pans and clothes from the marriage parties. He received a pair of shoes from the cobbler, plate (*Patravali*) from *Gurav*, betel leaves from *Tamboli* and oil from the oilman. He was also entitled to receive *Begar* from *Mahar* for fifteen days in a year from each village under his jurisdiction.¹³¹

Now a brief overview of the *Balutedari* system or the institution of 'Bara Balutas' which was, as has already been mentioned, a peculiar form of the *Jajmani* system in pre-colonial Maharashtra. The *Bara Balutas* or the 'twelve groups of village servants' held some rent-free land in village, and in lieu served the entire village community (excluding Untouchables) in economic and social needs. Normally, they held hereditary monopoly over the sphere of their service or occupation (*Watan*) and they could also transfer or sell their *Watan* rights to others including migratory servants (*Uparis*).¹³² They all worked as assistants to the village *Patil* in various social and festival ceremonies in the village.

Actually, in the Maratha records, they are referred to as *Balutas* and their number has been mentioned as 'twelve', though some records raise their number to more than twelve. There has also been a debate among the historians regarding the components of *Bara Balutas*, but those who were almost regularly included in them were carpenter, blacksmith, leather worker/shoemaker, washerman, potter, barber, rope maker, astrologer (*Joshi*), Hindu shrine keeper and *Mahar*. In addition to the above ten, goldsmith, bard, mosque-keeper and bearer of burdens (*Taral*) were also oftentimes included

131 P.G. Gavli, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

132 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th Century", *HJE*, Feb. 1972, pp. 35-36.

in the *Balutas*.¹³³ Grant Duff further mentions about the existence of *Bara Alutas* and includes among them goldsmith, *Lingayat* priest, tailor (*Shimpi*), water carrier (*Koli*), gardener (*Mali*), drum beater (*Dauryagosavi*), vocalist (*Ghadshi*), musician (*Ghondali*), watchman (*Ramoshi or Bhil*), oil presser (*Teli*) and betel leave seller (*Tamboli*).¹³⁴ However, it appears that the term *Aluta* was used alternatively for *Baluta* in extension of the application of the word and unlike *Balutas*, *Alutas* were not regularly found in every village.

The *Balutedars*, as members of the village councils, affixed their signature or thumb impressions against their names on the *Mahajars*. Every *Balutedar* had his own symbol: The potter's was wheel, the barber's was mirror, the carpenter's was chisel, the shoemaker's was thread and picker, the washerman's was mallet, the *Gurav's* was censer, the goldsmith's was hammer and *Maulana's* was knife. The *Balutedars* were generally classified in three rows or categories:

First Row: Carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker and watchman or *Mahar*

Second Row: Washerman, potter, barber and rope maker or *Mang*

Third Row: Goldsmith, *Gurav*, *Joshi*, *Maulana*, *Koli* (water carrier) and *Ramoshi*.¹³⁵

The *Sutar* (carpenter) was regarded as the 'head' of the artisans. He made the villagers' ploughs and repaired their carts, provided wood material for building houses or making carts. The *Lohar* (black smith) made the shoes of ploughs and other implements and iron tools. The *Kumbhar* (potter) supplied the villagers with earthenware, pitchers, water pots and jars and received a cake of bread for every article. During the days of ripening crops, he took a jug and water vessels to each field for those engaged in watching the crops and received in turn the *Niboor* (ears of corn). He had also to supply any Government servant, on his arrival at the village, with the vessels. He supplied earthen images of deities in the festivals and received some grains. The *Nhavi* (barber) shaved all the villagers. He attended the

133 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-40.

134 James Grant Duff, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 25, see footnote.

135 P.G. Gavli, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

weddings in *Patil's* family. He also attended to the *Patil* in the festivals. Whatever *Patil* received from the villagers, came to him duly through the *Nhavi*. The goldsmith made jewellery for the villagers on their demand. The *Parit* (washer man) washed the cloths of the villagers.¹³⁶

The *Koli* (water carrier) kept earthen vessels filled with water at the village *Chavdi* for the use of all caste Hindus. He carried water for village and Government officials. He also supplied water to travellers and the villagers in marriages and festivals. When there was a river near the village, the water carrier acted like a ferryman and took people across on a boat or inverted earthen pots.¹³⁷ The *Maulana* or *Mulla* (the Muslim priest) took care of the mosque and tombs. It is very interesting to note that the *Maulana* also found a place in the Hindu *Baluta* system of Maharashtra and was accordingly entitled to certain customary rights.¹³⁸

The menial/servant castes like *Mahar*, *Chambhar*, *Mang*, *Dhar* and *Ramosi* came last in the social scale. In other words, all of them were Untouchables. Out of them, the *Mahars* formed the largest single group.¹³⁹ The *Mahar* was the most important village servant, who was assigned such low works as cleaning away dead animals and scavenging. It is said that the boundary of Maharashtra is coterminous with the spread of the *Mahar* caste. The *Mahar* was usually a *Balutedar* of lower rank and a petty Government servant in the village, acting as a messenger and assisting/guiding Government officials/strangers passing through the village. He was also the village watchman and scout man. In addition, he carried the death news to the relatives of the deceased person from one village to another and conveyed the death information from the military camps to the relatives of the dead and also to the Government. He helped in disposing of the dead humans and animals. He supplied fuel on the occasion of festivals and also on the occasion of caste (community) dinner. His evidence was required in the village disputes. Especially, in case

136 Bhima Ranganathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

137 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

138 James Grant Duff, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 483-484.

139 Susan Bayly, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-230.

of dacoit or theft, his evidence was deemed important to detect the thieves or dacoits. Similarly, when the cultivators quarrelled regarding the boundaries of their fields, his evidence often decided it.¹⁴⁰

In large villages, the *Mahars* were divided into three or four categories: (1) The *Weskars* or porters waiting at the village gates (2) The *Khale Weskar* or guards of the stack-yards. (3) The *Gav-Weskars* or those who attended the *Chavdi* (village office). (4) The *Gav-Mahar* or those who did the general duties of the villages. The *Mahar's* remuneration was a Government *Inam*, a *Watan* title which made entitled him to presents of bread and other victuals, small impost of oil, sugar and condiments received from shopkeepers and the like. Due to the absence of any fixed traditional occupation, the *Mahars* were ready to go in search of employment wherever it was available. In medieval and pre-modern times, they were recruited to the Maratha armies (except the regime of *Peshwas*) and that tradition continued under the East India Company and the Crown rule. The British formed a separate regiment of *Mahars* namely 'Mahar Regiment'. In its effort to build a modern army, the British Government made education compulsory for its recruits and their wards and thus opened an avenue for the *Mahars* to enter the modern age.¹⁴¹

The *Chambhar* (shoemaker) made all leather buckets, halters, whips, shoes and bounds for agricultural purposes. He had to serve gratuitously, all big *Watan-dars* of the *Paragana* and the village with a new pair of shoes annually.¹⁴² The *Mang* provided the villagers with ropes and prepared hides for the *Chambhar* to work. He was also assigned with the work of executing the capital punishments, i.e., human-hanging and human-killing. He sometimes acted as watchman. But traditionally the *Ramoshi* held the office of watchman. The *Ramoshis* automatically turned into auxiliaries in the police when the dispute pertaining to the country was settled. Under a weak

140 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

141 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, pp. 426 & 432.

142 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Government or under anarchy, they sometimes became thieves and robbers.¹⁴³

The Untouchable caste people also performed certain important duties on the occasion of public festivals. For instance, in the *Pola* festival, *Mang* and *Mahar* tied the *Toran* and made red paint to *Patil's* house.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the Untouchable castes provided highly essential services to the village and its officials.

The *Balutedars* received from each peasant household *Baluta*-remuneration or payment for their services, in the form of grains and other farm-produce or sometimes cash, at the time of harvest and cooked-food on the festival occasions. Besides this form of payment, some important *Balutedars* were given land gifts by the village community. This gift was also known as *Watan*. The principle which was at the base of it was to provide durability and continuity from one generation to another to the occupational relationship of the master and the servant.¹⁴⁵ The *Balutedars* also possessed some hereditary 'rights' in the village. They were remunerated by the villagers for their services. The state records of the *Peshwa* period throw some light on the proportion of grain-share given to the *Balutedars*. Out of a total of 70, the first row of *Balutedars* i.e., *Sutar*, *Lohar*, *Chambhar* and *Mahar* were entitled to a share of 10 each. Whereas the *Balutedars* of the second row, i.e., *Kumbhar*, *Nhavi*, *Parit* and *Mang* were entitled to a share of 5 each. The third row of *Balutedars*, i.e., *Joshi*, *Gurav*, *Sonar* and *Maulana* were entitled to a share of 2 ½ each.¹⁴⁶

It is pertinent to note that fifty-two 'rights' of *Mahar Balutedars* were claimed as their traditional 'rights' in the customary laws. According to these 'rights', deferent village officials and *Mirasdars* were expected to make a minor payment in cash or kind to the *Mahar* for his several duties which were actually a binding on him.¹⁴⁷ For instance, he was entitled to collect a tax from 2-4-0 to 3-4-0 on

143 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

144 Bhima Ranganathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

145 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th Century", *HJE*, Feb. 1972, pp. 27-31.

146 *Maharashtra State Gazetteer* (ed. A. S. Pathak), 2009, p. 171.

147 *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

the marriage of the caste Hindus including the other *Balutedars*. The *Sanads* (charters) were also given to *Mahars* by the past Governments to this effect. Such *Sanads* also mentioned the right to levying excise duty on the various consumer commodities brought to the market for sale. The *Mahar* had a right to collect Rs. 3 ½ on the funerals of members of the caste Hindus. He was permitted to take skin of the dead animals removed by him. In some cases, he returned the skins to the owner of the cattle on a payment of one Maud of grains to him. Though the barber did not shave him, but lent him the razor. The *Bagwan* or fruit seller gave 100 fruits to him for every 1000 fruits brought to the market. *Vani* or grocer gave tobacco and betel to him every day. The *Tamboli* or pan seller supplied a little quantity of betel-leaf to him. The *Mahar* served the *Patil*, *Deshmukh* and *Deshpande* as *Rabta-Mahar*, *Ghar Mahar* and *Padewar*. The *Deshmukh* paid Rs. 6/- to him for his clothes and gave him some bread every day in lieu of his free services. The village *Patil* (and other officials too) oftentimes had a claim of the free services of *Mahar* round the year and round the clock.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the so-called fifty-two 'rights' of the *Mahar* were not actually 'rights', but his several duties or forms of forced labour which he had to perform for the village officials and *Mirasdars*.

Within the confines of village, the produce was distributed according to the customary laws under *Jajmani* (or *Balutedari*) system prevalent in Maharashtra. Thus an interlinked two-tier structure reigned before the advent of the British – first a hierarchy of state officials which included *Patil*, *Kulkarni*, *Deshpande*, *Deshmukh*, *Jagirdar* and *Mansabdar* and the Mughal emperor (or the *Peshwa*, the regional ruler of the Deccan) standing above the village system, and second the *Balutedari* pattern determining the intra-village relationship.¹⁴⁹

(3)

Colonial Intervention and Social Change

When Maharashtra came under the British control after the eclipse of *Peshwa* rule in 1818, a new colonial administration was set up

148 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

149 Mahesh Gavaskar, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

in the region, the purpose of which was to exploit the people and resources of the land in the interests of the British. As a matter of fact, India and Britain entered the modern era together, but one as an emerging manufacturing power, whose ships and guns ruled the earth, and the other, with traditional manufactures weakened under the process of deindustrialization, if not ruined, and also a process of 'peasantization' caused by the land tenurial policies aiming at high taxation of agriculture and the drain of wealth from the country.¹⁵⁰ Needless to say that the economic policies of the British Raj had a drastic effect on the region of Maharashtra too. Here, the Britain introduced a land revenue system namely *Ryotwari* system which established a direct relationship between the cultivators and the colonial Government so far as the payment of land revenue was concerned. The system thus brought about almost an end of the mediatory role of the traditional village *Patil* between farmers and the Government in the land revenue administration.¹⁵¹

Under the new colonial system, the village became a basic unit of revenue administration. For the purpose of revenue collection, two positions were created, namely *Mulki Patil* and *Police Patil*. The *Mulki Patil* looked after revenue administration while the *Police Patil* was responsible for law and order. They were paid a salary for performing these duties. Like the *Patil*, the *Kulkarni* who looked after the land revenue accounts of the village, also became a paid employee of the Government and was designated as *Talathi*. Over a group of villages constituting *Taluka* or *Tahsil*, a *Mamledar* or *Mamlatdar* was appointed as administrative chief of this unit. A centrally located village or town was made headquarters of the *Taluka* and all its administrative offices were housed at this place. A *Peta* or *Mahal* was a smaller administrative unit (like *Taluka*) and the administrative head of this unit was called *Mahalkari*. A group of *Talukas* formed a district or *Zilla*.¹⁵² Table 1.2 shows various sources of revenue including land revenue in the Bombay presidency in the mid-nineteenth century.

150 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, pp. 140-141.

151 *Maharashtra State Gazetteer* (ed. A. S. Pathak), p. 276.

152 *Ibid.*

TABLE I.2
SOURCES OF REVENUE IN BOMBAY PRESIDENCY, 1855-56¹⁵³

<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Source of Revenue</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Land Revenue	57.5
2	Salt tax	5.6
3	Opium Revenue	20.7
4	Post Office & Stamp Duties	1.8
5	Customs	7.0
	Total (including others)	100
	Total in Million Pounds	5.0

The table indicate that the tax system as a whole was regressive and the demand of land revenue was excessive. In fact, the British East India Company, after receiving the taxation rights in Bengal, Bombay and Madras presidencies, set out to reform the land taxation system in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, chief objective of which was not to give better protection to the peasants, but to weaken the intermediary elite, to separate taxation and ownership rights and to make land a sailable asset. The major concern of the British Raj in effecting these changes was to obtain a steady flow of a large amount of revenue from the land. Accordingly, the colonial Government brought about a great change in the existing land relations.¹⁵⁴

The British, under the new land revenue administration, knocked off the top half of the two-tier structure of the village administration, and in its place, either institutionalised the *Zamindari* system to collect land revenue or, as in the case of Deccan, enforced the *Ryotwari* system wherein the cultivators paid the revenue directly to the state. The *Ryotwari* system, besides doing away with a host of intermediaries between the state and cultivators, introduced the idea private ownership of land in the village economy. Land was now no longer

153 Tirthankar Roy, *The Economic History of India 1857-1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, rpt. 2011, p. 256.

154 *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

owned by the village community as a whole but by the individual *Mirasdars*.¹⁵⁵

The land revenue policy of the British was rigid and the Government was reluctant to grant any concession to peasants in payment of land revenue, even in the event of famines and other calamities. With factors like the introduction of private property rights in land, growth of the monetary economy and development of the means of communications, the process of transfer of lands from the hands of cultivators to traders and moneylenders started in Maharashtra in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was due to this process that the moneylenders slowly turned into landlords. A large percentage of such 'absentee landlords' came from out of the region; but the local Brahmans were also conspicuous in their ranks.¹⁵⁶ The various district gazetteers, e.g., that of Sholapur, Satara etc. describe this process in detail. For instance, the *Sholapur District Gazetteer*, reads:

The tendency seems to for petty landlords to diminish and the land to fall into the hands of men of capital who employ the old holders as their tenants or labourers. The higher class of husbandmen (owners of more than 100 acres) are usually also the merchants dealing in cotton, cloth and grain and lending money.¹⁵⁷

The typical "men of capital" were not native *Vanis* or merchant caste people of Maharashtra, but immigrant merchants from Gujarat or Marwar in Rajasthan, popularly known as *Gujars* and *Marwaris* in the region. The merchants were not the only moneylenders. In villages, local officials – the non-Brahman headmen, the Brahman accountant (*Kulkarni*) and the village priest-astrologer (*Joshi*) – also lent money, and sought mortgages and land control.¹⁵⁸ The introduction of private ownership over land in the village economy and gradual penetration of monetary economy in rural areas enhanced the power and prestige of the literate *Joshis* in particular, as never

155 Mahesh Gavaskar, *op. cit.*, 92.

156 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 427.

157 *Sholapur District Gazetteer*, 1884, p. 51.

158 *Satara District Gazetteer*, 1885, p. 181.

before.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, the Brahman *Kulkarni* (village accountant), being a keeper for land records and the only literate person in the village community (after *Joshi*), and also the moneylender, found himself in a position of power that would enable him to grab the land of cultivators. In Deccan, a large percentage of the *Inamdars* were such persons who had held *Inam* rights due to their position as village accountants or priests. Alternatively, the Brahmans also claimed the position to hold such rights because they had been military feudatories under the *Peshwas*.¹⁶⁰ One *Satara District Gazetteer* describes:

The lending professional moneylenders are Brahmans, Gujarat *Vanis*, *Marwar Vanis*, *Jains*, *Lingayats*, Marathas and Musalmans. Few live solely by money-lending. The Brahmans are husbandmen, land proprietors, traders and, to a small extent, pensioned government servants and pleaders. A few of them have large capital and combine money-lending with trade as their chief calling.¹⁶¹

Hence, the Brahmans, who traditionally enjoyed the position of ruling class, were able, despite the disintegration of *Peshwai*, to make a smooth transition to the new order in their favour. In contrast, because of the introduction of new legal system, the traditional role of *Patil* as maintainer of law and order became redundant and, here too, it was the *Kulkarni* who gained importance.¹⁶² As a result, rapid socio-economic transitions started to occur in rural Maharashtra. The social policies of the colonial state also caused great interventions and transitions in the region. The British state in the first half of nineteenth century was kept aloft by the evangelical and utilitarian zeal of a 'civilization mission'. No doubt, the collapse of the rule of *Peshwas* brought about an end to an important function, as pointed out earlier, that is, the state's active support of the *Brahmanical* elite and to protect, maintain and strengthen the social status quo

159 Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, rpt. 2013, p. 257

160 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 76.

161 *Satara District Gazetteer*, 1885, p. 181.

162 Mahesh Gavaskar, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

particularly in the caste-matters.¹⁶³ However, the resistance of the traditional entrenched power centres of India, particularly in 1857, forced the British colonial masters to take a negotiating stand. As soon as the power transferred from the East India Company to the British imperial state, the nature of the colonial Raj changed rapidly under the new transitions. In this context, the connections of the Raj with industrial capitalism as well as the British Crown should particularly be kept in mind to understand how the British dealt with pre-capitalist and pre-modern society in India. As almost all historians believe, the free trade capitalism had played a proactive role in shaping of the policy of non-intervention in India declared by Queen Victoria herself in 1858. And later on, as the exploitative political economy of the Raj became more and more evident, the British government abandoned its self-proclaimed role of a civilizing agency altogether. There might also been a necessity for the British rulers to enter into a nexus with the traditional elite so as to legitimize their entry and existence in the political domain of India.¹⁶⁴

With the sound establishment of their colonial administration in the second half of nineteenth century, a need was felt by the British to introduce English education among the native people to create a new educated class, which could be chiefly useful in their administrative machinery. It is pointed out here that William Adam, a Scottish observer of the nineteenth century, had claimed in his reports (1835-1838) that there were “1,00,000 indigenous schools in Bengal and Bihar alone” before the introduction of English education by Lord Macaulay. Nevertheless, the contemporary scholars like Sir Phillip dubbed his reports as a myth as Adam used the term ‘school’ not as an institution but as a place where instruction was given to one or more students either by the teacher or the father himself or any member of the family.¹⁶⁵ And among all such reports

163 Hiroshi Fukazawa, “State and Caste System”, *HJE*, Jan. 1968, pp. 34-43.

164 Mahesh Gavaskar, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

165 “Adam’s Report on Education (Macaulay’s Minute)”, <https://www.the successkey.com/2016/12/adams-report-on-education>

assembled by Dharampal¹⁶⁶, we do not find clear and sufficient examples of the lower classes being educated in the so-called indigenous schools, with the exception of Bengal, where few *Doms* and *Chandalas* were reported to have access to such places. In fact, it was the East India Company Government and the Christian missionaries who had, for the first time, widened educational opportunities for the common masses in India. As is well known, the Charter Act of 1813, for the first time, laid down that out of the surplus revenues of India a sum of one lakh of rupees each year should be applied for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of sciences and literature among the inhabitants of British India. The grant allocated under the Act was first used for the encouragement of oriental methods of instruction by paying stipends to the students, although grant-in-aid to the schools was not paid until 1833. The turning point actually came only after the coming of Lord Macaulay on the scene with his famous opinion, viz., to create a “class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” which now became the British policy. The British made English as the official language in 1835. Accordingly, the new education was aimed at producing clerks and lawyers. Hence, the curriculum was designed not to teach science or technology but to pass on English morals.¹⁶⁷

It also gradually became clear that the British rulers were also keen to retain status quo in India, and, hence, they had nothing to do with any ‘reform’ to be introduced in the Indian society. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Queen’s Proclamation of 1858 itself assured the Indian people that the British did not want to interfere in the socio-religious matters of the country. For this reason; the Governors of Bombay like Mountstuart Elphinstone tried best to appease and accommodate the *Brahmanical* elite in their new administration. He did not even grant permission to Dr. Taylor, one of the

166 See Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, Bibila Impex Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1983.

167 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 68.

leading missionaries of his times, to stay in the city of Bombay in 1807.¹⁶⁸

As a matter of fact, the British hoped to appease and win over the old ruling elites. In most parts of India, this was a prominent aspect of their social policy. Here, some historians have pointed out the 'dialogical' nature of colonialism. It is true that apart from interacting with each other, the various segments of the Indian society were also trying to negotiate with the phenomenon of colonialism. Hence, a brief discussion involving the context of 'dialogical' nature of colonialism will capture the complexities of ties between the colonizers and different segments of Indian society, as well as the dominant and the dominated social groups of those times. The first thing to remember in this context is that the 'dialogue' had been mainly between the indigenous elite and the colonizers. If the elites and the British collaborated, it was in an atmosphere where both 'sensed' and 'feared' responses from the masses they ruled¹⁶⁹ (thought the dominated social groups and their intellectuals like Jotirao Phule also responded to both, as we will see in our subsequent discussion, in their peculiar manner). In Maharashtra, where the former ruling class had been the intellectual elite, this was a major factor, particularly in the education policy of the British. Elphinstone, the first Governor of the Bombay province, was an English conservative who was afraid of radical reform/change and hoped to modify Indian institutions without breaking tradition and working through traditional elite and institutions. He was quite aware of the *Brahmanic* domination in religious, social and political life of the region. He knew that Brahmans had a stake in preserving their supremacy over the culture and values of society.¹⁷⁰ He, therefore, visualized a policy of providing colleges in the cities for the study of traditional disciplines like Sanskrit and the sacred texts of Hinduism, apart from

168 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 447.

169 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 142.

170 Ravinder Kumar, *Western India in Nineteenth Century: A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968, pp. 45-46.

English. It is needless to say that these colleges were chiefly meant for the students belonging to Brahman and other high castes. He also maintained the traditional *Dakshina* system¹⁷¹ (of the former *Peshwas*) whereby the Government gave grants to such Brahmans who had distinguished themselves in the sacred studies. He established the Hindu College in Poona in 1821 which planned “first to train Brahmans in classical Sanskrit studies.”¹⁷² The College was thrown open to students of the non-Brahman castes only in 1850 and was renamed as Deccan College in 1864. After the establishment of the University of Bombay in 1857, Indian students were introduced for the first time to the researches made by western scholars in oriental philosophy, Sanskrit literature, and ancient Indian history. A large number of Sanskrit works on different subjects were translated into Marathi.¹⁷³

Naturally, the best policy for the new colonial state in a hierarchical society was to take care of the education of higher classes possessing ‘hereditary’ qualities and inclination for learning and occupying natural influence over the minds of their countrymen. The result of this policy was striking. The Government took utmost interest in the higher education and almost neglected primary and secondary education. The colleges of arts and science began thriving in the cities. The six prominent colleges of the Bombay presidency in the year 1881-82 were centred in cities like Poona, Bombay, Ahmednagar and Kolhapur. Out of these colleges, two were in Bombay, two in Poona and one each in Ahmednagar and Kolhapur. While new colleges were being opened in the cities, there was only one primary school each for a group of villages and that too only with one teacher who was paid a very meagre salary of Rs. 4-10 per month.¹⁷⁴ Here, the remarks of a renowned Cambridge historian

171 *Ibid.*, pp. 50-55.

172 Elphinstone decided to continue the Annual *Dakshina* Festival in which impecunious Brahmans used to assemble in Poona once every year to pass test in Hindu philosophy and rituals and received cash awards. See Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 68-69.

173 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 68-69.

174 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Anil Seal are noteworthy: “Elphinstone’s policies may have probably saved British domination in western India; they certainly postponed the decline of the *Brahmanic* pre-eminence in Maharashtra.”¹⁷⁵

Needless to say the policies of the British Government weighed in favour of urban areas which was beneficial to the upper classes/ castes and the rich sections of the society. Soon the expansion of higher education produced significant results. The colleges began to turn out thousands of graduates every year. For example, in the year 1864-65 in the Bombay presidency alone 933 students passed B.A. examination and 79 students passed M.A. whereas the total number of students passing B.A. and M.A. examinations that year in whole of the British India was 5108 and 708 respectively.¹⁷⁶ As we observe the caste-wise data of the students enrolled in the colleges of Bombay presidency, the picture becomes perfectly clear (See Table 1.3).

TABLE 1.3
STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT CASTES ENROLLED IN THE
COLLEGES OF BOMBAY PRESIDENCY (1884)177

<i>College/Institution</i>	<i>Brahman</i>	<i>Kshatriya</i>	<i>Vaishya/Vani</i>
Elphinstone College, Bombay	59	10	38
Deccan College, Poona	107	01	01
Free General Assembly’s Institution, Poona	34	01	06
St. Xavier’s College, Bombay	15	01	05
Gujarat College, Ahmadabad	03	-	01
Rajaram College, Kolhapur	23	-	-
Total	241	13	51

Interestingly, the caste-based and profession-oriented demand for education further resulted in a bias for higher education. The

175 Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, p. 78.

176 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

177 Ravinder Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

supply of university-educated government officers was greatly facilitated so as to aiding the expansion of the bureaucracy. An excessive accent on literary education limited the usefulness of the university as a vehicle for scientific research.¹⁷⁸

As a matter of fact, the British colonial masters had to build a well-organised revenue collection system and also a new administrative and legal structure to rule over the entire Indian subcontinent. The mammoth task involved the creation of new job opportunists, for which the knowledge of certain literacy skills was necessary. As the British political and administrative institutions grew in size and extended more deeply into the Indian society, it became clear that they offered great opportunities, both of employment and of influence, to those Indians who were able to find space in them. The old association of the higher castes with skills of literacy gave them a much greater flexibility and advantage to exploit these new opportunities.¹⁷⁹ The result was that the higher castes, particularly the Brahmans, came to occupy a significant proportion of clerical/administrative and professional positions at all levels of the British administration. Thus, they were able to corner almost all employment opportunists.¹⁸⁰ It was here that the lower caste leaders like Jotirao Phule found their caste-fellows to be so acutely disadvantaged.

It is true that the disarmament of India and suppression of local armies by the colonial rulers led to the decline of old ruling classes in beginning. Particularly, the Brahman diplomats and administrators attached to the *Peshwai* and other local princes lost their means of livelihood when the princes were subjugated by the British. But their long well-established tradition of learning helped them to avail for themselves, the facilities offered by new educational institutions set up by the British rulers. The colonial education, which was clearly biased towards the elite and towards timing positions in new colonial bureaucracy, gave new foothold to Brahmans who upto now continued to propagate the traditional scriptures, now, in the words of Jyotee Thass (1845-1914) – one of the earliest *Dalit* reformers of

178 Tirthankar Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

179 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

180 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

south India – were learning “new (western) *Vedas* and *Shastras*” to capture the opportunists available in the colonial administration and also to justify caste in terms of modern sciences.¹⁸¹

Soon the new educated elite, mostly consisting of Brahmans and other upper castes in Maharashtra, started to capture various key positions (like judges, juries and administrative staff) in the colonial government. For instance, the report of Indian Public Service Commission recorded that in 1877, out of 1866 Hindu members of the judicial services 904 were Brahmans, 454 *Kayasthas*, *Kshatriyas* and *Rajputs*, 113 *Vaishyas/Vanis*, 146 *Shudras* and 102 others. The Brahmans were particularly dominant in Bombay presidency with 211 out of total of 328.¹⁸² It was also found that 41.25 percent of the deputy collectors, 75.5 percent of *Mamlatdars* (assistant deputy collectors) and 71 percent of the subordinate judges in the province were Brahmans. Further, Brahmans and other “advanced Hindus” (mainly *Kayasthas* and merchant *Vani* castes) represented 268 out of 411 clerks in Secretariat, 64 of 91 in Public Works Department, 125 of 198 in the High Court, 32 of 47 in Police Courts, and 59 of 87 in the office of the Commissioner of Police, Bombay.¹⁸³

Hence, the Brahmans and other “advanced Hindus” emerged as clear winners as they established a virtual monopoly over the ranks of new government. Additionally, the caste-based Hindu societal rules still guided the daily life of people. Within a few years, they could monopolize almost all the avenues of employment opened out by various government departments, educational institutions and commercial establishments. In addition to it, they also entered the new professions of lawyer, physician, and journalist. Of course, with the spread of education, many persons belonging to the non-Brahman castes also obtained the requisite qualifications to enter these oppor-

181 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, pp. 145 & 198; also see G. Alosius, *Nationalism without A Nation in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 67.

182 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

183 Memorandum of the Depressed India Association, *Indian Statutory Commission*, p. 50, quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 73.

tunities. But they could not compete successfully with the Brahmans etc. In a word, the *Brahmanic* hegemony, far from slackening hold over the Hindu society, intensified under the colonial regime.¹⁸⁴

The educated middle class (which consisted chiefly of Brahmans and other high castes) was though extremely small in size but was united by their caste bonds, economic interests, and a keen nostalgia for lost political power. The dominating position of this class was undermined only by the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie after the World War-I. The English education also threw open for the upper caste intellectuals in Maharashtra, a window into the outer world. Their study of the English constitutional history, classical political economy, social philosophy of Bentham, Mill and Spencer and the religious teachings of the rebel Protestant sects, developed in them an awareness of modern political and social values.¹⁸⁵ The eulogies showered on ancient Indian learning by the Western philosophers, Orientalists and Indologists also helped to remove the inferiority complex created among the first generation of educated Indians by the initial influence of Western Civilization. Accordingly, the new educated elite came out with a very positive opinion about the British Raj. Many of them even claimed that the advent of the British rule in India was a 'God-sent gift' and the British rulers were the 'angels of Gods.' Stalwarts like Gopal Hari Deshmukh alias 'Lokahitwadi', Balshastrri Jambhekar, Dadoba Pandurang, Baba Padamji etc. were, by and large, of such opinion. This first generation of upper class social reformers believed that the policy of the British was not to exploit the Indians but to ameliorate them from age-old ignorance and superstitions. Slowly, they also came to realize that unless feudal fetters were broken and modern social values assimilated, no social progress was possible. In this context, what Y.D. Phadke, a prominent social historian of Maharashtra, observes is notable:

Impressed by the achievements and the superiority of the new rulers and challenged by a band of Christian missionaries, the (educated) elite in the Bombay Presidency, as in Bengal, stressed the need to

184 G. Alosius, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

185 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 427.

critically examine the social system, religious beliefs and cultural heritage of India. The confrontation with the British rulers and Western Civilization made the western-educated Indian elite aware of the shortcomings of the Indian society.... The loss of freedom, they believed, was a blessing in disguise, for, it gave them an opportunity to reform society and makes it fit to preserve independency whenever it would be regained.¹⁸⁶

As such, the educated elites in those days were very impressed by western modernity which was based on the ideas of rationalism, humanism and scientific temper. Of course, the new western knowledge which came through English language, literature and press, provided an access to the modern English literature for the Indians. Alongwith the liberating ideas of Kant, Olney, Thomas Paine and Voltaire; educated Indians became familiar with Bacon's scientific method of studying social and material phenomena, Darwin's theory of evolution, J.S. Mill's ideas on liberty and individualism and Carlyle's famous saying that – "reform means going back to the truth."¹⁸⁷ They could also read the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Martin Luther and George Washington etc. Such ideas were the outcome of renaissance and reformation in Europe. Accordingly, the educated elites also desired to initiate renaissance in India.¹⁸⁸ Hence, they started their projects of socio-religious reform as a first step towards Indian renaissance.

The new educated elites and the reformers started various newspapers in English as well in Marathi languages in order to introduce 'reform' in Indian society. As a matter of fact, the publication of various newspapers during the nineteenth century in Maharashtra created a favourable atmosphere for the first generation of modern intellectuals/reformers to advance their projects and activities. In 1831, Balshastri Jambhekar started the publication of western India's first Anglo-vernacular weekly, the *Darpan* (1832). After some time,

186 Y.D. Phadke, *Social Reformers of Maharashtra*, Maharashtra Information Centre, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 7-8.

187 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

188 R.C. Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I, Firm K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1963, p. 291.

he started *Digdarshan* (1840). Soon, several other newspapers in the regional language(s) appeared on the scene, for instance, *Jam-e-Jamshed* (1831), *Mumbaina Samachar* (1822), *Bombay News* (1830), *Mumbaina Chabuk* (1833), *Mumbai Durbeen* (1838), *Samachar Darpan* (1849) and *Chitradnyan Darpan* (1850). Some other notable native newspapers were *Prabhakar* (1845) *Dnyanodaya*, *Dnyanprakash*, *Induprakash*, *Arunodaya*, *Native Opinion*, etc.

The first generation of reformers were convinced of the need for an expansion of India's intellectual horizons and for a reevaluation of her traditional socio-religious beliefs. This line of thought was mainly sponsored by moderate and progressive social thinkers/reformers like Bal Shastri Jambhekar. Jambhekar founded the 'Bombay Education Society' and the 'Native Improvement Society'. He was Dadabhai Nauraji's teacher.¹⁸⁹ His newspaper, the *Darpan*, reflected the concerns and approaches of the modern intellectuals of Maharashtra. The press, it opined, possessed enormous power to bring about renewal in Indian society by "chasing away the mists of error and ignorance which clouded men's minds, and shedding over them the lights of knowledge, in which the people of Europe have advanced so far before the other nations of the world."¹⁹⁰

In 1840s, the *Prabhakar*, a successful newspaper edited by Jambhekar himself and another reformer Babu Mahajan, and the main mouthpiece for the expression of reformist opinion in Maharashtra, expressed dissatisfaction over the caste hierarchies, privileges of Brahmans, and devaluation of women and lower castes. The paper assumed a more reformist character when Gopal Hari Deshmukh alias Lokahitwadi (1823-1892) attacked Brahmans for their weaknesses, deficiencies and immoral tactics through his *Shatpatre* – a series of hundred letters dealing with the topics of Hindu social reform – which were published in the *Prabhakar* in late 1840s. Arguing in one of his letters published on 11 June 1848, that in ancient times Brahmans could come from any caste and we have examples of Valmiki and Vyas, he wrote:

189 *Ibid.*

190 *Darpan*, 6 January 1832, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

It is clear that Brahmans of those days were learned and intelligent, unlike the stupid Brahmans of the present, and there were not rigid prohibitions against mixing outside the caste or against the strict letters of the *Shastras*.¹⁹¹

Lokahitwadi advocated in another letter that the Brahmans should give up the habit of learning Sanskrit grammar and try to learn as to how to cut wood. He condemned the prevalent *Brahmanic* Hinduism and presented the idea of a 'new religion' which was based on truth, equality and liberty. It is also pointed out that Lokhitwadi also came in contact with Jotirao Phule and, to some extent, impressed him.¹⁹² He did not, however, take any concrete step to ameliorate the conditions of lower castes and remained aloof. It is said that he even had to keep his books in the corner of a wall just to avoid polluting things in his house.¹⁹³ In any case, the *Prabhakar* was vehement about the traditional religious practices that violated both man's reason and his notion of social justice.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, the *Marathi Gnyan Prakash*, the mouthpiece of the *Marathi Gnyan Prakash Sabha* (Marathi Society for the Spread of Knowledge) founded in 1848 by a group of reformers and students of Elphinstone College with Dadaoba Pandurang its first President, strongly echoed the mid-nineteenth century western reformist belief of the ultimate unity of all truths – social, scientific and religious. In an article published in the paper, it was pointed out that the orthodox Brahmans arrogated to themselves, the position of gods on earth. After centuries of such as abuse:

Our political power has been destroyed, our wealth has gone, our institutions have decayed, our trade is worth nothing, our ancient learning has been ruined, the incentive for individual education has

191 *Prabhakar*, 11 June 1848, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

192 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

193 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

194 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94, also see Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

disappeared, the ignorance has increased, our once glorious cities have vanished and our peasantry has become impoverished.¹⁹⁵

Significantly, colonialism, while in many ways solidifying the hold of *Brahmanical* elite through English education etc., also gave limited opportunities to the subordinate castes. As pointed out earlier, the East India Company Government had, for the first time, provided an opening for the common masses, either through military recruitments or the missionary effort. It was on this account that the first response of the lower castes to the new situation brought about by the colonialism was a welcoming response throughout India. For instance, the '*Kartabhaja*' (Devotees of the Creator) movement, which was the first socio-religious movement of the lower classes, (particularly *Namshudras*) of Bengal aroused in the end of eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ignored the traditional *Brahmanical* and *Pauranic* imaginary and celebrated prosperity and an abundance of enjoyment and eroticism under the new regime of East India Company. The word '*Kompani*' (Company) was a key metaphor for them to describe themselves as the *Kartabhajas* claimed to be the '*Garib Kompani*', i.e., the Company of the Poor. They hailed the East India Company rule for opening opportunities to pervade their poverty and praised the 'rag-clag madman Aulchand', the founder of their movement.¹⁹⁶ In fact, the *Kartabhajas* represented a parallel movement to the socio-religious movement of the Bengali *Bhadralok* (high castes) called 'Bengal Renaissance' which arose under the banner of *Brahmo Samaj* of Raja Rammohan Roy and his followers, as the first apparition of Hindu social reform which, though advocated monotheism and struggled against social evils like Sati and child marriage, yet believed in the golden Vedic heritage of Aryans and, by and large, kept silent on the issues of caste and oppression of the lower caste Hindus.¹⁹⁷

Similar response was witnessed in Maharashtra. But the circum-

195 *Marathi Dnyan Prakash*, July 1850, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

196 Hugh B. Urban, *Songs of Ecstasy: Tantric and Devotional Songs from Colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, pp. 6-41.

197 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 127.

stances were somehow different here, as the main interventions in the social spectrum were not made by the Company Government, but by the Christian missionaries who pioneered earlier activities of 'reform' among the lower classes in the region. They wrote various books and pamphlets in English as well as in Marathi, through which they criticised caste and Brahmanism, assailed the superstitions and idolatry of Hindu religion and its faith in a priesthood that seemed to have lost sight of its spiritual mission. The *Dnyanodaya*, an organ of the Christian missionaries, was published from Ahmednagar since 1849. Murray Mitchell and Hume were its editors. One can observe in the list of its readers, the name of Jotirao Phule. It is pointed out that the *Dnyanodaya* forcefully attacked the Government policy of refusing admission to *Mahar-Mang* boys in the government schools.¹⁹⁸

We know that Phule as well as many of the non-Brahmans, who came forward during this period, were educated in the English schools opened by the Protestant missionaries of the Free Church Society. Unlike the Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries who had come to India with the Portuguese and compromised with the medieval caste system, the Protestant missionaries commenced their effort at conversion with an attack on Hindu religion and its traditional social order. The Puritans had revolted against the religious bigotry and the Church hierarchies in their own country. Insistence on the right of each individual to have direct communion with the Almighty was a typical feature of their sect.¹⁹⁹ It is, therefore, no wonder that the lower caste and non-Brahman reformers like Phule, who were deeply impressed by such a philosophy, should express serious objections to the caste hierarchies as well as the approach of social reform adopted by the elite reformers.

The Scottish and American missionaries, no doubt, played an important role in fostering the speed of social reform movement in Maharashtra. They were extremely active in their efforts of proselytization of the people. Though apart from the native people's

198 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

199 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 429.

opposition, the British rule too asked them to stop their move, they continued their activities. Missionaries like John Wilson, James and Murray Mitchell attempted to undermine the public credibility of the orthodox Hindu religion beliefs and social practices. Some of the high castes Hindus (e.g., Baba Padamji, Pandita Ramabai etc.) were also attracted by them and they eventually embraced Christianity.²⁰⁰ It is pointed out that Phule, who came in contact with the missionaries in his twenties, was himself a product of the missionary movement. Though, despite being influenced by the missionaries, he never accepted their whole worldview and strongly refuted their idea of the mediatorship between God and the man. Rather, he accepted the line of thought preached by the western religious radicals like Thomas Paine. In this context, the observation of Rosalind O'Hanlon is notable:

While the mission schools and the newspapers were the most important influences in creating the distinctive consensus of opinion shared by the young reformers, the government schools, individual British administrators, and the new vernacular press appear also as significant agents of change in their personal lives. It was neither the systematic criticism of traditional Hindu society articulated in missionary propaganda, nor the ideas of European religious radicals alone which shaped the intellectual developments of Hindu radicals and reformers, but their simultaneous reinforcement and counterbalancing of each other.²⁰¹

The limitations of the attitude of first generation of reformers like Bal Shastri Jambhekar, Lokhitwadi etc. towards the issue of social reform, led to the rise of more progressive reformers who soon appeared on the platform with the formation of '*Paramahansa Mandali*' (Society of the Super Being) in 1849 at Bombay. The *Mandali* expressed the earlier radical voice of social reform in Maharashtra, which was a Poona Group of young iconoclasts, modelling their efforts like Young Bengal of Hennery Vivian Derozio.²⁰² Dadoba Pandurang, a professor of Elphinstone College, was the chief

200 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

201 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

202 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 98.

promoter and founder-secretly of the *Mandali*. Before founding the *Mandali*, Pandurang had founded another society at Surat namely 'Manavadharma Sabha' (Society for Human Religion) in 1841. He believed that each religion suffered from certain deficiencies. Hence, one must observe noble and philanthropic principles from various religions that would pave the way to serve the humanity. A book published later in 1868 entitled *A Discussion on Religion* represented the rules of the *Paramahansa Mandali* which was perhaps authored by Dadoba Pandurang himself.²⁰³

Nevertheless, the *Mandali* was kept a closely guarded secret and no definite book of rules was available to its members. Hence, the members thought that they should not observe caste, should not worship idols, should permit widow remarriage, should educate women, and should spread education amongst the lower castes.²⁰⁴ Later on Baba Padamji joined the *Mandali*. In his writing *Arunodaya*, he also wrote about the beliefs of this society. According to him, the followers of the *Mandali* believed that caste divisions and idol worship were wrong and all human beings belonged to one caste only. For them, there was only one God and only one religion in the world. New members had to agree to its ideas based on egalitarianism and to take bread and milk from the same vessels as the other members.²⁰⁵ Hence, the *Mandali* appears to be the first society for radical reform in Maharashtra.

It has been claimed by some historians that Jotirao Phule was also influenced by the activities of the *Paramahansa Mandali*, for, he had very close relations with its leader Baba Padamji who later on embraced Christianity. Another pointer to the connection between the *Mandali* and the society organised by Phule (i.e., the *Satyashodhak Samaj*), according to Rosalind O' Hanlon, was that the copies of *A Discussion on Religion* were disseminated by the latter as a part of its

203 A.K. Priolkar, *Dadoba Pandurang*, pp. 245-246, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

204 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

205 Baba Padamji, *Arunodaya* (Marathi), Bombay, 1888, p. 178 quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

propaganda in Poona in 1870s.²⁰⁶ Further, Phule's dedication of the ballad written in 1869 in praise of Chhatrapati Shivaji to Balkrishna Jayakar, the then President of the *Mandali*, as a "mark of profound respect and a testimony of sincere affection" is another indication of their close connections.²⁰⁷

Actually, caste experienced by Phule was a system in transition. Men of lower castes often mixed with Brahmans in societies like *Paramahansa Mandali*. Its learned Brahman members were trying to broaden their traditions, though these early radicals challenged the traditions more directly through words. It was, however, also one of his painful experiences, that, the anti-caste movement launched by the *Mandali* collapsed in 1860s due to the reactionary aspirations of the dominant Hindu orthodoxy to maintain status quo.²⁰⁸ Disagreements and differences increased within the *Mandali* to such a level that, on the one hand, its radical deist ideas tended to take on an almost anti-religious tone particularly at the hands of the young students of Elphinstone College, while on the other, the dissenters decided to form another society, the *Prarathana Sabha*, in which they would be quite open about their beliefs. In the end, Padamji and Narain Raghunath left the *Mandali*. With some other members, they set up *Satyashodhak Sabha* (The Truth Seeker Society). The *Sabha*, however, came much closer to a definite adoption of *Bible* as a divine revelation and some of its members including Padamji virtually converted to Christianity soon afterwards leaving the *Sabha* which, as a result, shortly died.²⁰⁹ And the term '*Satyashodhak*' was eventually used by Phule in 1873 when he founded his own society *Satyashodhak Samaj* to fight for the cause of *Shudra-Atishudras* and women.

206 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.

207 P.G. Patil (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule - Selections*, Vol. II, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1991, p. 75.

208 Shailander Yallappa Mugali & S. Amadaihal Priyadarshini, "Mahatma Jotirao Phule's Views on Upliftment of Women as Reflected in Sarvajanic Satyadharma", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 69 (2008), pp. 693-694.

209 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

The sixth and seventh decades of the nineteenth century also witness the emergence of a small but well organised group of the revivalists in Maharashtra. They felt an excessive pride in India's heritage and civilization. This development was extremely congenial to the mental make-up of the educated middle-class Brahmans etc. who were longing for a return to past privileges and power. They believed that the Vedic traditional Hindu religion which was based on *Shrutis*, *Smrutis*, and *Puranas* was a God-given religion. This was one of the lines of thought which was followed by the orthodox reformers like Morabhat Dandekar and Krishan Shastri Sathe etc.²¹⁰ The ideology of the revivalists stemmed from a firm faith in, and assertion of, the superiority of Hindu culture. This faith was aided by the Aryan theory of race popularized by the European orientalist and adopted enthusiastically by the high caste elites. The acceptance of this theory even by liberals like M.G. Ranade was surprising.

As told, the *Paramahansa Mandali* was transformed into *Prarthana Samaj* by the end of sixth decade of the nineteenth century. Its first meeting was held in the house of Atmaram Pandurang on 30 December 1866. The formation of the *Samaj* reflected an ideological shift from the uncompromising religious and social radicalism of the *Mandali*. It took inspiration from Keshavchandra Sen of *Brahmo Samaj*. Justice Ranade also joined hands with the *Prarthana Samaj* in 1870. In addition to Ranade, R.G. Bhandarkar, Vaman Abaji Modak, Mama Paramanand, Vasudeo Babaji Navarange, N.G. Chandavarkar and a number of other social workers also came to be associated with the activities of the *Samaj*. Though in the beginning, the *Prarthana Samaj* was founded with the purpose of achieving the 'divine truth' – that means it was essentially a universal religious reform association – it actually followed the *Bhakti* ideology of Hinduism, hoping that the social reform would naturally follow the progress in its religious ideas.²¹¹ In 1872, the *Samaj* launched various social reform activities viz. establishing schools, founding orphanages, and opening widow homes etc. in Maharashtra.

Notably, Ranade defined social reform as “a change from con-

210 Y.D. Phadke, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-59.

211 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

straint to freedom, from credulity to faith, from status to contract, from authority to reason, from unorganized to organized life, from bigotry to toleration, from blind fatalism to a sense of human dignity.”²¹² With this worldview, he encouraged the establishment of different associations such as the ‘Society for the Propagation of Widow Remarriage’, the *Sarvajanik Sabha*, the Indian Social Conference and a school for women, etc. The *Prarthana Samaj* demanded that the age of consent for intercourse within or without marriage be increased, widow remarriage be allowed, and female education be encouraged. This programme accounted to a reform in the family system and better treatment of women rather than total reformation as such. Abolition of caste inequalities could not even be put on the agenda of its social reform.²¹³ Ranade disappointed his reformer friends by refusing to marry a widow for his second marriage and married at the age of 32, a girl of 11 years in 1873.²¹⁴ Accordingly, the *Prarthana Samaj* became a target of criticism by contemporary radicals like Phule on account of its compromising attitude towards social reforms.

In the meantime, a new all-India form of nationalism was taking place in the country. Religious revivalists outside Maharashtra gave a tone to this. Swami Dayananda (1847-1883), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and the eccentric English theosophist Annie Besant (1863-1902) gave a new emphasis to the glories of ancient Indian religious culture and the society of the Aryan/Vedic period. With them, religious revivalism took a different form from the religious conservatism of the Maharashtrian *Brahmanical* elite. Dayananda’s *Arya Samaj* found its base particularly in the merchant and peasant communities of Punjab and some other parts of north India where it had become involved earlier in social reforms and education but later its *Shuddhi* movement was mainly directed towards reconversion of Muslims. According to Dayananda “the *Veda* is the book of the sci-

212 Ramabai Ranade (comp.), *op. cit.*, pp. 536-537.

213 Nalini Pandit, “Caste and Class in Maharashtra”, *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 429.

214 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 100.

ence of truth.”²¹⁵ Nevertheless, Dayananda’s ‘Arya’ was cultural and not racial and the Vedic values were interpreted by him in equalitarian terms as he attempted to bring the lower castes and outcastes into the ‘Arya’ religious community.²¹⁶ Similarly, Vivekananda also called for liberation of women and Untouchables even though he bitingly attacked the ‘westernized’ social reformers.²¹⁷ Such ideas entered Maharashtra quite late; by the second decade of twentieth century, and their most notable exponents being V.D. Savarkar (1893-1966), a *Chitpawan* Brahman who combined a fervent anti-Muslim Hindu nationalism arguing for ‘racial unity’ of all Hindus, with an emphasis on abolishing the harmful social customs including untouchability. He was one of the prominent leaders of *Hindu Mahasabha* which also emphasised *Sangathan* and *Shuddhi*. Though he was respected by non-Brahmans and *Dalit* leaders for his social reform activities, the *Mahasabha* was considered to be only a cloak of Maharashtrian orthodox Brahmans who had opposed even the Hindu revivalist reformers for too long.²¹⁸

Some political associations were also formed in Maharashtra during the late nineteenth century. The first one was *Saravajanik Sabha* which was founded on 2 April 1870 in Poona. The Indian National Congress was founded on 28 December 1885 at Bombay in the presence of the leaders of the region like Ranade, Bhandarkar, Agarkar, W.S. Apte, K.T. Telang, N.G. Chandavarkar etc. But in its earlier days, the lower caste *Mahars*, *Mangs* etc. were not even allowed by the high caste members of the Congress to sit alongwith them in the Congress sessions. Hence, the party was totally dominated by the high caste elites.²¹⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century, the issue of social reform was pushed into the background by the educated elite who turned

215 Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

216 Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey), 1964, pp. 296-303.

217 *Ibid.*, pp. 331-335.

218 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 104-105.

219 Jotirao Phule, *Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

their attention to obtaining more political concessions from the British. In fact, the commitment of most of the Brahman reformers and liberals towards their own social reform movement was superficial. They dominated the political platform – the Indian National Congress – in the earlier period. But as the orthodox pressure began to mount, the liberals came under the control of B.G. Tilak (1856-1920), the leader of the upper caste and bourgeois nationalist movement. The Tilak-led extreme nationalists, who were called ‘*Jahaals*’ (extremists), emerged to oppose the ‘*Mavaals*’, the moderate upper caste liberals led by Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and others.²²⁰ In late nineteenth century, Tilak succeeded in convincing his followers that social progress was not a practical proposition under alien rulers and that ‘political reform’ should get precedence over social reform. He even thought that there was nothing basically wrong with the Indian social systems. It did help India to survive the onslaught of alien political rulers and cultures, whereas the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome crumbled under the blows of foreign invasions. The main cause of India’s defeat was not its social and cultural backwardness, but the lack of technical knowledge and the political disunity which helped the British play one local ruler against another.²²¹

Here, to be fair to nationalist leaders like Tilak, it should be recognised that in the context of British colonialism, it was obvious that most of these leaders were primarily interested in dealing with the colonial power, in the first instance. In fact, Tilak was determined to oust the British power from India and had, in his own way, launched a determined struggle against the Raj and chosen to organise Hindu nationalism around Ganapati festival by magnifying a household

220 M.H. Jadhav, “Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra: Review of Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra by J. R. Shinde”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 17, 26 April, 1986, p. 740.

221 Nalini Pandit, “Caste and Class in Maharashtra”, *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 429.

worship into a public prayer and used that as a vehicle for anti-British and, unfortunately, anti-social reformer propaganda.²²²

Hence, there is no surprise why Phule had vehemently criticised the revivalists and nationalists and also their associations and termed them as “bodies of Brahmins.”²²³ In fact, being an organic intellectual and religious radical to the core, he was not satisfied with any of the social, religious or political organisations of his times because he found almost all of them were influenced more or less by the *Brahmanicall* elitist ideas which would never be acceptable to him. It was for this reason that he decided to go his own way, i.e., the way of radical socio-religious reform.

222 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 103.

223 Nalini Pandit, “Caste and Class in Maharashtra”, *EPW*, Feb. 1989, pp. 223-25.

The Making of Mahatma Phule

(1)

Brief Life History

Jotirao Phule was born in Poona, Maharashtra at a time, as described in Chapter-I, when the *Peshwa* power was destroyed by the British East India Company (1818) and the colonial regime started in western India. He hailed from the *Mali* caste of horticulturists who had been accorded *Shudra* status. The *Malis* made their living in Maharashtra cultivating fruits, flowers, vegetables, often using a network of kin connections to transport their produce to market and sell. The caste often acted as a medium of contact between the rural areas and growing urban centres of western India.¹

Phule's great grandfather was a *Chaugula*, an inferior village officer who assisted the village Patil and other Government officials in collecting land revenue. His original family name/surname was 'Gorhe'. Actually, a dispute occurred between the *Chaugula* and the village *Kulkarni*. In those days, *Kulkarni* happened to be an influential village officer.² Using his power and position, the *Kulkarni* harassed the *Chaugula* so much that one night he murdered the

1 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002 (First published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p. 105.

2 Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, London, 1971 (First published in 1968), pp. 240-41.

Kulkarni.³ He then shifted his family to Khanwadi, a village in the Purandar Taluka of Poona district. There a son, Shetiba was born to him. Shetiba was a simpleton as well as a spendthrift man. He lost everything that he had. To find another source of livelihood, he shifted his family to Poona.⁴

Shetiba had three sons Ranoji, Krishna and Govindrao. Owing to their poverty, his three sons had to work in one moneylender's house at Poona. They had to look after his shop. Soon their master engaged them in the trade of flowers. They worked hard in their new trade. Soon they attracted the attention of the then *Peshwa* Bajirao-II. Various flower articles were supplied by them to the *Peshwa*, who was so pleased with them that he conferred upon the florist brothers thirty-five acres of land near Poona. They now came to be known as or 'Phule' (florists) instead of Gorhe.⁵

The downfall of *Peshwa* Bajirao-II affected the fate of thousands of families including the Phule brothers in Poona who were dependent upon him. Govindrao, the younger one, worked hard on the family farm in a neighbouring village. He also set-up a flower and green grocery shop in Poona to sell the products of his own farm. Slowly, he improved his position. He got married to a *Mali* girl named Chimnabai, daughter of Zagada Patil of Kavadi village near Poona. Chimnabai gave birth to two sons – Rajaram and Jotirao. The younger one, Jotirao or Joti, was born in 1827. According the Gail Omvedt, Joti was, indeed, named after the popular folk deity in Maharashtra 'Jotiba' who was a symbol of peasantry, and not after the 'lamp' (*Jyoti*) as generally believed.⁶ It also comes to view that among the peasant communities, the term Joti also meant a 'plough

3 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Publication, Bombay, 1964, Third Edition, 2013, p. 1.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

5 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *Contribution of Phule and Shahu to Caste and Religion*, Ph. D. Thesis, submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 1987, p. 71.

6 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2008 (hereafter: *Seeking Begumpura*), p. 159.

bearer' or 'cultivator' which appears to be an exact meaning of his name.

The exact date of his birth is, however, unknown. Jotirao used to say that he was born on the day when a fire took place at Shaniwarwada, the fort-palace of *Peshwas*. But Shanivarwada was burnt thrice in history. A scholar had claimed, on the basis of some scant evidence, that Jotirao was born on 26 January 1827.⁷ However, this claim is not acceptable. Nowadays, 11 April 1827 is generally accepted among historians, as the exact birth date of Phule. It is also doubtful that the name of his mother was Chimanabai and some of his contemporaries like Mahadev Vaghole and Gyanoba Krishnaji Sasane have claimed that Chimanabai was the name of Joti's step-mother. In any case, when Joti was about nine to ten months old, his mother died.⁸ His grief-stricken father was worried about his little ward. He decided to remain single and looked towards his cousin Sagunabai, who was a child widow, to take care of his boy. According to Pamela Sardar, Sagunabai, a compassionate and intelligent woman, came into Joti's life like a godsend and played a crucial role in the shaping of his life. She did bring him up as her own son. She worked as a domestic helper in the house of a Christian missionary, Mr. John, who had some orphans in his house. She got his permission to take her nephew in.⁹

When Joti was five years old, his father was happy to see that his motherless son was quite healthy and strong at that tender age. Brought up in a missionary house, Joti developed a fascination for the English language. Here he also learned the values of discipline and spirit of service to the needy and the suffering. The missionary zeal and passion for humanitarian work made a powerful impact on the impressionable Joti.¹⁰ The love and compassion of his step

7 *Maharashtra Times*, Bombay, 27 July 1977, quoted in Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

8 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *National Biography: Jotirao Phule*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 3-4.

9 Pamela Sardar, "The Woman Who Mentored Phules", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *A Forgotten Liberator: The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule*, Mountain Peak, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 32-34.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

mother for orphaned and distraught children also sensitized him to the weak and the defenceless. Sagunabai found that her ward was a promising child, all he needed was good schooling. Although persons of his community had no education, as it was not a thing to be aspired for by the people belonging to the lower castes, yet, Govindrao, after persuasion by Sagunabai, gave his thought to this question and decided to put him to school in 1834 when his ward was seven.¹¹

In those days, schools were not run in large numbers in the Bombay presidency by the Government but most of them were either run by individuals or missionaries. 1834-1838, Joti attended a small Marathi school just outside Poona. The young boy made a remarkable progress in his studies. He learned there to read and write, accounting, grammar, *Dharamshastra*, *Vedanta* etc.¹² There is a story repeated by almost all of his biographers and also endorsed by one of his contemporary reformers, Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823-1893), popularly known as Lokahitwadi. While he was studying in his primary school, his education was suddenly stopped in 1838 on the advice of a Brahman clerk working in his father's produce shop who persuaded Govindrao to withdraw the boy and put him to work tending the crops. The motive given in this story is the caste bias of the orthodox Brahman against the education of lower castes, coupled with his fear that the young boy might become skilled enough in writing and accounts to be able to dispense off with his services as a clerk.¹³ Deshmukh comments on the alleged event in his famous writing *Shatapatre (One Hundred Letters)*:

If a Brahman was to come across a clerk of the Maratha caste or a caste other than his own, he would get livid. The Brahman would say that *Kaliyug* (last stage of historical development) was here and learning (which had been held sacred and a profession of Brahmins) was being polluted by being imparted to the lower castes. Thus we see that the Brahmins held the belief that other castes should not be imparted edu-

11 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

12 Archana Malik-Goure, *Jotirao Phule: A Modern Indian Philosopher*, Suryodaya Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 2.

13 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

cation. Hence, the Brahman clerk's advice to Govindaro to withdraw Joti from school.¹⁴

Thus, regrettably, the orthodox Brahmans could not stomach the changes which were taking place under the colonial rule, in terms of spread of education among the lower castes.¹⁵ After discontinuation of his education, Jotirao started helping his father by working on the family farm. Here again Sagunabai intervened. She met her two neighbours Gaffer Baig Munshi, a learned Muslim, and Mr. Legit, a British administrator who, on her request, persuaded Govindrao to send his ward back to school.¹⁶ Hence, her foresight and timely intervention made it possible to get Joti re-admitted to the school. She was also fortunate to be able to admit him to a good missionary school, courtesy Mr. John. As a result, in 1841 Jotirao, when he was 14, got admission into Scottish Mission School at Poona run by the missionaries of Free Church of Scotland. Joti always remained indebted to his dear *Aau Maa* (aunt-mother) and later on, while dedicating his first book *Nirmikacha Shodh (The Search for the Creator)*, acknowledged her contribution in making of his life in the following words:

The endowment of Truth, Sagunabai, you brought me up humane and humble. You taught me how to love other's children. With great appreciation, I learned it from you. I dedicate this book to you.¹⁷

The Scottish Mission School accepted pupils from a very wide range of cultivating, artisan, and even Depressed Classes, apart from the customary literate upper castes.¹⁸ In this school, Jotirao met Sadashiv Ballal Govande, a Brahman boy who remained his close friend throughout life. Vithal Valvekar and Sakharam Yeshwant

14 Quoted in T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

15 J.R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: Nineteenth Century Maharashtra*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 53.

16 Pamela Sardar, "The Woman Who Mentored Phules", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 35.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

18 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-110.

Paranjape, belonging to the Brahman caste, were also among his close friends who joined him later and always stood by him.¹⁹

Since Jotirao was relatively older than many of his classmates studying in the school, he was little bit ashamed of sitting in the classroom. Nevertheless, he had a strong desire for knowledge and made a remarkable progress in his education. Meanwhile, at the age of thirteen, he was married to Savitribai, who was then only eight years old, and, later on, proved herself to be a true revolutionary-partner of Phule.²⁰ She came from the family of Zagade Patil of the Kavadi village near Poona. However, her biographer M.G. Mali claims that the family of Savitribai belonged to the village Naygoan which is located in Satara district.²¹

As pointed out in the previous chapter, it was the East India Company Government and the Christian missionaries who had, for the first time, widened educational opportunities for the common masses in India. Of course, the missionaries, especially of the Free Church of Scotland and the American Mission, set up schools seeing in the lower castes, a fertile ground for their proselytising activities.

19 P.G. Patil (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule - Selections*, Vol. II, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1991, pp. xv-xvii.

20 Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) was not like a typical Indian docile woman, but equally a courageous one who stood by her husband and supported all of his radical initiatives. She has been credited with being the first native lady teacher in India. A capable teacher, a social worker, a leader, a thinker and a writer, Savitribai has been regarded as the “first modern Indian *Vidrohi* (radical) poet”. She was also the first biographer of Jotirao Phule. As a matter of fact, she was the first feminist of south Asia. Apart from setting up, in association with his husband, the first ever school for women, she started a women’s association called *Mahila Seva Mandal* as early as 1852. While her contemporaries were busy in reconstructing the images of the mythological *Pativrata* Hindu woman based on Sati-Savitri module, Savitribai, alongwith her husband, expressed the earlier Indian feminist fervour. See Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3 & Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 9-13 and M.G. Mali, *Krantijoti Savitribai Phule*, Asha Prakashan, Gargoti, 1981, pp. 17-19.

21 M.G. Mali, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

They emphasised in their propaganda how Hinduism had deprived the lower castes of their religious and educational rights. For Jotirao and others who attended the schools run by the missionaries, the new colonial regime naturally appeared as opening up new opportunities for their own advancement and for fighting against the age-old *Brahmanic* subjugation which the people of Maharashtra had suffered during the *Peshwa* rule.²² He remained in Scottish mission school until 1847, and left it having completed his secondary education. From here, his exposures to new intellectual currents took place after coming in contact with some learned teachers in his early formative years.

The third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed the emergence of a new print media, in English and Marathi in India, which was also the creation, in part, of the Christian missionaries. The missionary newspapers attacked the social consequences of the *Brahmanic* Hinduism based on inscriptive values. A powerful strategy adopted by the missionaries to undermine the legitimacy of *Brahmanic* superiority was the large scale publication of the *Vedas* and their circulation among the masses. The idea was to demonstrate that the *Vedas* had little connection with the privileges of the Brahmins.²³ The demand of lower caste radicals for some authoritative Hindu text to be available to all and act as a guidebook for the righteous religious and moral conduct, was the direct result of the missionary propaganda.²⁴ This provoked quite new controversies and conflicts in Hindu society. Missionary teachings of equality and universal brotherhood on the one hand and their criticism of discrimination based on caste in the Hindu society on the other, led newly educated lower caste youth like Jotirao to self-thinking.²⁵

Interestingly, during his school days the young Jotirao had also developed a love for physical exercises and games, as well as for his

22 A.D.I.H. Doctor, "Low Caste Protest Movement in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Maharashtra: A Study of Jotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar," *Indian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1991, p. 200.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

country. The twenty-year-old youth had his friends who are said to have been fired with the ideas of liberating their motherland from the British foreign rule by their readings of the lives of Shivaji and George Washington, and of the work of Thomas Paine, and perhaps, also due to the influence of anti-British Brahmans. Phule has himself said in one of his famous writings, *Slavery*, that he had been first introduced to Paine's work by some anti-British Brahmans in Poona.²⁶ One Lahuji Vastad, a *Mang* (Untouchable) by caste was keeping up *Dandapatta* (gymnasium) at Poona where athletic sports as well as use of arms were taught. It is pointed out that Vasudev Balwant Phadake, a revolutionary leader, later on also took physical training under Lahuji Vastad. Jotiba became an enthusiastic pupil of Lahuji. Here, Dhanajay Keer points out that the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century was a period of conflicts with the newly established colonial masters, for example, the Ramosi rebellion (1826), Koli fishermen's rebellion of 1830 etc., and it may be possible that examples of some of these may have inspired the youthful Phule.²⁷ Nevertheless, Jotirao's loyal pupillage under an Untouchable master also caused development in him, deep sympathy for the Depressed Classes, which remained in him until the end of his life.²⁸

At this juncture, we also come to know about another narrative, repeated by many hagiographers/biographers of Phule, which, according to them, had had an indelible impact on the due course of his life. The exact date of the incident is not available but it is believed that the incident happened sometime in 1848 during the last days of his secondary education. He had been invited by one of his Brahman friends to attend his marriage ceremony. The bridegroom was going in a procession to the bride's home. Jotirao was also walking in the procession. His presence in the marriage procession was, however, not tolerated, in the words of his biographer Keer, by the "blue

26 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction)*, Left Word Books, New Delhi, 2002, p. 88.

27 Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

28 J. R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

blooded orthodox Brahmins”²⁹ who insulted him on account of his lower caste background. Jotirao felt the insult deeply and immediately left the procession and returned home with tears and anguish in his eyes. He narrated the whole incident to his father. But his old father tried to pacify him and asked him never to aspire equality with Brahmins who were, in the veritable ideal of the orthodox religion, like earthly gods. He also told several heartening incidents of past experiences to show how even respectable non-Brahmins were ruthlessly punished under the *Peshwa’s* regime as a result of such acts, and also recounted the punishment that such a social misdemeanour would have incurred to him under that regime.³⁰ Jotirao did not have a sound sleep that night. A jumble of ideas kept running in his mind throughout the night. Suddenly:

A force gathered in Joti’s stout heart. It strove towards its objectives. All his actions, thoughts, emotions, dreams were directed to it.... The goal makes the man. All great changes precede a vigorous intellectual reevaluation and reorganization. This was the inward history of Joti. The taint of social inferiority proved a specific source of several of his later drives. This was a new awakening. With this awakening, the struggle of truth against untruth, of justice against injustice began ... Joti put on a rebel’s robe.³¹

Dhanajay Keer, further portrays the state of “realization of the truth” by Phule, in the following words:

Joti said to himself that he was well-educated; he knew what was good and what was evil. He belonged to the religion to which Brahmins belonged. Then what is it that led them believe that he was inferior to them? Was it religion that made them act like that? He then came to the conclusion that the Brahmins enjoyed power as a priestly class and as the head of the caste system. Thus, he realized that in order to annihilate Brahminism that condemned the non-Brahmins to perpetual subordination and humiliation, heredity as the basis of (Hindu) society must be discarded.³²

29 Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

30 Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

31 Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

32 *Ibid.*

If the above mentioned story of caste discrimination with Jotirao is a fact, it has certainly been bedecked by the biographers of Phule. However, an incident of this kind would not be inconsistent to the time, and also with what we know of Phule's intellectual development during that year. Significantly, the year of 1848 marked a turning point in his life and career as he decided not to accept a job under the colonial Government but to open his first school for Untouchable girls in Poona.

Nevertheless, it was certainly realised by Phule that caste discrimination was the worst enemy of Hindu society and culture, and that true harmony could not be inculcated among Hindus unless they abolished the discriminatory and divisive institutions like *Varna*, caste and untouchability.³³ He also realized that due to the lack of education, the lower classes had become slaves in the *Brahmanical* social order in every walk of life. He, therefore, resolved to raise the banner of revolt against the '*Brahmanic* slavery' through spread of education and knowledge amongst the lower classes. This would suggest a definite shift of emphases, away from hostility to the British, towards a concern with social problems seen as the consequence of socio-religious practices badly in need of reform.³⁴

Soon, Phule started attacking *Brahmanic* Hinduism through his actions, writings and speeches. He attacked the stronghold of the orthodox Brahmins who prevented others from having access to all the avenues of knowledge and power. He denounced them as cheats and hypocrites.³⁵ Resultantly, his orthodox adversaries also made a counter-attack on him and criticised him heavily. Some of them took the chance to make fun of his ignorance of grammar and misinterpretation of the Hindu mythology. Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar (1850-1882), the renowned Marathi scholar and educationist, was one of his prominent critics. Phule, however, never hated

33 Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, rpt. 2013, p. 258.

34 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

35 Y.D. Phadke, *Social Reformers of Maharashtra*, Maharashtra Information Centre, New Delhi, 1975, p. 13.

Chiplunkar, instead he praised him for his educational work with an open mind.³⁶

In fact, the response of Phule to the existing state of affairs in Hinduism was bound to differ from that of the upper caste intellectuals. His ideas, quite naturally, reflected his peculiar perspective of looking from below. To him, the core of Hinduism was not Brahmanism. In fact, Brahmanism was deliberately and carefully designated and developed through centuries chiefly by the orthodox Brahmans themselves, through their monopoly of religion, education and knowledge. Under such state of affairs, Phule, alongwith his friends and followers, turned to reform the traditional Hindu society. At such a time when the orthodoxy was opposed to educating the lower caste people and women, he decided to open a school for girls belonging to the lower castes, in Poona. In the meantime, his friend Sadasivarao Govande took him to Ahmednagar, a prominent centre of educational institutions run by some American Christian missionaries. They visited the mission school of Miss Farrar, who expressed her grief to see that education of women had been sadly neglected in India. She was also of the opinion that each Indian male should firstly take to educating his wife who could then help him in the spread of education among others. The idea stuck to Phule. Later on, he himself spoke about his "state of mind" was on the eve of opening the first girls' school:

The low caste *Mahars, Mangs, Chambhars* etc., composing a great part of my countrymen, are being sunk deep in ignorance and misery. The Lord was pleased to excite in me a desire to better their conditions through the means of education. Female school first of all attracted my notice. As upon mature consideration, they (females) were found to be even more necessary than male ones. In this state of mind, I visited meanwhile at Ahmadnagar, in company with a particular friend, the female school belonging to the American Mission conducted by Miss Farrar and was highly pleased with the manner in which the girls in those schools were educated.³⁷

36 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Addressed to the Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 111.

37 *Dnyanodaya*, 16 December 1853, quoted in Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

When Phule returned to Poona, he, first of all, persuaded his wife Savitribai to get educated. She agreed and studied, along with another woman Fatima Sheikh (who later on also taught in Phule's girls' school) in the formal school of Ahmednagar in 1846-47. Now Phule decided to open the first female school in Poona³⁸ and started his school for girls belonging to the Untouchables namely 'Low Caste Female School' on 15 May 1848 at Bhidewada in Budhwar Peth, Poona with nine students and Savitribai as its headmistress.³⁹ It was the first school opened by any reformer in India for Dalit girls. Phule's other associates belonging to the Brahman caste, Paranjape, Hapte and Govande, gave him financial assistance to run the school.⁴⁰ Govande also sent books from Ahmednagar. The school was opened exclusively for the girls of castes such as *Mahars*, *Mangs*, *Purvarees* and *Chambhars*. This was the time when Poona in particular was the bastion of highly conservative Brahmans, who looked upon the act of founding an institution for imparting education to *Shudras*, *Atishudras* and women as an 'offence' against God, *Shastras*, and Hinduism. They apprehended that the social edifice of the Hinduism would receive a severe jolt if women became educated. Educating women was considered by them as bad as 'playing with fire' as they believed that it would lead them cross the domestic boundaries and make the elders lose their authority. As a result, the orthodoxy started a vicious campaign against Phule, for, not only his act of opening a school for Dalit girls but also allowing his wife to teach there. Keer observes about the reaction of the orthodox Brahmans and other conservative sections of Hindu society to this act of Phule as under:

A school, started by a non-Brahmin, a *Shudra*, and that too for the girls of *Shudras* and *Atishudras* raised alarm amongst the orthodox Brahmans. The Brahmans raised an outcry against this act which was, to them, horrible and sacrilegious. They said that knowledge and learning were seeking shelter in the *Shudra* homes. It was against the will of God, religion and society to teach the *Shudras* who did not have

38 Cynthia Stephen, "The Stuff Legends are Made of", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

39 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

40 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

the right to education according to scriptures. And teaching girls was the worst kind of sacrilege, horrible and outlandish attack on Hindu religion. To send a girl to some school at which a man could be present was something which was entirely unacceptable....⁴¹

Hence, the conservatives could not tolerate Phule's school anymore. Accordingly, they created all types of obstacles in the progress of his school. When Savitribai Phule started going to teach the girls, stones, mud and cow dung were thrown by the conservatives at her when she was on her way to the school. She fearlessly faced this offensive for several times. She even once slapped one of her tormentors on the street. But later, depressed with the constant persecution and nasty opposition, she almost gave up. But Jotirao gave encouragement, care and trust to her.⁴² He also appointed a person to protect her when she was on her way to the school. Now, the conservatives threatened his father with dire consequences if he did not ask his son and daughter-in-law to stop or disassociate himself from their activities. Thus, Jotirao's father was deeply troubled. Yielding to the pressure, he asked his reformer son and daughter-in-law to close their school. Both of them, however, refused to give up their noble endeavour. In the meantime, Govindrao's neighbours/relatives of the *Mali* caste also pressed upon him to stop his son and daughter-in-law from going against the age-old customs. Resultantly, an angry Govindrao told his son and daughter-in-law to go their own way and ordered them to leave his house. In fact, he did it more out of the psychological pressure applied upon him by the conservatives. Accordingly, the young couple had to move out of their parental house. But, this was not enough. The *Mali* caste excommunicated both of them because they "served the Untouchables."⁴³ Hence, the couple paid a heavy price for their noble action for the educational upliftment of the down-trodden. This was not an ordinary happening. A bombshell fell upon them. Their life was suddenly disturbed. Everything fell into disaster and, meanwhile, the school was closed

41 *Ibid.*

42 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

43 Sunil Sardar, "Love Letters unlike Any Other: Savitri's Three Letters to Jotiba", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43.

down temporarily due to lack of sufficient funds. On this event *The Bombay Guardian*, a certain lover of truth, commented: "Goddess of misfortune frowned upon the good intentions."⁴⁴ Phule himself described the incident later on, in the following words:

...Having, however, by my teaching the low castes, become odious to my (own) castemen, my father at last drove me out of his house and left me to shift for myself in the best way I could. So the school was, as a matter of course, closed, and I was compelled to engage in business to gain a livelihood.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, when his financial position improved to some extent, Phule reopened the school in the space provided by his friend Govande. After some time, he found a bigger place to run the school which he took on rent from a Muslim friend. Hence, the school which first began with eight girls on its roll at Budhwar Peth, progressed well and soon the number of pupils rose to forty-eight. Savitribai began teaching in this school again on an honorary basis. A friend, Major Thomas Candy, Principal of Poona College, provided text books for the school. On 3 July 1851, Phule opened another school in Anna Chiplunkar's mansion at Budhwar Peth. Moro Vithal Walvekar and Deorao Thosar assisted the school. Phule himself started teaching for four hours a day without taking any salary.⁴⁶ His wife Savitribai herself took over the charge of school mistress, after having been coached for undertaking the task by a social reformer and member of *Paramahansa Mandali*, Keshav Shivaram Bhavalakar.⁴⁷ She was brought to the new school from the Low Caste Female School as Phule himself was working in it.

A School Managing Committee was also constituted by Phule with Jagannath Sadashiv Govande as its President and Keshav Sakharam Bhavalkar as secretary. Anna Sahashrabudhe, Bapuraoji Mande, Vishnu Shastri Bhide, Krishna Shstri Chilpunkar and Vishnu Shstri Pandit were made its members. The school manage-

44 *The Bombay Guardian*, 24 November 1851.

45 *Ibid.*, 16 December 1853.

46 *Dnyanodaya*, 15 July 1853, quoted in Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

47 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

ment was handed over to this committee.⁴⁸ When the list of members of the committee was submitted to the Government, Jotirao Phule's name was mentioned first among its members, and he was described as a "benevolent person who had devoted his life for the cause of education."⁴⁹ Describing the aims and objectives of the school, the secretary of the committee expressed optimism about the female education in the following words:

A few enlightened individuals who have been educated in Government schools, deeply lamenting the ignorance in which females have been kept for ages in this country, often discussed various plans for improving their conditions and placing them in the position in which God and nature have intended.... Savitribai, the School Mistress, has nobly volunteered to devote herself to improvement of female education without any remuneration. We hope that as the knowledge advances, the people of this country will be awakened to the advantages of female education and they will cordially assist in all such plans as are calculated to improve the condition of those who have hitherto been unaccountably neglected by the tyranny of prejudice....⁵⁰

On a profound note, it should be pointed out here that Savitribai always stood by her husband and she was the only source of support to him in his family. She did so even without caring about the pressure from her own family members and close relatives, whose hearts were spoiled by the conservatives and orthodox Brahmans. She once strongly rebutted the plea of her narrow-minded brother that her husband should submit to the custom and follow the dictates of Brahmans. She narrates the conversation with her brother in a letter to Jotirao, written in October 1856, in these words:

I told him, 'brother, your mind is narrow, and the Brahmans' teaching has made it worse. Animals like cows and goats are not untouchables to you, you lovingly touch them. You catch poisonous snakes on the day of snake festival and feed them milk. But you consider *Mahars* and *Mangs*, who are as human as you and I, untouchable. Can you give me any reason for this? ...My husband is a god-like man. He is

48 T. Laxmanshahtri Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 11,

49 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

beyond comparison in the world, nobody can equal him. He thinks that Untouchables must learn and attain freedom. He confronts the Brahmans and fight with them because he believes that they are human beings like others and they should live as dignified humans.... He is actually doing God's work. And I assist him in that. I enjoy doing this work. I get immeasurable joy by doing such service. Moreover, it also shows the heights and horizons to which a human being can reach out.⁵¹

That day, her brother finally repented what he had said and asked for forgiveness, and her mother proudly said, "We are blessed by your words of wisdom."⁵² Such rare appreciations, perhaps, gave strength to Savitribai who optimistically wrote to her husband, "We shall overcome and success will be ours in future – the future belongs to us."⁵³

On 17 February 1852, Jotirao's school was publicly inspected, following which there was a speech by Bhansaheb Mande who said: "It is a pity that the citizens of our country are not yet convinced of the need of education for women." Justice Brown was also present on this occasion. In his speech, he quoted poet John Milton and said: "Educating women will strengthen the family happiness and utility of the institution of family."⁵⁴ Major Candy, who supervised his schools said in his report: "I am happy to note the intelligence and progress of the girls while I visited the schools run by Mr. Jotirao Phule."⁵⁵ *The Bombay Guardian* published a report with "great pleasure" and drew attention of its readers "to the progress made by Mr. Jotee Phooley, who for some years past, had been indefatigable in his efforts to promote the education of his country."⁵⁶ The report of the event reads as follows:

51 Sunil Sardar, "Love Letters unlike Any Other: Savitri's Three Letters to Jotiba", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43.

52 *Ibid.* p. 43.

53 *Ibid.*

54 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

56 *The Bombay Guardian*, 26 November 1852.

The prejudice against teaching girls to read and write began to give way.... The good conduct and honesty of the peons in conveying the girls to and from school and parental treatment and indulgent attention of the teachers made the girls love the school and literally run to it with alacrity and joy⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Phule started two more schools for the downtrodden at Poona; one on 17 September 1851 at Rasta Peth, and another on 15 March 1852 at Vithal Peth. Shri Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar, Superintendent of Government's Vernacular Schools expressed satisfaction at the progress of Phule's schools.⁵⁸ The curriculum of Phule's schools comprised not just three R's alone, but also of grammar, geography, history, science, map reading etc. Reporting about the progress of one of his schools in its issue of 29 May 1852, *The Poona Observer* wrote:

It will be no doubt very gratifying to the friends of native improvement to learn that a benevolent-minded Hindu of the Malee caste has, at his own expense, founded a school in Vithal Peth in the city of Poona, where *Mahars*, *Mangs* and *Purwarees* are taught the vernacular. This school has a large attendance of children. And from the advantages it affords, we should hope that considerable benefit may result to the community from its establishment.⁵⁹

Notably, in an essay competition, a fourteen-year-old Dalit (Mang) girl from Phule's schools wrote an essay, in which she said:

Brahmans say that our castes should not read the *Vedas*: this leaves us without a scripture. Thus, are we without religion? Oh God, please tell us, what is our religion? God, by Your grace, You sent to us the kind British Government. This has brought relief and welfare. Before the British came, the *Mahars* and *Mangs* were beheaded when they committed an offence (of having education) against the will of people of higher castes. Earlier we were not allowed to move about freely in the bazaar of Sultekadi, (but) now we can.⁶⁰

57 Cynthia Stephen, "The Stuff Legends are Made of", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

58 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

59 *The Poona Observer*, 29 May 1852.

60 A.D.I. H. Doctor, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

Such was the 'enlightenment' being given to the downtrodden girls in the schools run by Mahatma Phule! It is pertinent to note that the Dakshina Price Fund Committee of the city gave him a grant of Rs. 75/- per month to run his schools. But since this grant was inadequate, Phule had to rely mainly upon his own funds and also financial assistance by his friends. Thus, he, with the help of his friends, tried best to run his schools. He was working so hard that he could not even take his meals in time. Since he had left his father's house with his wife, he had to search for another source of livelihood. A man of conviction, Phule soon made alternative arrangements for his livelihood. Soon, he became an important figure in the field of women's education in Poona.⁶¹

The Board of Education recommended to the Bombay Government, in 1852, that some mark of honor be conferred upon Phule for his labours and untiring services to impart education among the women and lower castes. Accordingly, the Government organized a public facilitation of Phule and his wife Savitribai, on 16 November 1882. Both was formally honored by Major Candy and presented with a traditional pair of shawls, a gift traditionally bestowing merit, on behalf of the Bombay Government.⁶² The ceremony was reported in the *Bombay Guardian* dated 26 November 1852. Phule replied thanking the Government for the honor in these words:

What I may have done towards furthering the cause of educating native females is indeed too little and I falls far short even of the demands of duty as one of the sons of (my) beloved land. It is your benevolent and philanthropic desires to create a noble and generous ambition among the youths of this country and to see India raise her now abject hard and occupy a place among the civilized nations of the earth that I owe these honors.⁶³

Here, it is also pointed out that this step of the Government to honor Phule was said to have caused 'displeasure' among the Poona

61 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

62 Cynthia Stephen, "The Stuff Legends are Made of", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

63 *The Bombay Guardian*, 26 November 1852.

conservatives as, they believed, the presentation of shawls should not have been bestowed to a *Shudra*, and a man of his rank should receive the lower reward of money.⁶⁴

Phule also worked for the adult education. In 1855 he opened a night school for the adults in which many laborers got education.⁶⁵ However, his radicalism was not fully shared by others, particularly the Brahman members of his School Managing Committee and soon a rift developed between Phule and the others. In fact, the committee emphasized the general backwardness of the Hindu society as a cause of the sufferings of the lower castes, rather than attributing these to any particular social class. Writing on the issue in 1870s, Phule attributed his rift with the other members, to their divergent ideas of education of the lower castes. To him, the more serious reason for this rift was that while other members thought that the lower castes pupils should be given education only in the basic skills of three R's, he insisted that they should be given a 'thorough education'⁶⁶, so that they could get from it, the power to knowing what was good and what was bad for them.

In fact, Phule had waged his ideological fight against *Brahmanic* domination which was not very much liked by the others. He blamed the Brahmans for trying to impress the British that the lower castes had neither any liking nor real aptitude for education. He suggested that every village school should be compelled to have a certain proportion of children from the *Mali-Kunbi* and *Mahar-Mang* castes and if it did not happen then the school should be closed. Having quarreled with his colleagues in 1853, Phule had to leave his own school. He worked as a part time teacher in 1854 in the Scottish Mission's School, where he once studied as a student, for female boarders in the mission's compound. His entry in the school was appreciated by its Principal Murray Mitchell in the following words:

We have been happy in securing the aid ... (of) one of the most zealous and accomplished teachers in Poona – Jotee Govindrao Phoolay – a

64 *Ibid.*

65 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-34.

66 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 119-28.

native philanthropist, whose preserving efforts on behalf of the education of females and the lower castes have called forth the warmest commendation of the Board of Education and of Government itself.⁶⁷

Though Phule left the Scottish Mission's School after some time, when his financial conditions improved, he maintained his contact with the school and used the Mission facilities in the course of his own educational work. Rosalind O'Hanlon has reproduced an incident, recorded by Murray Mitchell, in his school, in which Phule had had a 'hand'. Actually, the latter sent a *Mahar* boy to the school with the request to receive him in the lowest English class. Mitchell described how the high caste students in the school had objected *en masse* to his presence, threatening to desert the school if he were not removed. The principal was, however, saved from the dilemma by the *Mahar* boy himself, who never came back to the school after such an insult.⁶⁸

After founding educational institutions, Jotirao turned his attention to social reform by striking at the *Brahmanical* social order. By 1858, he took leave of the management of his schools⁶⁹ and started his attempts to mobilize the *Shudra-Atihudras*. He sought to project a new collective identity for all the lower castes in Maharashtra and made efforts to bring together the *Mali-Kunbis* and the *Mang-Mahars*, who were made oppressed in the name of religion by the 'Brahmanists', into a single fold. In *Trutiya Ratna (The Third Eye)*, a play written by Phule in 1855, such a portrayal of the 'Brahmanists' comes out most forcefully.⁷⁰ What the play brings out clearly is the fact that the orthodox Brahmans were actually exploiting the ignorant low caste people belonging to their own Hindu community⁷¹

67 *Orient Christian Spectator*, February 1855, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

68 Murray Mitchell, *In Western India: Recollection of My Early Missionary Life*, Edinburg, 1899, pp. 314-315, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

69 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

70 *Purogami Satyashodhak* (Marathi), Vol. V, No. 2, April-June, 1979, pp. 29-35.

71 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125.

and, according to Phule, had established themselves in a position of "earthly Gods" (*Bhudevas*) and reduced the *Shudras* (*Kunbis-Malis*) and *Atishudras* (*Mang-Mahars*) to the conditions of religious slaves.⁷²

It soon became clear that Phule stood for an all-round reform in Hindu society. In 1864 in the Gokhale's garden of Poona, marriage of a *Shenavi* widow, Narmada and a *Shenavi* widower, Raghunath Janardan took place, which was actually encouraged by Phule.⁷³ Child marriage was a very common practice in those days which led to increase in the number of young widows, particularly among the Brahmans and other high castes. Sometimes they were sexually abused by their close relatives which sometimes caused them unwanted pregnancy. In view of the seriousness of the problem, Phule opened a Home in his own house in 1863. Characteristically, he advertised his service by putting up pamphlets in the Brahman localities of the city wherein he appealed to the pregnant widows in the following words: "O you widow! Come and deliver here safely and secretly. Take away your child, or else leave it here at your sweet will. The Home will look after your child."⁷⁴ Many widows came there to deliver their unwanted babies and thus several children were saved. One Brahman widow Kashibai, who was rescued by Phule and Savitribai when she was going to commit suicide because she was pregnant, gave birth to a male baby in this orphanage in 1874, who was adopted by the couple as their son because they were childless.⁷⁵ In this noble social service, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, R.G. Bhandarkar, Rao Bahadur Madan Shrikrishan, Navarange Narayan, M. Paramanand, and Tukaram Taty Padaval etc. also helped him. But since Phule did not want help from his friends formally, he, this time, did not form any committee to run his above institution.⁷⁶ The previous experience of School Managing Committee, perhaps, set him off to that direction.

72 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 30.

73 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.* p. 90.

74 *Ibid.*

75 Cynthia Stephen, "The Stuff Legends are Made of", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

76 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

In 1865, Phule published the second edition of *Jatibhed Viveksar*, a book authored by his friend Tukaram Tatyapa Padaval. The book advocated annihilation of caste. In 1868, his father died. He performed his last rites differently – by feeding the orphans and differently-abled persons. On his father's first death anniversary, he distributed books among the needy students and also served food to the poor.⁷⁷ In 1868, he threw his domestic well open to all the needy, especially Untouchables. In 1869, he composed a ballad on Shivaji. He was the first poet and leader of modern Maharashtra to sing the glory of Shivaji. He also drew attention of the people towards the condition of Shivaji's grave in Raigad.⁷⁸ In 1869-70, he wrote a series of poems in which he narrated the economic exploitation of the ignorant and superstitious *Shudras* by the priests. He also delivered speeches on social issues and problems of peasants and the down-trodden in different parts of Maharashtra.⁷⁹

In 1873, Phule published his famous book *Gulamagiri (Slavery)*. In this book, he strongly condemned the "slave system" imposed by the "Brahman law" upon the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* in India, though the similar systems had long ago been prohibited by the British, the French and Americans in their respective countries.⁸⁰ He included in it, a manifesto discarding caste for the first time in modern India and declaring that he was willing to dine with all regardless of their caste, creed or country of origin. Surprisingly, several newspapers of Maharashtra refused to give publicity to this manifesto on account of its contents. His book was heavily criticized by the conservatives for its "venomous propaganda" against Brahmins.⁸¹ But he went ahead without caring about them.

On 24 September 1873, Phule along with his associates and followers founded *Satyashodhak Samaj* which literally means 'a society of the researchers of truth', at Poona. It was entirely a social reform asso-

77 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

78 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-170.

79 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.* pp. 91-92,

80 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

81 Y.D. Phadke, *Mahatma Phule: Samagra Vangmya* (Marathi), Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Anni Sanskriti Mandali, Bombay, 1985, p. 150.

ciation. The *Samaj* aimed at complete abandonment of Brahmanism and the culture and tradition supporting this ideology, and gave a call to the people to follow a true/righteous and moral religion based on truth.⁸² A well-known Marathi writer, Krishnarao Arjun Keluskar has opined that the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj* was a result of the deep influence of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* on Phule's mind.⁸³ Phule became the founding President and Treasurer of the *Samaj*. Its membership was open to all men and women regardless of their caste, creed or country of origin. It is noted that apart from lower as well as high caste Hindus, the Jews were also admitted as members in the *Samaj*.⁸⁴

Phule performed some marriages without the Brahman priests, in accordance with the principles laid down by the *Satyashodhak Samaj*. Monetary aid was given to the needy/poor students. The *Samaj* started boarding and night schools for poor students, particularly belonging to the lower castes. It also organized essay and elocution competitions in order to denounce caste system, idol worship and other social evils. The activities of the *Samaj* were confined not just to the areas of Poona and Maharashtra alone, but it also covered the parts of Gujarat and Telangana.⁸⁵

Since Phule's actions and ideas not only challenged the superiority of Brahmans and other high castes but also struck at the very root of *Brahmanic* Hinduism, some reactionaries were disturbed by this. According to T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, the reactionaries sent some assassins to get rid of him. The assassins included two men, one was Rode Ramoshi and another was Dhondiram Namdeo Kumbhar, a potter. But Phule's magnanimity impressed the assassins and they become his followers for entire life. One of them, Dhondiram Kumbhar, studied well and later on became one of the followers and pillars of the *Satyashodhak Samaj*.⁸⁶

Phule's sympathies were also with other social reformers and

82 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

83 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

84 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

85 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-250.

86 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

activists and he helped them in times of difficulty. For instance, he once helped the founder of the *Arya Samaj* Swami Dayananda Sarasvati. When Dayananda visited Poona on an invitation from M.G. Ranade in 1875, a procession was planned to honor him. This procession was, however, threatened by his reactionary opponents. But, Phule came to the rescue and his men, mostly *Mahars* and *Mangs*, had joined the procession in large numbers to give protection to Swami Dayananda.⁸⁷

Phule never exploited his status as a renowned social reformer for his livelihood. For earning his bread, he worked as a contractor for the Government projects. In 1876, he started Poona Commercial and Contracting Company with the help of two partners namely Krishna Rao Bhalekar and Ramchandra Hari Shinde. His agricultural activities also drew him into widening market circuits of rural-urban inter-linkages. Govind Ganpat Kale, a younger contemporary of his, recalls, that in the 1870s Jotirao owned 60 acres of land at Manjri, a place located on the outskirts of Poona. Besides this farm,

...The main income earning activities of Jotirao were contracts of construction work, a shop wending Mushi and an agency to sell vegetables.... The tunnel at Katraj on Poona-Satara road was completed shortly before my birth. Jotirao had taken sub-contract for this scheme. Further, he had taken sub-contract of supplying stones and cement for the construction of a dam on Mula-Mutha and a bridge at Yarwada.⁸⁸

Admirably, however, Phule was paying back to society through his noble services in the social and educational spheres. In 1876-77 various parts of Maharashtra had to face a sever famine. Phule opened an orphanage at Dhankawadi camp where two thousand children were fed.⁸⁹

87 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

88 Govind Ganpat Kale, *Mahatma Phuleyancha Aprakashit Athavani*, Raghuvanshi Prakashan, Pune, n.d., p. 12, quoted in Mahesh Gavaskar, "Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule's Critique of Brahman Power" in S.M. Michael (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2007 (first published by Vistaar Publication in 1999), p. 92.

89 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

In view of his works for the community, Phule was appointed as member of the Poona Municipality. He worked as member of the municipality for about seven years, from 1876 to 1882. He utilized his position in the municipality only for the welfare of poor and downtrodden people. He opposed the Government for spending money over decoration of the city before a visit of the Governor General Lord Lytton. He also opposed the policy of giving licenses for opening new liquor shops in the city and in protest wrote a letter to Mr. Plunket, Chairman of the Managing Committee of Poona Municipality in 1880. His stand was supported by *Dnyanprakash*, the local newspaper of Poona. As a result, the municipality had to roll back its liquor policy.⁹⁰

In 1879, activities of mobilization of the textile workers in Bombay presidency were started due to the joint efforts of Jotirao Phule and his friend Narayan Meghaji Lokhande.⁹¹ Inspired by Phule, Lokhande edited *Din Bandhu*, the first newspaper in India chiefly devoted to the workers' cause. Both of them addressed several workers' meetings at Bombay.⁹² Accordingly, both were appointed as members of the Government Labour Inquiry Committee. The committee submitted a report to the Government which recommended fixing of different working hours for male, female, and child labours. With its recommendations, the workers also achieved the right to enjoying certain holidays. The Committee also stopped the practice of night shift for female workers.⁹³ In 1882, Phule gave his evidence before the Hunter Commission for Education in which he demanded the right to compulsory education.⁹⁴

Phule also worked for the exploited peasantry. He took a leading part in organizing a movement of the small farmers against the

90 *Dnyanprakash*, 23 October 1877, quoted in Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-64.

91 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

92 Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-59.

93 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

94 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, 19 October 1882, in William Hunter, *Report of the Indian Education Commission*, Vol. II, Superintendent of Government Printing, India, Calcutta, 1883, pp. 140-145; also see P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 119-128.

money lenders' exploitation and the Government's heavy burden of taxes on the farmers in Junnur region during 1883 to 1886.⁹⁵ During 1883 to 1889, he also made a valuable contribution to the Marathi literature and authored his famous books like *Shetakaryacha Asud*, *Satsar* and *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*. His book *Shetakaryacha Asud* was actually a compilation of his speeches delivered in the public meetings of peasants during the Junnur movement. He sent a copy of his book to the then Viceroy of India Lord Duffrin in order to effect the policy of the British Government for cultivators.⁹⁶

In July 1887, Phule made his Will. Since he had no child, and he and his wife had adopted their son Yashwantrao, he declared him as his heir. Yashwantrao was now appointed to look after his entire estate. According to the Will, if he did not prosecute his studies after his matriculation examination to obtain some degree or turn out to be vagabond, he would, in that case, be cut off with only a small part of his property.⁹⁷ The boy later became a doctor.⁹⁸

On 8 March 1888 Hari Raoji Chiplunkar and Jotirao Phule arranged a function in honor of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. Phule purposefully dressed like a peasant and attended the function where he also gave a speech. He told the chief guest that the people who had gathered there did not represent India. He said that if the Duke of Connaught was really interested in knowing the 'real' conditions of the Indian subjects of Her Majesty the Queen of England, he ought to visit some nearby villages as well as the urban slums where the Untouchables lived. He further requested him to convey his message to the Queen Victoria that Indian masses were in utter poverty and they were in utter need of education and help.⁹⁹

On 11 May 1888, a public meeting was organized at Koliwada in Bombay where the people honored Jotirao Phule with dedicating the title 'Mahatma' (great soul) to him. Of course, he was the first

95 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

96 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

97 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

98 Cynthia Stephen, "The Stuff Legends are Made of", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 22.

99 P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. xx-xxi.

and real Mahatma of modern India on whom, the people conferred the title. In July 1888, Phule faced attack of paralysis which affected the right side of his body. He was not able to write with his right hand. Nevertheless, his strong will power made it possible for him to write with the left hand and he completed his last masterpiece, the book namely *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak (A Book of Universal Religion of Truth)* which was posthumously published in 1891.¹⁰⁰ On 29 November 1890 Jotirao Phule, who had emerged as a unique social reformer, a philosopher of *Debrahmanized* Hinduism and a great lover of the downtrodden, passed away.¹⁰¹ His revolutionary wife Savitribai Phule lit his funeral pyre which was one of the very rare instances in the history of India, where the wife performed the last rite for her husband.¹⁰²

(2)

Influences and Inspirations

As mentioned earlier, most of the hagiographers/biographers of Mahatma Phule suggest that the incident of insult that occurred with him in the marriage of his Brahman, friend brought about a tremendous change in his life and thoughts. But the fact is that much before this event; Jotirao had developed a taste for reading, particularly about the great men and radical thinkers of history. He had read the life histories of Tukaram, Shivaji Bhosale, George Washington, Martin Luther and Napoleon Bonaparte during his school days. His interest deepened during the due course of his life. Later, he also studied the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, Buddhist Literature, *Smritis* and *Bhakti* literature. His other readings include Johan Wilson's *India: Three Thousand Years Ago or the Social State of Aryans on the Banks of the Indus in the Times of Vedas* (1858), William H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Peru* (1847), Henry Mead's *A Sepoy's Revolt*, R.S. Godaboly's *Maharashtra Deshacha Itihas* (Marathi), Captain James

100 G.P. Deshapande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225.

101 P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. xxi.

102 Cynthia Stephen, "The Stuff Legends are Made of", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

Cook's *Voyages round the World* (1815), Friedrich Max Muller's *Rig-Veda Samhita: A Collection of Ancient Hindu Hymens constituting the Second Ashtaka or Book of the Rig-Veda* (1854), etc.¹⁰³

Notably, the critics of Phule alternatively express that he was solely under the influence of Christian missionaries. He was identified as 'reverend Phule' and his even his Mali caste fellows viewed him for a long time as a 'traitor'.¹⁰⁴ We have come to know that the motherless little Joti was brought up in the home of a missionary, Mr. John, by his aunt-mother Shagunabai, where he had first developed the spirit of service to the needy and the suffering. We also know that he had studied in the Scottish Mission School, Poona until 1847 and left it, having completed his secondary education.¹⁰⁵ Thus, making of his mind and his exposures to new intellectual currents especially took place after coming in contact with the Christian missionaries in his early formative years. Further, he was particularly influenced by John Wilson, a missionary of Free Church of Scotland, and his understanding of Brahmanism was close to that of the missionaries like Wilson. No doubt, the missionaries attempted to undermine the public credibility of the orthodox Hinduism, its beliefs and social practices. Even some of the high caste contemporaries, e.g., Baba Padamji, Pandita Ramabai etc., were also attracted by them and eventually embraced Christianity.¹⁰⁶ It is true that Phule himself was an admirer of the Christianity and was influenced by the missionaries like John, Mitchell, Wilson etc. who gave opportunities to the people belonging to the lower castes like him to receive education which was hitherto denied to them in the Hinduism, he, however, never accepted their whole worldview. For instance, he strongly refuted their idea of the mediatorship between God and man. Equally, he was against any notion of revelation. By rejecting the ideas like 'revealed truth' or 'divine sanction', he had moved away from Christianity (and also Islam).¹⁰⁷ In fact, he did not believe that

103 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

104 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 207.

105 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

106 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

107 Mahesh Gavaskar, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

conversion to Christianity etc. could be a right way for the amelioration of lower classes.

Actually, Phule's favourite western thinker was Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a religious radical of America, whose famous treatises like *Rights of Man* (1791) and *The Age of Reason* (1794) had marvellous impact on his mind. "The whole world is my country; my religion is to do good" – was the life motto of Paine. His book *Rights of Man* was called 'Bible of the poor'. He believed that the Nature/Creator has made all men and women equal, and, therefore, they all are entitled to equal natural rights. He had especially drawn attention of the western civil society towards the inhuman practice of slavery imposed upon the black people in America.¹⁰⁸ Keeping in view of these facts, some serious historians of the subject (e.g., Rosalind O'Hanlon) suggest that Phule could become a religious radical because he was intellectually inspired by Paine who was a great critic of Christian fundamentalism. In this context, Krishnarao Arjun Keluskar, a colleague and friend of Phule during 1880s, recorded his impression of Phule's early approach towards religion. Rosalind O'Hanlon reproduces it:

Many educated people at that time thought that the Christian religion was better than their own religion, and some people even became Christian themselves. But Jotiba and his friends did not become Christians. The reason for this was that they had obtained one or two books from a very great revealer of truth from America. This man was Thomas Paine.... He (Paine) said God is one, and in understanding his existence the *Bible* is worthless, and there is never any need for an intermediary in order to worship Him. So Jotiba and his friends saw that the Christian religion was (also) without justification.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, Moro Vithhal Valavekar, Phule's another close friend and colleague, has left an important account of his own and his friend's religious attitude while they were in school. He recalls that he had found most striking in the teachings of missionary teachers, the urge to reform Hindu society and to do good to his countrymen.

108 P.C. Roy & J. Kishore, *The Great Warriors of Human Rights Movement from India*, Wisdom Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 51-53.

109 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

Nevertheless, the Christian beliefs had been unacceptable to them as an absolute system of values.¹¹⁰ As such, Phule and his friend were equally critical of the fundamentalist nature of Christianity as they were to that of Hinduism, and were attracted towards the religious radicals like Thomas Paine who condemned the Christian orthodoxy in an altogether hard-hitting tone.¹¹¹

According to Ramesh B. Jadhav, a Phule scholar, there are remarkable similarities between the lives and ideas of Thomas Paine and Jotirao Phule, for instance:

1. Paine was born as son of a Quaker-stay-maker in 1737 at Thetford in the country of Norfolk, while Jotirao was born in 1827 as son of a *Mali* (gardener) at Poona.
2. Both of them were the great lovers of liberty and truth. Paine used to say that 'where is not liberty, there is mine'; and Phule has extensively written about truth in his literature. 'Truth alone triumphs' - that was his great belief.
3. Paine suggested rational ideas about religion, marriage and divorce. He pleaded... justice for women. Above all, he assailed Negro slavery with such mastery and fervour that five weeks after appearance of his article, the first American Anti-Slavery Society was founded at Philadelphia. Jotirao also suggested rational ideas about marriage, abolition of caste system, female education; reformation and standard of living of Indian farmer. To serve all these purposes, he founded his Society for the Seekers of Truth in September 1873.
4. Poor though Paine was, he poured the whole of the profit which he received from the sale of his (first) little book, into the colonial war-chest. Paine's most valuable weapon was still his pen, writing at night, after endless marches, under the light of camp fires at the time of general depression. Though Jotirao ... earned a lot of money by doing some kind of business such as public contractor, mould maker,

110 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

111 *Ibid.*

gardener etc.; whatever he gained in these various activities, he poured it in the public work.

5. 'Man has no property in man' – this was a great desire of Paine; and whatever he had done in his life time, that was only for that desire. Jotirao also fought throughout his entire life to remove all types of slavery from the lives of so called lower classes.¹¹²

Some of the above mentioned similarities between the two great religious radicals may be a coincident, but not all of them. In fact, Phule was greatly inspired by Paine and followed his mentor in true spirit. He was particularly attracted to the Paine's emphasis on oneness of God and equality among all human beings. Paine denied the necessity of the 'middle man' between man and God, Phule also wrote critically about the class of hereditary priests in the Hindu society and denied their necessity as middle men between man and God in the Hindu religion. Phule was also impressed with the idea of liberation which was advocated by Paine for the Blacks from American slave-system, and he himself struggled throughout life for the liberation of *Shudra-Atihudras* from the clutches of caste-slavery and *Brahmanical* exploitation.¹¹³

The major philosophical outlook of Phule found expression in his treatise *Sarvjanik Satyadharma Pustak (A Book of Universal Religion of Truth)*, which was published after his death, i.e., in 1891. The book underlines the concept of righteous conduct and true faith and also the cardinal principles on which the new moral society has to be founded.¹¹⁴ Thus, the ideas which were at the very core of Thomas Paine's philosophy appear to have inspired the basic propositions of Phule's philosophy.

Hence, Phule was an admirer of Paine as well as also of some other western thinkers. For instance, Reverend Theodore Parker (1810-

112 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-79.

113 R. Umaphathi, *A Historical Study of the Life and Achievements of Jothirao Phule*, Ph.D. Dissertation, submitted to Periyar University, Salem, 2007, p. 57.

114 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 225-236.

1860), an American Transcendentalist, abolitionist and reformer and author of the treatises like *A Discourse of Matters pertaining to Religion* (1842) and *Ten Sermons of Religion* (1853), also influenced him.¹¹⁵ He was also inspired by Martin Luther, George Washington, Lafayette and Abraham Lincoln. No doubt, the western thinkers/leaders and the events of western history like renaissance and reformation, Protestantism, scientific and technological revolutions, American and French revolutions and abolition of slavery and the emerging liberal democracies of the west, etc. had affected his mind to a great extent. It, however, equally strongly appears that Phule, by and large, developed his thoughts on the ideological and cultural bedrock of the indigenous *Shramanic* and radical *Bhakti* traditions. In fact, he was influenced, to a great extent, by different Indian/Hindu traditions of equality, reason and religious radicalism. It is significant to note here that so called 'great tradition' of Hinduism (i.e., *Brahman Dharma*) had always been accompanied by the individuals or groups who had challenged it. Prominent among those groups were the *Shramanic* cults (belonging to Buddhism and Jainism) in ancient India and the devotional *Bhakti* cults in medieval India. As a matter of fact, India through the ages had witnessed a string of counter-cultural movements that professed and propagated a world-view that was radically opposed to the 'Vedic purity' and *Brahmanic* celebration of the caste culture. Despite time and spatial difference, a host of socio-cultural leaders – from Buddha to Kabir – gave a strikingly similar messages, that caste is divisive, oppressive, inhuman, and hence, unacceptable.¹¹⁶ Significantly, Phule was inspired by the egalitarian philosophy of Gautama Buddha whom he hailed as the "saviour of masses" and accused the orthodox Brahmans of "nursing

115 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance" (Report on a Seminar organised by Centre for Social Studies, Surat on 9-10 January 1991), in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 21, May 25, 1991, p. 1325.

116 Victor Paul, "The Relentless Truthseeker", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 81.

a grudge against Buddha” for their defeat at his hands.¹¹⁷ Similarly, among *Bhakti* saints, he was greatly inspired by Kabir and Tukaram.

It is pertinent to note here that the most important saint-poets belonging to the *Bhakti* cult in north India were Nanak, Raidas and Kabir. All three were bitter opponents of Brahmanism and hierarchies of caste. They saw the *Bhakti Marg* (path of devotion) as a supplement to orthodox religion that might be more accessible than the rigorous paths to God through *Gnyana* (knowledge) and *Karmakanda* (ritualism). This was also the character of the Marathi poets like Namdev, Jnaneshwar and, more importantly, Tukaram, as we already have come to know in Chapter I. All of these *Bhakti* saints rejected the idea of attaining merit and salvation by reading the *Vedas* and other holy books, fulfilling caste obligations, giving gifts to the priests etc. To them, the love for God was more important than all of these things. A ‘true Brahman’ was one who loved God with a pure heart, and such a man might be anyone, even of an Untouchable caste.¹¹⁸ Phule as well as his associates also felt a deep bond with these *Bhakti* saints, especially Kabir who presented a radical critique of Brahmanism in his poems, *Bipramati* – a part of Kabir’s *Bijagranth*. In fact, Kabir’s anger was directed primarily against caste, priest class and ritualism and what he most often denounced the social hierarchies, the arrogance of Brahmans and untouchability:

Four ages teaching *Gayatri*, I ask you who won liberty?
 You wash your body if you touch another,
 Tell me who could be lower than you?
 Proud of your merit, puffed up with your rights,
 No good comes out of such pride.
 How could he whose name is pride destroyer endure the same?
 Drop the limits of caste and clan... seek unembodied place.¹¹⁹

As a matter of fact, Kabir’s *Bipramati* was a great source of inspiration for Phule. He regarded him as one of his ideological mentors.¹²⁰ He was also said to be particularly fond of Tukaram’s famous

117 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

118 Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225.

119 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 99.

120 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

dictum '*satya-asatyashi mein kele gwahi*' – means, "I made my own mind the witness of truth and untruth; therefore, I can know truth and untruth through the voice of my conscience." This phrase of Tukaram, to use the words of Gail Omvedt echoes the great theme of entire non-*Brahmanic* tradition in India, from Buddhist '*atta deepa bhava*' (be your own light) to Kabir's '*Veda kitab kahaa kin jhuthaa, jhuthaa jo na vichare*' (which is false *Koran* or *Veda*; false is he who does not think), to Phule's 'truth-seeking'.¹²¹ The obvious implication of the phrase was a quite yet firm rejection of the authority of the *Brahmanical* literature and institutions. Omvedt even claims it was Tukaram who, in one of his songs, referred to a supreme deity called 'Baliya', evidently Bali Raja, a theme which later was used by Phule in his non-*Brahmanic* utopia called '*Baliraj*' or kingdom of Bali.¹²² In fact, Phule, later on, saw his own movement as a continuation of those of Buddha, Kabir and Tukaram.¹²³

In addition to the *Shramanic* and *Bhakti* traditions, there were also available to Phule and his contemporary reformers the ideas of a very diverse mixture of critics of the orthodox religion, particularly, those reflected in a fiercely anti-*Brahmanic* tract called *Vajrasuchi* or *Vajrasuchik-Upnishad*, most frequently ascribed to Ashva Ghosh, perhaps a Buddhist monk. According to some historians, there was great influence of this work on the Marathi saint-poets like Bahinabai, a disciple of Tukaram and many others.¹²⁴ The *Vajrasuchi* was also used by Tukaram Tatya Padaval, a well-known friend and colleague of Jotirao Phule from Bombay, for his book entitled *Jatibheda Viveksar*. Phule published the second edition of this book in 1865.¹²⁵ The birth-based '*Brahmanhood*' was the main target of the criticism in *Vajrasuchi*. It begins by asking what '*Brahmanhood*' consists of: it could lie neither in birth nor in reading of the *Vedas* (for, Ravana was deeply versed in the *Veda*). Then it turns to attack the doctrine of *Varna*, arguing that if all of the four *Varnas* have processed from

121 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, pp. 115-116.

122 *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

123 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

124 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225.

125 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

the body of the god Brahma, then they must all be alike. 'All human beings belong to one caste. Superiority of a human being does not depend on his birth' – this was the great message of *Vajrasuchi*.¹²⁶ It is also pertinent to note here that like Phule and Padaval, Dadoba Pandurang and V.D. Savarkar were also inspired by *Vajrasuchi*.

In fact, having taken inspiration from numerous radical thinkers and scholars both from India and abroad, Phule examined Hindu religion and its basic principles, and also the current state of Hindu society through his own critical outlook. The deeper he went, the more he realized that the whole of Hinduism was in utter need of reform.

(3)

Writings and Insights

In order to present his thoughts and ideas before his followers and people, Jotirao Phule authored many writings. Most of them were written in Marathi, the language of common man in Maharashtra. In fact, being a true spokesman and champion of the down-trodden *Shudra-Atishudras*, Phule wanted to make them at par with the high caste Hindus. For that purpose, he wrote extensively in order to explain his positions vis-à-vis various issues and problems the then Hindu/society was facing, from the 'perspective' of the lower castes/classes. As a result, his writings came before the world, which help us understand, in depth, his mind, thoughts and insights. His writings include plays, poems and polemical works – foremost of which are a ballad on Shivaji, and four books: *Gulamagiri*, which mainly focuses on Brahmanism and caste discrimination; *Shetakaryaca Asud*, describing the exploitation of peasants; *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*, an intellectual endeavour to outline a new theist and egalitarian religion; and *Asprashyache Kaifiyat*, an account of the miserable conditions of Untouchables narrated from their 'own' standpoint.

Phule also wrote several scathing articles that were published in some contemporary periodicals like *Din Bandhu*, *Satyadipika*, *Vividhadnyan Vistar*, *Sudharak Patrika* etc. Most of his prose writings

126 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

are authored in dialogue form. It was an effective form of writing for explaining the complex issues/things in an interesting and simple way to the common man. He also wrote many *Abhangas* and *Pavadas*. The *Abhanga* was actually a popular poetic form used by the *Bhakti* poets. Phule's system of argumentation and his poetry were chiefly inspired by the seventeenth century *Bhakti* poet Tukaram. He wrote *Abhangas* in an influential style and created a new word for it, the *Akhandas*. He wrote *Pavadas* – an alliterative poetry that recounts the achievements of a warrior or the talents of a scholar or the excellences of a great person – in his own style. He also composed *Mangalashuktas* to be sung at the weddings conducted by *Satyashodhak Samaj*.¹²⁷

Most of Phule's writings have been reprinted in the collection of his works edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, published by Maharashtra State Society for Literature and Culture, Bombay in 1969.¹²⁸ Some of his writings have been reprinted in the edited work by Y.D. Phadke, published by Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Anni Sanskriti Mandali, Bombay in 1985.¹²⁹ Some of the selections from his works were translated in English and published by Mahatma Jotirao Phule Death-Centenary Central Committee, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay under the editorship of P.G. Patil in two volumes in 1991.¹³⁰ His major writing were further translated in English and published by Mahatma Phule Source Material Publication Committee, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay under the editorship of Asha Mundlay in three volumes in 2002.¹³¹ Some of his selected works were again got translated, edited and published inde-

127 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

128 See D. Keer & S.G. Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule* (Marathi), Maharashtra State Society for Literature and Culture, Bombay, 1969.

129 See Y.D. Phadke (ed.), *Mahatma Phule: Samagra Vangmya* (Marathi), Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Anni Sanskriti Mandali, Bombay, 1985.

130 See P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vols. I & II, 1991.

131 See Asha Mundlay (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Vols. I, II & III, Mumbai, 2002, Mahatma Phule Source Material Publication Committee, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2002.

pendently by G.P. Deshpande, the renowned scholar of the subject, in 2002.¹³² Some of Phule's major were later translated and published independently in Hindi¹³³ and also some other Indian languages by different scholars/publishers.

Since Phule was primarily a social activist, his writings came out from time to time without any planning or systematic order, just to explain his thoughts and ideological positions vis-a-vis various social, religious, cultural, educational, political and economic issues. On this account, his writings appear to be unsystematic, sporadic, pictorial and hard-hitting basically designed to shock people into an awareness of the situation. On this account, his contemporary critics attacked him heavily and, as stated earlier, even took chance of making fun of his ignorance of grammar and language. Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar was one of his prominent critics. Jotirao's Marathi was a "horrible thing" to him. In a sarcastic vein, he wrote that "Jotirao should leave alone subjects like religions, history, philology and theology and turn his attention to the grammar of Marathi."¹³⁴ Chiplunkar also boasted of the "superior power, leadership and valour of Brahmins", but his caste-pride did not allow him to go deep into the grievances, miseries, ignorance, poverty and exploitation of the lower castes. He might have had mastery of language, as Dhananjay Keer rightly observes, but had little or no insight, whereas Phule possessed no great power of language, but had great vision and insight.¹³⁵

In 1879 Phule's work *Gulamagiri* was reviewed in the literary journal *Vividhadnyan Vistar* where the reviewer, too, fell heavily on him:

These days, some ... Jotiba, apparently an amateur ballad-singer, has been laying his offering of ballads before us. But it seems that his skill does not lie only in composing ballads; he gives the impression that he is similarly skilled in ancient history, in religious and moral philosophy

132 See G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, 2002.

133 L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *Mahatma Jotirao Phule Rachnavali* (Hindi tr.), Vols. I & II, Radhakrishnan Prakashan, New Delhi, 1994, revised ed. 1996.

134 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

135 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

and in general knowledge.... It would demand great effort and intelligence to describe the virtues of his work....¹³⁶

The reviewer then went on to describe critically the contents of *Gulamagiri* and also gave some examples of Phule's ballads. Finally, he commented that if it were really true that Brahmans were responsible for deaths of thousands of the lower castes, what would be their fate in India if men like Phule ever came to power and decided to take revenge for these episodes of ancient Indian history? He also advised him to consult the Royal Asiatic Society to see what they thought of his ideas!¹³⁷ Of course, the answer of the reviewer's satiric criticism was that Phule never intended his works as purely literary or antiquarian contributions to the higher research. Rather, he came out with his writings in order to suggest, especially to his lower caste readers, the new explanations and a new model, from their own perspective, of perceiving the apparently unequal distribution of power, knowledge and resources among different social groups in Hindu society.¹³⁸

In fact, Phule, who was thinking with the lower castes and was engaged in their everyday struggles, lacked the luxury of time and freedom to write literary or fat scholarly texts. As he noted in the introduction to *Sarvajantik Satyadharma Pustak*, he wanted to write a more thorough book, but felt it was more important for the book to be useful to the daily life of the people.¹³⁹ Hence, he chose to author small writings, pamphlets and booklets. He thoughtfully chose this model as a social necessity. This model also avoided the deification of ideas that were associated with fat texts.¹⁴⁰

136 *Vividhadnyan Vistar* (Marathi), July 1869, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

137 *Ibid.*

138 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

139 Gail Omvedt, "Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 September 1971 (hereafter: "Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution" *EPW*, 11 Sept. 1971) p. 121.

140 Gopal Guru, "Liberating Jotirao Phule: Review of G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* (with Annotations and

Phule mainly used the nineteenth century colloquial language in his writings. There was much in his Marathi that came from the spoken rather than the literary language. His use of Marathi was real Marathi which was not like the *Sanskritized* Marathi of the educated elite, but the one which was drawn from the masses. He had explained in the introduction of his ballad *Chhatrapati Shivaji Raja Bhosale Yancha Pavada (A Ballad of the Chhatrapati Raja Shivaji Bhosale)* that he had been careful to write in a language that would appeal to the *Malis, Kunbis* etc.:

I have altogether avoided using great long Sanskrit words. Wherever I have been able, I have used short words just enough to convey my meaning. I have worked very hard to put it in an easy language that the *Malis* and *Kunbis* will understand, and to write something in a way that they will like.¹⁴¹

Of course, his works include not only the touching descriptions of poverty and predicament of the people, beside poetry and propaganda, but also discussions on the causes and remedies of their problems. One of the objectives of his writings (as well as his movement) was to critique the foundations of *Brahmanic* Hinduism, its social structure and its socio-economic and politico-cultural systems. Without doing so no real and long-running social reforms were possible. His writings are not systematic, but they contain a basic logic and vision and reflect the concerns and dilemmas of Indian masses of his times.¹⁴²

Phule's major writings are as under:

1. ***Trutiya Ratna (The Third Eye)***: It is a play written by Jotirao Phule. He authored the manuscript for this play in 1855, but it was not published in his life time. The manuscript was found in the of P.S. Patil available in Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.¹⁴³

Introduction)", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 30, 2003, p. 3704.

141 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Chatrapati Raja Shivaji Bhosale*, p. 6, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

142 Gail Omvedt, "Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution" *EPW*, 11 Sept. 1971, p. 121.

143 *Purogami Satyashodhak* (Marathi), Vol. V, No. 2, April-June, 1979, pp. 29-35.

The principle characters of the play are a poor cultivator, his wife, a Christian missionary and Phule himself (who makes intervention in the play as a commentator). The plot is that an orthodox Brahman priest visits the pregnant wife of the cultivator and cautions her against an 'unfortunate' conjunction of the zodiac which can destroy her fetus. The only way to ward off the danger is to propitiate the god Maruti and feed a large number of Brahman priests. The cultivator and his wife incur a heavy debt in order to give feast to the priests. As the missionary explains the benevolent nature of God who could never have willed the inhuman caste system and how He cannot be found in idols, the cultivator come to understand how he has been befooled, cheated and robbed in the name of religion and god Maruti. The play ends on a happy note of the cultivator and his wife realizing their mistake and resolving to get them educated at Phule's night school. The play brings out the fact that the orthodoxy, acting as the guardians of Hindu religion, has actually been exploiting the ignorant lower caste people. The play shows how the orthodoxy has conspired to the use the doctrines of *Karma* and *Dharma*, and the institutions of *Varna* and *Jati* not only to exploit and plunder the lower castes but also to keep them backward. As commentator, Phule urges *Malis-Kunbis* and *Mangs-Mahars* to cease fearing the orthodox Brahmans, for, now God has sent the British in India to revoke the disabilities which the orthodoxy had imposed upon them for centuries.¹⁴⁴

2. *Chhatrapati Shivaji Raja Bhosale Yancha Pavada* (*A Ballad of the Chhatrapati Raja Shivaji Bhosale*): This ballad was first published in June 1869 at Bombay.¹⁴⁵

In this ballad, Phule portrays the great Maratha King Shivaji as the symbol for reconstructing a new identity and for installing a sense of pride among the various lower castes of Maharashtra. The ballad also presents the '*Shudra-Atishudras*' as the forgotten descendants of the inhabiting warrior race (*Kshetriyas/Ksatriyas*) of ancient

144 Jotirao Phule, *Trutiya Ratna* in *Purogamy Satya Shodhak* (Marathi), Vol. V, No. 2, April-June 1979, pp. 29-35; also see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-132.

145 D. Keer & S.G. Malshe (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

India. Phule draws a parallel between Shivaji and the mythical king of ancient India, Bali, and sketches both of them as the saviors of the lower castes against 'external oppressors'. He attributes Shivaji's successes to the skill of his armed forces consisting of the lower castes/classes rather than to his Brahman ministers.¹⁴⁶

Interestingly, Phule inserted an imaginary episode in the play as part of his strategy to use Shivaji as a symbol for uniting the lower castes against the *Brahmaical* domination. Shivaji's mother, Jijabai, takes young Shivaji into the garden and narrates to him the story of his ancestors of 'pre-Aryan' India. She explains how the country's weakness before the Muslims was due to the persecution of martial races by the *Arya-Bhats*. She also narrates how our forefathers lived happily until they were destroyed by the Aryans, which caused weakening of the country and paved the way for its eventual conquest by the Muslims. The ballad tells us that Shivaji's anger against the Muslims rises when he realizes that this is the 'second time', his country is being made to suffer this way.¹⁴⁷

3. *Brahmanache Kasab: (Priestcraft Exposed)*: This work was published in 1869 at Bombay by Phule himself. He requested the Education Department to buy the copies of this book, but they were not keen on recommending such a book for general reading, let alone for the schools.¹⁴⁸

Here, Phule narrates how the Brahman priests and mendicants plunder the poor, ignorant, simple and hardworking *Kunbi* at the occasion of birth, marriage, his daughter's reaching puberty, anniversary, building house and even death.¹⁴⁹ The picture that emerges is of a simple and hardworking peasant who earns by the sweat of his brow, however, the priest loots him at every stage of his life.

146 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Chatrapati Raja Shivaji Bhosale*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 76-80.

147 *Ibid.*

148 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

149 Jotirao Phule, *Brahmanche Kasab (Priestcraft Exposed)* in D. Keer and S.G. Masche (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60; also see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-219.

4. Vidyakhatil Brahman Pantoji: (*Brahman Teachers in the Education Department*): This is also a ballad first published in the journals *Satyadipika* and *Vividhadnyan Vistar* (both Marathi) in June and July of 1869 respectively. The commentary accompanying the ballad in the *Vividhadnyan Vistar* suggests that the ballad was only one of a larger collection written by Phule. No original copies have been recovered so far.¹⁵⁰

In this short ballad, Phule tells us how the orthodox Brahman teacher would give education with affection only to the high caste students, whereas in the case of lower caste ones, he would strike them with his stick/feet, twist their ears sharply and, in general, treat them such as to make them drop out their education. Phule also accuses the British Government of taking no interest in the education of lower castes.¹⁵¹

5. Gulamagiri (Slavery): This treatise was first published in 1873. The aim of this writing was to attack on the *Brahmanic* 'slavery' and caste discrimination prevalent in Hindu society in various farms. Phule has dedicated this book to the "good people" of United States, "as a token of admiration for their sublime disinterested and self-sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro slavery."¹⁵² He strongly condemns the 'slave system' imposed by the 'Brahman law' (law of Manu) upon the lower castes in India, though similar systems had long ago been prohibited by the British, the French and Americans in their respective countries.¹⁵³ He expresses his earnest desire that his countrymen may take their noble example as their guide in the emancipation of their '*Shudra* brethren' from the trammels of the *Brahmanic* thralldom. 'All slaves must unite; they have nothing to

150 *Vividhadnyan Vistar* (Marathi), Bombay, July 1869 & *Christian Journal of Satyadipika* (Marathi), Bombay, June 1869, pp. 83-87.

151 Jotirao Phule, *Vidyakhatil Brahman Pantoji* in *Christian Journal of Satyadipika*, Bombay, June 1869, pp. 83-87.

152 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol.-I, p. xxiii; also see Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

153 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

lose but their chains' – one could thus summarize the message of this book.¹⁵⁴

In the book, Phule attempts to explain the history of *Brahmanic* dominance in India starting from their settlement in the plains of Indus River till date. According to him, the *Arya-Bhats* originally came India from Iran (that is why; they were called 'Aryans') He devotes the first nine chapters of his treatise to reconstructing and reinterpreting the ten incarnations of Vishnu in historical terms. In the subsequent seven chapters of the book, Phule has described as to how the slavery imposed by orthodoxy continued right from the time of Manu till the establishment of British rule in India which caused various deteriorations in Hindu religion and society and made the life of lower castes and women miserable.¹⁵⁵

6. Memorial Address to the Education Commission: As stated earlier, Phule, in 1882, submitted a long representation to the Hunter Commission on Education in India. This was not published independently during his lifetime.

In his evidence, Phule has exposed the cause of educational backwardness among Indian masses, particularly lower castes/classes, and also given his suggestions for educational reforms. At the outset, he expresses his dissatisfaction with the educational policy of the British Government because they have weighed heavily in favour of the upper caste elite at the cost of the masses in the name of 'downward filtration' (trickle-down) theory. Factors like neglect of primary education, lack of trained teachers and training facilities, defective scholarship system and shortage of non-Brahman teachers are pointed out as major drawbacks of the British educational policy.¹⁵⁶

In his representation, Phule has also given many useful suggestions, particularly for the improvement of school education in rural areas and towns, including making primary education compulsory, reforming the methods of selection of teachers and adding to the

154 Archana Malik-Goure, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

155 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol.-I, p. xxiii; also see Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 22-46.

156 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 119-128.

curricula elementary knowledge of agriculture and useful arts and crafts etc. This throws light on the insights Phule had with respect to the problem. He expresses that education should not be looked upon as instrument of creating clerks and loyal servicemen only, but it should be seen in the wider perspective to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the people of India.¹⁵⁷

7. *Shetakaryacha Asud* (The Cultivator's Whipcord): As mentioned earlier, Phule wrote a series of speeches between 1882 and 1883 that were delivered in Junnar peasant movement. He then collected all these into a single manuscript, consisting of five long chapters, entitled *Shetakaryacha Asud* and sent it to the then Viceroy of India, Lord Duffrin.¹⁵⁸ The work was not published during Phule's lifetime. The first of its two chapters were actually published serially in *Din Bandhu* by 1883 under the editorship of Narayan Meghaji Lokhande. But later on he refused to publish the last three chapters on the ground that they were "severely critical" of the British Government policy towards cultivators.¹⁵⁹

This book gives very close and deep insights of the miserable conditions of the cultivator of Maharashtra and his acute poverty. He supplies all the material needs of society but is highly exploited by both *Brahmanical* and colonial systems. Phule gives in the book, a description of Brahmans and other high caste employees working under the various Departments of the British colonial state and living, in comparison to the cultivators, a very good life. It is pertinent to note that Phule comes out in this book, even prior to Dadabhai Nauraji, with a 'drain theory' vis-à-vis the exploitation of peasantry. The subject matter of *Shetakaryacha Asud* is not restricted to farmers' problems alone. The book also examines the restraints imposed by the *Brahman Dharma* on various castes and women which hampered progress and resulted to their pitiable conditions.¹⁶⁰

157 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

158 The original manuscript of *Shetakaryacha Asud* is available in National Library, Calcutta, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

159 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

160 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp 117-183.

8. *Ishara* (*A Warning*): This work was authored by Phule in 1885 where he, taking a strong exception to the views of M.G. Ranade about 'fairly good conditions' of the peasantry, criticizes his views in strong terms.¹⁶¹ Since his intension in this booklet appears to bring the deplorable state of affairs under the 'Brahman rule' of the *Peshwas* to the notice of the 'poor *Shudras* and *Atishudras*' and also Brahmins, he had titled it *A Warning*.¹⁶²

In this book, Phule has first depicted the sufferings of farmers and the other oppressed sections of Hindu society during the reign of *Peshwa* Bajirao-II. His rule became synonymous with exploitation, torture and state-conspired murders. Except Brahmins, all other sections were treated as slaves. The money collected from the people was not utilized for people's welfare. It was misused for inviting Brahmins to feasts and in giving *Dakshina* and gifts to them. Phule remarks that those who were the witness to the regime of *Peshwas* would never wish it again. They would rather wish the British rule to be perpetuated. During the *Peshwa's* rule, there was no safety to the property and crops of the tillers or even to their lives. But now under the British rule, Phule feels: "Justice has been provided to all. Bridges, roads, canals, dams, schools, hospitals etc. all are within the reach of the ordinary men."¹⁶³ The exploitation of the farmers, nevertheless, continues still under the colonial rule due to the emergence of intermediary classes like money lenders, *Kulkarnis* and Government officials etc.¹⁶⁴

9. *Satsar* (*The Essence of Truth*): This was a journal which Phule tried to publish in 1885. Its two issues were published, both state his theological position. First issue was published from Poona in June 1885 and the second came in October 1885. Phule hoped to make it into a regular series, but its publication was discontinued.¹⁶⁵

Pandita Ramabai's conversion has been mentioned many times in discussion in the first part of the *Satsar*. Phule opines that since

161 Jotirao Phule, *A Warning*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 48.

162 *Ibid.*, pp. 48-50.

163 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

164 *Ibid.*, pp. 55-60.

165 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 203 & 215.

orthodox Brahmans insulted Ramabai, they had no right to denigrate her. When questioned as to how the non-Brahman majority people came under the authority of Brahmans, he replies it was much the same as Hindus came under the authority of the Muslims and the British. To a question, Phule remarks that orthodox Brahmans in the name of Hindu religion have pushed the non-Brahmans to the status of their cultural watchdogs. In their scriptures, they give many definitions of the word religion, but without giving a clear meaning of the 'true' religion, they have made their texts ambiguous and obscure.¹⁶⁶

In the second issue of *Satsar*, Phule mainly discusses the problem of women. He argues that since all the religion texts were written by males, women were not given their due rights in them. The women would not, if given the opportunity, have done the same thing to the men. He agrees that the British Government is good for women who are being provided at least some scope in the field of education and, as a result, they could now improve their lot.¹⁶⁷

10. *Asprashyache Kaifiyat* (Untouchables' Apologia): This work was completed in 1885, but could not be published during Phule's lifetime. The manuscript was found in the collections P.S. Patil available in Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.¹⁶⁸

This book has been authored like a report which throws lights on the miserable conditions of the Untouchables. Here, Phule has depicted an imaginary encounter between Queen Victoria and *Mahars* and *Mangs*. The Queen being invited to their houses, was requested to see if there are any changes in their conditions which, actually, remain the same for so long – forms the plot in the book. The poor Untouchables tell the Queen how in the past *Peshwa* regime they were treated like animals and were subjected to suffer a lot as a direct result of the "pernicious caste system" prevalent in Hindu society for centuries. During the British rule, though they

166 Jotirao Phule, *Satsar*, Number 1, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp 205-213.

167 Jotirao Phule, *Satsar*, Number 2, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 215-223.

168 Y.D. Phadke (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 693-700.

feel satisfaction that there is safety to their lives, but they still do not enjoy the freedom to walk on certain streets, and on account of their poverty they also are not able to send their children to schools. Phule concludes with an appeal by *Dalits* to the Queen to eradicate their poverty and sanction them equal human rights, and the Queen, in turn, assures them of the same.¹⁶⁹

11. *Satyashodbhak Samajokta Mangalashthakasaba Sarva Puja-vidhi:* (*All the Rites, Ceremonies, and Verses used by the Satyashodbhak Samaj*): This small book was first published from Bombay in 1887.

It appears that Phule was trying to keep intact the outer form of some, if not all, Hindu rituals for the followers of *Satyashodbhak Samaj*. However, he tries to change completely the essence of such rituals. He replaces Sanskrit with Marathi, the language of the people, turning the rituals intelligible and sensible, and filling them with social contents such as one by asking the bride and bridegroom to take oath of loyalty and good conduct to each other as well as to society, particularly the downtrodden.¹⁷⁰

12. *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak* (*A Book of Universal Religion of Truth*): Phule authored this book during the last days of his life in 1889. He had to endure severe physical pain to write this book due to a paralytic attack. He willed himself to write this with his left hand.¹⁷¹ This book was posthumously published in 1891, as he was short of funds to publish it.¹⁷²

Phule authored this book to define the fundamental principles of his society *Satyashodbhak Samaj* as well as his religious and moral philosophy. This treatise is, in essence, a spiritual manifesto for human liberation, a declaration of human rights of the downtrodden and women in India. The inspiration came to him, as pointed out earlier, from a great revealer of truth from America, i.e., Thomas Paine. The

169 Jotirao Phule, *The Untouchables' Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol.-II, pp. 86-93.

170 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

171 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

172 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 148.

book defines the ideal principles for the creation of a universal moral community as well as the social and intellectual attitudes essential for it.¹⁷³

Phule's *Satyadharm* is a profound concept. It includes the liberation of man from the fetters of astrology, fortune, from fears of other world and heaven or hell etc. as also from such conceptions as salvation of soul or revealed truth etc. In this book, Phule has pinpointed thirty-three principles for "votaries or followers of universal religion of truth" wherein he mainly emphasizes that "all women and men are by birth independent and are all equal to enjoy their all due human rights."¹⁷⁴

The following articles, books and collections of Phule were also published in various Marathi periodicals from time to time, some of which are part of the above mentioned writings:

Nirmikacha Shodh

Satya Shodbhaka Samajichi Thsanya Varshika Samaranbachhi Hakigatha

Duskala Vishayaka Vinanthi Patrika

Marathi Granthakara Sabhesa Patra

Mama Paramand Yancha Patra

Akhandhadi Kavya Rachana

Parisheste

Mahatma Phule Yanche Anupalabdha Lekhana

Jotirao Gonvindrao Phule Yanchya Charithracha Kalapata

Nivadaka Sadgharbhasuchika

*Nivadaka Sabdhanachakosh, etc.*¹⁷⁵

The above mentioned list includes the writings that were authored as independent works, although some of them were not published while Phule was alive. It excludes letters and other small pieces of writings published in contemporary newspapers. Some of these letters/writings have been published in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer & S.G. Malshe, Y.D. Phadke, P.G. Patil, Asha Mundlay and G.P. Deshpande.

173 Rosalind O' Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

174 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 33-37.

175 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

As we finally attempt to understand the mind of Jotirao Phule, it emerges that as part of his strategy to fight the *Brahmanical* ideology and domination, he normally made use of the 'human rights' argument. This was, of course, an intellectual impact of Thomas Paine on his mind. He argues that all women and men enjoy certain natural rights which every just society must recognize. When a society does recognize such rights, Phule contends, it could claim to be 'moral' on imperative order. On this account, in his writings, he criticises Brahmanism chiefly for its violation of man's natural/human rights and accuses the orthodox Brahmins of trampling on the rights of all other peoples of their own Hindu community.¹⁷⁶ As such, Phule emerges as a first advocate and champion of human rights in India. But he does not merely stop at demanding equal rights for the lower castes and women; he proceeds further to construct a universal religious ethic, the *Satyadharmā*, in which God is viewed as the *Nirmik* (Creator) of all men/women equally, and whose explicit command is that the benefits of the nature/earth be equally shared by all women and men belonging to all castes, classes and communities.¹⁷⁷ His idea of religion is something akin to that which emerges in earlier Indian/Hindu traditions of religious radicalism.

In fact, it appears that, since Phule hailed from the lower strata of Hindu society, he naturally comes out as, to apply Antonio Gramsci's phrase¹⁷⁸, an organic intellectual. In this way, apart from his experiences and inspirations, his 'social location' largely helped him to develop his perspective – which was a perspective from below or that of the downtrodden sections of Hindu society and was based on a revolutionary, but religious worldview – and from this perspective

176 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 98.

177 Jotirao Phule, *Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol.-I, p. 33.

178 For understanding the Gramscian concept of 'organic intellectual' see: Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebook of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1978; Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1991; Renate Hobul, *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, 1992.

he viewed the problem of Hindu social reform and came out with a dynamically radical framework to that effect as we shall come to know in our subsequent discussion.

When asked by someone what his religion was, Phule replied that since *Brahmanic* religion deceived God and imposed a 'slavery' on *Shudras* and *Atishudras*, it was not a religion at all. Now there is no need for Brahmans to shed 'crocodile tears' for the down-trodden, when they have all options even including conversion to other religions, he said with bitterness and anguish.¹⁷⁹ Though Phule was critical of *Brahmanic* Hinduism, particularly with the creed of orthodoxy which converted Hinduism into a 'wrong' religion, he did not think that conversion was the right or the only solution to all problems of the down-trodden. Actually, he was unhappy with the state of affairs in the Hinduism of his times, which was monopolized by vested interests of the "selfish orthodox Brahmans." It was for this reason that he firstly came forward with a harsh critique of orthodox religion and then presented his own framework of Hindu social reform. The next Chapter discusses in detail how Phule countered, criticized and exposed the *Brahmanic* Hinduism.

179 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

Countering the *Brahmanic* Hinduism

(1)

Critique of Brahmanism and Caste-Society

It has been generally believed that Jotirao Phule considered the institution of caste chiefly accountable for the deteriorating state of affairs in Hindu religion and society. To Phule, however, it was Brahmanism/*Brahman Dharma* (religion of orthodoxy) which was mainly accountable for the creation of the unjust Hindu social order based on *Varna Vyavastha*. For this reason; he started his publication in the area of religion and also ended them with the religion, purpose of which was to critique the *Brahman Dharma* in respect of its social order as well as its religious philosophy. He saw Brahmanism as the ideological and institutional system of monopolizing knowledge, power and privileges. Remarkably, he, in his own way, unfolded the role of knowledge in perpetuation of *Brahmanic*/caste slavery and, in this context, he classified knowledge in three broad domains: historical knowledge, empirical knowledge and moral knowledge. We know about Foucault's power/knowledge paradigm which is based on the critique of enlightenment, humanism, rationalism and modernity. While Foucault counters all knowledge systems as 'regimes of truth' produced by the hegemonic powers of the time¹,

1 As a distinguished Professor in Epistemology, Michael Foucault was looking at the processes that led to organization of knowledge in human, natural and social sciences and the relationship between power and knowledge, and in that quest he evolved many ideas/concepts like power/knowledge paradigm, discipline and punish, discursive formation, subjectivization, body and sexuality etc. He used the term 'power/knowledge' to

Phule's effort, according to Umesh Bagade, was to change the world/society with the weapon of knowledge as his knowledge/power paradigm was grounded in enlightenment values of humanism, scientific temper and modernity.²

According to S.P. Punalekar, Phule perceived the *Brahmanic* system from four dimensions: (i) social hierarchies and dominance, (ii) religious fundamentalism, (iii) subjugated status of women, and (iv) exploitation of the primary producers by the state and *Shetji*, *Bhatji* and *Latji*. Thus, he built a complete theoretical understanding of the caste-society based on the *Brahman Dharma*, its cultural matrix and its oppressive and exploitative character.³ He argued that before trying to overturn the material power of the *Bhatji*, i.e., orthodox Brahmins (and also other upper caste elites like *Shetji* and *Latji*) over the lower castes and over their own women, it was necessary to step out of the ideology of Brahmanism which was hegemonic tool of dominance and exploitation.⁴ He understood it (Brahmanism) essentially as an ideology of *Brahmanic* dominance (*Brahmanache Varschaswa* or *Brahman Varschaswad*) which perpetuated, rationalized and made sacrosanct the dominance of the priestly class and also

signify that power is established through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth'. For a concise understanding of the Foucaultian theory of Power/Knowledge see: Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (edited by Colin Gordon), Pantheon Books, New York, 1980.

2 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge: Phule's Path of Alternative Education", in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No 1-4, S.P.P. University, Pune, January-December 2015 (hereafter: "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42), p. 61.

3 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance" (Report on a Seminar organised by Centre for Social Studies, Surat on 9-10 January 1991), in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 21, May 25, 1991 (hereafter: "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, Vol. 25, No. 21), p. 1325.

4 Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2005, rpt. 2013, pp. 251-52.

their ideology of social hierarchy, particularly through their knowledge strategies. Since it presented itself as divinely ordained, it was necessary to oppose this system in its entirety.⁵ There was nothing sacred or divine about it. It was historical, constructed over time and since it was based on unjust religious and social and moral ideas, it has to be countered and ultimately smashed.⁶

In fact, Phule's thinking was based on the contention that an irreconcilable conflict of interests existed between the *Brahmanical* elite and the *Shudra-Atishudra* masses. Because of this, any effort to achieve equality necessitated an attack on the privileges and position of the elite.⁷ It is pertinent to note here that Phule's methods and forms of critiquing were dialogical. This also sets him against orthodox tradition which, by and large, belonged to the homological mode.⁸ In this regard, it is interesting to note that in his *Akhanda Kavyarachana (Marathan Poetry)*, there are clear reflexes that give an idea of his theory of hermeneutics. In one of his poems, he says that the *Brahmanic* tradition was not creative because it did not have the scope of self-doubt and self-introspection.⁹ Since the *Brahmanical* social order was based on the institutions of *Varna*, caste, untouchability and patriarchy which were founded on the idea of social hierarchy and graded inequality, Phule vehemently attacked this

5 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction)*, Left Word Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 6-7.

6 Ashwini Deshpande, *The Grammar of Caste: Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 30.

7 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society: Non-Brahman Movement in Western India*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976; rpt. Manohar, New Delhi, 2011 (hereafter: *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*), p. 114.

8 Gopal Guru, "Liberating Jotirao Phule: Review of G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction)* (2002)", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 30, 2003 (hereafter: "Liberating Jotirao Phule", *EPW*, August 30, 2003), p. 3703.

9 Jotirao Phule, *Akhandas*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule – Selections* Vol. II, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1991, p. 150.

social order and also all theoretical or mythological grounds of the same propounded in the orthodox tradition.¹⁰

It is pointed out that without denying particularity of experiences of caste, untouchability and gender, Phule clubbed the *Shudras*, *Atishudras* and women under one subjective positioning that they were subjugated by Brahmanism. He brought all subjugated subjectivities like caste, class, gender, race under the universal trope of slavery. Thus, the *Brahman Dharma*, its scheme of social order and its mythology had become the subject of critical historical and sociological/anthropological enquiry for Phule. He traced the history of social antagonism and situated the experience of the *Stree-Shudra-Atishudras* (women and the downtrodden) in its framework. Gopal Guru maintains that “unity of experience can be explained in terms of historicity.”¹¹ Such a method of analysis has, no doubt, significance for the historians. Here, the words of a renounced historian D.D. Kosambi are also remarkable: “The religions themselves do not constitute history, but their rise and change of function is excellently historical.”¹² In Indian history, division of society into Aryans and non-Aryans (*Dasyus* etc.) mentioned in the *Rig-Veda* was the first indication of a stratified society. The Aryan ‘*Vis*’ or tribe was further divided into four groups based on the emergence of different socio-economic pursuits. The primitive castes, called *Varnas*, were identified not by the colour of their skin (as some people believe) but their profession. In the course of time, these *Varnas* specialized in their functions and formed a social hierarchy. The *Purusa Sukta* of the *Rig-Veda* gives a mythical story of the origin of the four *Varnas* – from the mouth (Brahman), arms (*Kshatriya*), thighs (*Vaishya*) and feet (*Shudra*) of lord Brahma.¹³

10 Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002 (First published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p. 80.

11 Gopal Guru, *The Cracked Mirror*, Oxford University Press. New Delhi, 2012, p. 122.

12 D.D. Kosambi, *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, 7th Edition, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1982, p. 16.

13 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Vasant Moon

Though the *Varna* system was different from that of caste, as the *Varnas* refer to broad philosophical divisions of Hindu society, whereas castes refer to specific localized groups based on birth, numbering about four thousand, yet it was the *Varna* system that provided a theoretical base for the emergence of caste system. As B.R. Ambedkar has rightly pointed out, caste was the 'by-product' of *Varna* and untouchability was the 'by-product' of caste.¹⁴ As discussed in Chapter-I, in the caste-ridden Hindu social order, every person acquired his/her rank on the basis of his birth within a specific *Varna* and caste and his/her personal potentials, merits or achievements could not bring about any change in such social position of him/her. Like other parts of the country, the same social order was prevalent in Maharashtra too. Here, the number of castes was about hundred.¹⁵

Philosophically, Indian history has been defined in Hindu/*Brahmanic* myths as a narrative of the past, which exemplifies the fulfilment of four ideals/goals of life: *Dharma* (the doctrine of religiously ordained duty); *Artha* (material prosperity); *Kama* (sexual/worldly pleasures); and *Moksha* (salvation). It is further noted that the traditional and highly conservative theories of *Karma* and *Dharma* and the philosophical underpinning of the social divisions of *Varna* and caste had particularly retained their central position in the religious worldview of *Brahmanic* Hinduism. Further, the caste ideology was strengthened on the basis of the doctrines of *Karma* and *Dharma*. The theory of *Karma* has, of course, its own notion of 'justice', and Max Weber, the stalwart sociologist, regards it in traditional theology as the "most complete theodicy ever produced."¹⁶ This has considerable potential resistance against attempts at social reform, as this theory expounds that one's present caste status is the consequence of the deeds done in previous existence; thus, birth in a

(ed.), Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, d.d., Vol. V, p. 78.

14 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 87-96.

15 *Maharashtra State Gazetteer, Maharashtra: Land and its People*, Gazetteer Department, Govt. of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2009, pp. 169-70.

16 Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, (tr. & ed. By Hans Garth & Don Martin Dale), The Free Press, New York, 1958, rpt. 2007, p. 21.

high caste is a 'reward', while birth in a low caste is 'punishment'. The theory of *Karma* is closely tied with the theory of *Dharma*. Unless an individual believes that his/her present social position, for example, as a tiller of the soil, is part of a logical scheme in which his/her present life is only a small part, the concept of religiously ordained duty (*Dharma*) as the fixed adherence to this role loses its force.¹⁷ As such, the theory of *Dharma* is also to reinforce one's caste-duty. According to the philosophy underlying it, birth of an individual in a lower caste is a result of the past deeds and to make him/her free from that deeds, there is only one way-out, i.e., to serve the high castes/society and follow all rules mentioned in the scriptures, that is called his caste-duty (*Dharma*).¹⁸

No doubt, under the impact of such philosophy, no big socio-economic developments were witnessed in Indian history. Phule, for the first time, studied the 'historical' causes of the backwardness of Hindu society from such perspective. He, however, used the term 'Brahmanism', rather than Hinduism, while presenting his critique of the unjust social order and religious theories. Interestingly, Weber also prefers to use the same term in his analysis because, to him, "it better represents" the nature of ancient religion of Hindus. He writes:

I use the word Brahmanism rather than Hinduism because it better represents the nature of the religion both because of the centrality of the notion of Brahman and the apex position of the Brahmans. Only in recent literature has the Indians themselves begun to designate their religious affiliation as Hinduism. It is the official designation of the English census for the religious complex, also described in Germany as Brahmanism.¹⁹

Phule starts analysing the *Brahmanical* social order, i.e., caste-society, like other historians and Hindu thinkers, with the example of the *Purusa Sukta*, which exists in the tenth *Mandal* of the *Rig Veda*. But he interpreted it as an example of dichotomous conception of Hindu society. It is the institution of *Varna* which gives apex position

17 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

18 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

19 Max Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

to Brahmans in Hindu society with many religious, political and economic privileges. And, such position gives birth to the subordination of the *Shudra-Atishudras*, particularly the untouchables, who became the victims of caste-slavery in Hinduism. Phule notes in his book *Gulamagiri (Slavery)* that the old forms of slavery have come to an end, but the '*Brahmanic slavery*' is still in existence in India. However, the most of the Brahmans refused to acknowledge their past role, and "no one among them had the moral courage" to fight the form of slavery prevalent in India based on caste and supported by their "artificial religion":

Even the educated Brahman, who knows his exact position and how he has come by it, will not condescend to acknowledge the errors of his forefathers and willingly forego the long-cherished false notion of his own superiority. At present, no one has the moral courage to do what only duty demands, and as long as this continues, one sect distrusting and degrading the another sect, the conditions of *Shudras* (will) remain unaltered, and India will never advance in greatness or prosperity.²⁰

Phule was equally aware that the belief of the *Shudra-Atishudras* was also in *Brahmanic* Hinduism and the mythologies fabricated by the priestly order, and he wanted to overthrow it. Therefore, he felt the need to re-interpret it from his 'perspective from below'. According to Bagade, Phule also realized that the strict regime of positivist method subscribing the view 'no document, no history' would not give scope to the writing the history of the *Shudra-Atishudras*. He, therefore, introduced innovations in the method of history. In order to recover historical truth concealed and suppressed under the *Brahmanic* myths and theories, he, in his own way, endorsed the method of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) wherein:

Vico affirmed that researcher should derive new facts from etymology, mythology, traditions and introduced a method of ascertaining facts from mythology and tradition. Walking on Vico's path, Phule wrote history of social struggle in India sufficing it with contentious facts

derived from etymology, myths and traditions. Thus, he carved out a path of materialistic interpretation of history.²¹

Nevertheless, Phule was the first organic intellectual of modern India who ventured to write alternative history and propounded an alternative discourse of oppressed classes. In fact, while giving his critique of 'Brahmanic slavery', he has hinted a theory of hegemony which explicates the links between hegemony, exploitation and knowledge. For Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), hegemony stands for a condition of dominance and persuasion caused by coercion.²² Apart from the role of coercion/violence, Phule points out the role of persuasion in the sustenance of the *Brahmanic* dominance/slavery. He writes in *Gulamagiri* that the orthodoxy had divided the *Shudra-Atishudras* into several castes, punished and rewarded them according to their loyalties and established their control over them. Thus, he explained how the *Brahmanical* knowledge system subjugated and enslaved the *Shudra-Atishudras* by giving them false identities of caste in a hierarchical social order, where all lower castes consciously or unconsciously acquired and accepted their caste subject position; and "now they are enjoying themselves at the cost of *Shudras* and the ignorant *Shudras* have failed to see the trickery of the Brahmins."²³ According to Gramsci, intellectuals of the ruling groups bear the task of perpetuation of hegemony. Particularly, the ecclesiastics, who are typical of traditional intellectuals, continue their existence through various historical traditions and through holding monopoly over religious ideology, philosophy, science and arts of the age, together with schools, education, morality, justice, charity, to protect the interests of the established/feudal order. He further says that the intellectuals of the clergy have always had selective affinities with classical and ancient authors and philosophers and the ideas enshrined in their

21 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 66.

22 Ranjit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, OUP, New Delhi, 1998, p. 23.

23 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

classics/literature.²⁴ Phule observes that Brahmans, by upholding monopoly over priesthood, scriptures and education, had created an elusive world of religious ideology and culture system in order to maintain their dominance over the *Shudra-Atishudras*:

They composed several books such as *Vedas, Smritis, Shastras, Puranas, Sambitas* etc. and out of the tales and ideas enshrined therein they forced on the *Shudras* and established their dominance. They abandoned their traditional war maundering and created a great rigmarole of their religiosity. They did not want the *Shudras* to ever realize how they have been tricked.²⁵

Hence, as G.P. Deshpande claims, Phule tried to provide 'logic of history' in India as Hegel and Marx did in Europe. He was also the first to attempt a transformation of plural categories of history into singular or universal. He therefore, stands in sharp contrast to Weber's statement that all ideas of universal significance came from Europe.²⁶ Further, his formulation is very similar to that of Marx except that he does not use the term 'class'. He calls binary/opposed groups by their *Varna* names: the Brahman and the *Shudra-Atishudra*.²⁷ His was not simply a focus on ideology and culture; he stressed equally the factors of violence and ideology in history and took the downtrodden community at the centre. According to Gail Omvedt, Phule's historical theory can be looked at as a kind of 'incipient historical materialism' in which economic exploitation and cultural dominance are interwoven. In contrast to a class theory, communities become the basis for contradiction/conflict.²⁸ As such, in a brilliant display of insight, he linked the present oppression of the downtrodden with 'past atrocities'. Nevertheless, it cannot be said,

24 Renate Hobul, *Anonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, 1992, pp. 165-166.

25 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 72-73.

26 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, Vol. 25, No. 21, p. 1326.

27 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

28 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of An Indian Identity*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 1995 (hereafter: *Dalit Visions*), p. 20.

as Deshpande²⁹ and Omvedt³⁰ claim, that Phule portrayed Indian history as an endless 'class struggle' between the Brahmans and the *Shudra-Atishudras*. In fact, unlike Karl Marx, he did not declare the class (or caste) struggle to be a perpetual or prolonged one until the occurrence of a peoples' revolution. As a matter of fact, his ultimate aim was not revolution but the restoration of equality, brotherhood and love in Hindu society.³¹

For Phule, caste was a category that belonged to the base as well as superstructure of the Indian society. If one accepts this reading of him, as a scholar of the subject argues, then his characterization would help explain the persistence of caste-based distinctions which seem to have weathered the various manifestations of the caste system over centuries.³² Till now, there is no empirical evidence to show that the influence of caste is really declining. Writing about the laws of caste, Phule remarks:

The main object in these falsehoods was to dupe the minds of the ignorant and to rivet firmly on them the chains of perpetual bondage and slavery which their selfish and cunning (adversaries) had forged. The severity of the laws as affecting the *Shudras*, and the intense hatred with which they were regarded by the Brahmans, can be explained on no other supposition but that there was originally between the two a deadly feud arising, as we have shown, from the advent of the latter into this land.³³

Clearly, it was a theory of the origins of caste and caste based antagonism in Hindu society. It is unfortunate that in the analytical frameworks advanced to study and discuss caste, Phule's writings and ideas do not get the attention they deserve, given how powerful

29 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

30 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, p. 20.

31 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 33-37.

32 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number: Caste and Class in India*, Feb 1989, Vol. XIV, No. 7/8, pp. 425-426.

33 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 30.

and pioneering they are.³⁴ As suggested earlier, Phule believed that violence, conquest, ideology and culture were overriding realities in the historical processes in India: the 'Aryan conquest' was simply the first of a series of invasions and conquests of the subcontinent. It was, to him, worse than others, not for 'racial' reasons, but for the fact that the *'Arya-Bhats'* solidified their power using a hierarchical and in-equalitarian religious ideology. The *'Bhatshahi'*, was a regime that used oftentimes religion and also state power (e.g., in the case of *Peshwas*) to maintain its hegemony and exploitation.³⁵ To Phule, India, and especially Maharashtra, had been ruled by aliens not simply for the centuries of Muslim and British rules, but for thousand years before that! The masses, from peasants through tribals and Untouchables, were the original indigenous people of this country, the 'sons of the soil', the elite and particularly the *'Irani Arya Bhats'* were aliens. Thus, the choice between the British and *Brahmanical* elite was seen as a choice between two sets of foreigners, one relatively enlightened and the other totally tradition-bound. In fact, to Phule, as Gail Omvedt has observed, the issue was not basically a 'racial' one, it was a 'cultural' one.³⁶

It is pertinent to note here that it was the Christian missionaries who first communicated many of these themes to the masses. They engaged in the debates with high caste elite and brought these debates out of narrow Sanskrit-dominated circles into a mass audience. They also brought the 'Aryan verses non-Aryan' theme which interpreted the caste system in terms of a great and ancient racial divide between conquering Vedic Aryan peoples and indigenous inhabitants of the sub-continent. We find, for instance, authors like George Briggs not only writing on caste groups like *Chamars*³⁷, but also communicating and exchanging ideas with various groups of the

34 Ashwini Deshpande, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

35 Bheema Ranganathrao Raskar, *The Study of Economic Ideas of Mahatma Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwara University, Aurangabad, 2015, p. 120.

36 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 116.

37 See George Briggs, *The Religious Life of India: The Chamars*, Navayana, Calcutta Association Press, Calcutta, 1920.

lower castes. As suggested in Chapter-II, Phule was influenced by the critical interpretation of Hindu society appearing in the writings of missionaries and other western scholars. He was more influenced by John Wilson, a missionary of the Free Church of Scotland³⁸ and his theory of the Aryan invasion is largely based on one of Wilson's book entitled *India Three Thousand Years ago* (1858). Wilson also published author pamphlet outlined "The Social State of the Aryans on the Banks of the Indus in the Times of the *Vedas*."³⁹ In fact, Phule found missionaries like Wilson closer to his own understanding of Brahmanism. Rosalind O'Hanlon, one of the serious scholars of the subject, writes in this respect:

Wilson's book... describe (s) the origins of the Aryan people, their arrival in the sub-continent and their conflicts with the indigenous tribes, the nature of their customs and their religious beliefs. As well as showing the historical inconsistencies of Hindu religion, Wilson's writings and their popularisation and serialisation in missionary periodicals provided additional ammunitions for the radicals like Phule in the very proposition of the alien origins of the higher castes in India.⁴⁰

It is also pertinent to mention here that the notion of 'Aryan race' was originally advanced by the renowned German *Sanskritist* Friedrich Max Muller in the nineteenth century, who consistently supported the 'brotherhood' of all the 'Aryan' peoples and the kinship between Indians and Europeans, though he never visited India.⁴¹ This theory had been further made the centre of discourse by the orientalist who saw in the *Vedas*, an ancient spiritual link between Europeans and Indians; by the British administrators and census operators who classified the society they ruled in different categories of race, community, caste and class; and also by the upper caste elites who used it to justify their equivalence to the ruling (British) elite as well as their superiority over the lower castes. Thus the elite adopted it as a model for understanding caste and caste relations in India. The theory even up to 1930 seems to have functioned as a new

38 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 165.

39 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

41 Ashwini Deshpande, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

'grammar' in which the old *Varna* system was translated. In this new language of caste and race, to claim 'Aryan' descent was equivalent to claiming 'twice born status', to say 'Dravidian' or 'non-Aryan' almost equivalent to saying '*Shudra*'.⁴² Thus the elites were trying to use the theory to differentiate themselves from masses and give a pseudo-scientific/biological and historical justification for the caste hierarchies in Hindu society. Though according to modern historians, the racial theory seems to be an artificial one because the so-called Aryans (actually *Indo-Aryans*) were actually a linguistic group and not a 'race' in the anthropological sense of the term.⁴³ There is also no evidence that the Aryans were responsible for destroying Indus valley civilization or the 'original inhabitants' of the land. Further, tracing caste system solely to the events of 'Aryan conquest' is inadequate. Yet, the fact of matter is that the racial theory was widely accepted, supported and advanced, first by the European and then by almost all Brahman and upper caste/elite intellectuals in those days (and even of the twentieth century). Their stress upon an Aryan identity and a *Vedic-Sanskritic* core, their pride in being 'white' in opposition to the 'black' lower castes, their veiled forms of high caste arrogance, all these things made it inevitable that the pissed-off lower caste people would throw back the weapon of racial identity and ask, "Who was the first invader? Who was the first outsider?"⁴⁴ As a social radical and organic intellectual of the '*Shudra-Atishudras*', Phule reacted likewise. But what is significant about his response is that he turned

42 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 101.

43 A recent 'Indo-European migration theory' claims that the introduction of Indo-Aryan languages in Indian subcontinent was the result of migration of the people from *Sintashta* Culture through *Bactria-Margiana* Culture from which they borrowed their initial religious practices. The alternate 'Indigenous Aryan theory' claiming Indo-Aryan languages entirely 'indigenous' is currently rejected by the mainstream scholarship. See: David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language: How Bronze Age Riders from Eurasian Steppes shaped the Modern World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007.

44 Gail Omvedt, *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2012 (hereafter: *Understanding Caste*), p. 99.

the racial theory upside down on its head in a way, to use the words of Gail Omvedt, somewhat akin to Marx's standing Hegelian dialectics on its head, to formulate a theory of the rise of caste-society and *Brahmanic* exploitation.⁴⁵

Notably, many orthodox Brahmans and even nationalists also made a crucial use of the Aryan theory of race in reinterpreting their cultural traditions. Amazingly, M.G. Ranade, considered Maharashtra's great liberal leader, had said at the Lahore session of the National Social Conference in 1893: "This race of ours is a chosen race. This country of ours is the true land of promise. It was not for nothing that God has showered his choicest blessings on this ancient land of *Aryavrata*."⁴⁶ He also told how original customs of the Aryans had been 'corrupted' by the influence of the primitive peoples. He lamented that the chivalrous civilization of the Aryans had been submerged in the south by the 'lower' *Dravidians* and hill tribes and in the north by invading *Huns*, *Jats* and Muslims.⁴⁷ He even said that the *Dravidians* had been responsible for the introduction of customs that degraded women – Sati, polygamy and polyandry.⁴⁸ Similarly, later on B.G. Tilak, the stalwart nationalist, emphasised the superiority of "Asiatic Aryan culture" and even claimed that conquest and assimilation of non-Aryans was not a sign of tyranny and injustice, but of strength and vitality of the "Aryan race."⁴⁹ Even reformers like Swami Dayananda and Aurobindo Ghosh, who were to reject the racial aspects of the theory, still treated 'non-Aryans' – *Dravidians*, Shudras, tribals, Muslims etc. – as inferior in cultural, moral and intellectual terms.⁵⁰ Further, the twentieth century representatives of Hindu nationalism (for example, V.D. Savarkar), who argued for 'racial unity' of all Hindus, asserted at the same time that the centre of this 'Hindu culture' was Vedic or Aryan and '*Sindhustan*' was

45 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, p. 19.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

47 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 102.

48 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 101.

the ancient name of Hindustan.⁵¹ Thus the term Aryan came to be defined as all that was more worth perceiving in the Hindu tradition.

In fact, the Aryan theory was a double-edged sword, and Phule took it up with vigour. To him the ‘invasion’ of Aryans on the original inhabitants of India led to the transplantation of an unjust *Brahmanical* social order based on *Varna Vyavastha*. This reminds us of the theory of the so-called ‘construction of caste’ advanced by Nicholas Dirks, or more accurately the construction of consciousness about caste, which was at least a three-way process in colonial India – including the European rulers, the Indian high caste elites, and the individuals of the lower castes. The elites saw themselves as linked to Europeans and stressed the decline of the indigenous people. In such a state of affairs, Phule was to evolve a theory in which the ‘golden age’ was pre-Vedic, based on the indigenous non-Aryans and destroyed by the Aryans invaders.⁵² In *Gulamagiri*, he did it intelligently where he wrote of an altogether different ‘golden age’ (as against the ‘golden age’ of Aryan/Vedic past emphasised by the *Brahmanical* elite) in pre-Aryan India under the ‘benevolent kingdom of *Baliraja*’ or king Bali, with an invasion by Aryans motivated by vested interests and resulting in the beginning of *Brahmanic* slavery.⁵³ So, while the elites were tracing their culture, including *Varnashrama Dharma*, from the Aryans, they were the descendants of foreigners, and their caste system and religion were inventions devised by the foreign conquerors to enslave the natives of India!

Hence, Phule, in *Gulamagiri*, evolved such a theory and opined that at some remote period of antiquity, probably more than 3000 years ago, the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahman caste descended upon the plains of Hindustan from regions lying beyond the Indus, the Hindoo Kush, and other adjoining tracts. To him, the Aryans were an off-shoot of the great Indo-European race from Persia, and other Iranian nations in Asia, and the principal nations

51 V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is A Hindu*, Hindi Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi, 2013 (First published under the title *Essentials of Hindutva* as a pamphlet in 1923 by the author), pp. 13-15.

52 *Ibid*, p. 169.

53 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 166.

in Europe likewise were descended from them. He further stated that the Aryans' original lands were sandy and barren. They were not able to meet their growing needs of sustenance and were attracted to the fertile land of India.⁵⁴ He argued that the Aryans were highly arrogant people who called themselves *Bhudev*, the gods on earth, and imbued with very high notions of self. They did not simply come here with peaceful intentions of colonization but as conquerors. Phule observed:

The cruelties which the European settlers practiced on the American Indians on their first settlement in the new world had certainly their parallel in India in the advent of the Aryans and their subjugation of the aborigines.... They originally settled on the banks of the Ganges whence they spread gradually over the whole of India. In order, however, to keep a better hold on the people, they devised that weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste, and the code of crude and inhuman laws to which we can find no parallel among the other nations.... The institution of caste, which has been the main object of their laws, had no existence among them originally. That it was an after-creation of their deep cunning is evident from their own writings.⁵⁵

Hence, Phule has described all 'aboriginals' and 'original inhabitants' of this land as 'non-Aryans'. They inhabited almost the whole of India from Indus in the northwest to the fertile land of Ganga and Brahmaputra Rivers in the north and northeast and to the Deccan or Maharashtra or even further in the deep south. They were "highly civilized people" who cultivated the great lands and lived happily in villages and towns. Their trouble started with the advent of the Aryans who were actually attracted by the extreme fertility of the soil, its rich produce, wealth of its people and the other innumerable natural gifts which this land of king Bali enjoyed. They came here

54 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery: In This Civilized British Government under the Clock of Brahmanism*, D. Keer & S. G. Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Maharashtra State Society for Literature and Culture, Bombay, 1991, pp. 147-148.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

with the intention of conquering, capturing and dominating the whole country in social, cultural, economic and political terms.⁵⁶

According to Phule, the aborigines of India were called *Kshetriyal/Kshetrapati/Kshatriya* (i.e., inhabitants/aboriginal warriors). Ancient India was called *Balasthan*. The Aryans invaded *Balasthan* again and again. In the course of time, the original inhabitants of *Balasthan* lost their ownership of the land. In this way, the Aryans degraded the original '*Kshatriyas*' as *Shudras*.⁵⁷ Phule repeatedly argued that the social and religious subjugation of the lower caste *Shudra-Atishudras* was the result of Aryan invasions. He, therefore, opposed the "*Arya Bhats*' religion" to protect the '*Kshatriya*' identity of all lower castes. In fact, etymological explanations of words like '*Dasyu*', '*Kshetrapati*' and '*Kshatriya*' were taken by Phule to interpret the theory of Aryan invasion. These words were explained by John Wilson as follows:

The word *Das*, derived from *Dasya*, ultimately came to signify a bonded man. In this sense, it has its analogue in the word slave, ... The term *Kshatriya*, applied by the *Shastras* or Law Books to the second or warrior class in the Hindu community, is used in the *Vedas* only as a denominative of a party possessed of *Kshatra* or power. In this sense, it is applied to the gods such as Indra and Varuna. In the *Vedas* the word *Kshetrapati*, 'the possessor of power', seems to have been applicable to any party exercising authority of any kind or extend. *Kshatriya* is the equivalent of *Kshetrapati*.⁵⁸

In order to critique and counter Brahmanism, Phule sketched all non-Brahmans as the *Kshetriyal/Kshetrapati/Kshatriya* and thus, stressed upon his basic argument of the dichotomy between 'Brahmans' and '*Shudra-Atishudras*'. It is notable here that there was only a two-fold division of society in Deccan and south India, i.e., the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans, during our period of study. In Maharashtrian society, interestingly, the *Kunbi* Marathas had started to claim the status of *Kshatriyas* (particularly after the coronation of Shivaji). The *Chitpavan* Brahmans, however, always questioned the

56 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. xx-xxiii.

57 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 57-63.

58 John Wilson, *India Three Thousand Ago*, Indological Book House, Varnanasi, 1858, p. 52.

claim of descendants of Shivaji on the ground that it was very hard for them to prove a pure *Kshatriya* descent.⁵⁹

According to Phule, the Aryan conquerors wanted to enslave the inhabitants forever. For this purpose, they devised the caste system. This soon led to the rise of the priestly order as a powerful class in their society. Similar example can hardly be found anywhere in history since the times of the Dravidians. The caste laws were framed in such a fashion that all rights and privileges were enjoyed by the *Arya-Bhats* whereas the aboriginals got duties and obligations.⁶⁰ From Phule's point of view, the highest rights, the highest privileges and gifts and everything that would make the life of a Brahman easy, smooth and happy were specially inculcated and enjoined in the social norms, whereas ancient *Kshatriyas* or today's *Shudras* and *Atishudras* were regarded with supreme hatred and contempt and were denied all of their natural rights. He writes in *Slavery*:

They were considered as mere chattels, and their life was of no more value than that of meanest reptile; for, it is enjoined that if a Brahman kills a cat or an ichneumon, the bird *Chasha*, or a frog or a dog, a lizard, an owl, a crow or a *Shudra*, he is absolved of his sin by performing the *Chandrayan Prayaschita*, a fasting penance, perhaps, for a few hours or a day and requiring no much labour or trouble. Whilst for a *Shudra* to kill a Brahman is considered as the most heinous offence he could commit, and the forfeiture of his life is the only punishment his crime is considered to merit.⁶¹

Hence, it was Phule's firm belief that all suffering in the life of non-Brahmans, whether ancient inhabitants namely '*Kshatriyas*' or present day *Shudra-Atishudras*, was primarily due to the *Brahmanic* hegemony. He claimed that looking down upon all such activities carried out by the people who laboured on the soil, the *Arya-Bhats*

59 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-20.

60 R. Umaphathi, *A Historical Study of the Life and Achievements of Jothirao Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Periyar University, Salem, 2007, p. 74.

61 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *Contribution of Phule and Shahu to Caste and Religion*, Ph. D. Thesis, submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 1987, p. 178.

refused to do any work with their hands such as working in the fields, looking after cattle or carrying vegetables on their hands considering all of them demeaning and below their dignity. Thus, they insulted the 'work culture' of the aboriginals.⁶²

In addition to propounding the theory of the origin of caste-based unjust social order, Phule had also attempted to explain the assimilation of some *Kshatriyas* with the Aryan society and also the origin of the *Deshastha* Brahmins of Maharashtra. He opined that the *Arya Bhats* joined their hands with some aboriginal *Kshatriyas* (like Pralhad etc.). They appointed them as 'Kulkarni' in various villages. This is how *Kshatriyas* came to be assimilated with the community of the Aryans. In the course of time, they named them as *Deshasthas*. He pointed out that under the rule of *Peshwas* there were no matrimonial or social relations between the *Konkanasthal Chitpavan* and the *Deshastha* Brahmins. There were a number of similarities like skin colour, social customs and family deities etc. between the *Deshasthas* and the *Shudra-Atihudras*. Phule opined that only the *Chitpavans* originally came from Iran because in skin colour they were similar to the Iranian people.⁶³ T. Laxmanshastri Joshi also holds the same opinion and says that *Deshasthas* were closer to the *Shudras* than *Chitpavans*.⁶⁴

Phule further suggested in his theory of caste that the process of differentiation in professions caused an increase in the number of castes. For instance, there were three different categories among the cultivators, viz., *Kunbis*, *Malis* and *Dhangars*. Those who depended entirely upon cultivation were known as 'Kulwadis' or 'Kunbis', those who maintained horticulture alongwith farming came to be known as *Malis*, and those who took up the tending of lives stock became *Dhangars*.⁶⁵ During the course of time, they all became different castes by themselves. The process of differentiation in the nature of

62 Aparna Devare, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

63 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 149.

64 Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, *Lekhansangraha*, Shrividyia Prakashan, Pune, 1982, p. 366, quoted in Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

65 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 59.

occupations, leading to differentiation in castes, was not only confined to the peasant groups, it was also witnessed in the case of many other serving classes such as *Shimpis*, *Sonars*, *Lohars*, *Sutars* etc. who originally belonged to one single group and their forefathers were common. He, therefore, remarked that difference between *Shudras* and *Atishudras* was 'artificial' and it was only created by *Brahmanical* ideology of social hierarchy.⁶⁶

It is significant to note that it was Phule, who for the first time in modern India, raised his finger against Manu. He came out with the opinion, which later Ambedkar endorsed, that it was *Manusmriti*, the ancient book of law, which was accountable for the enslavement of *Shudras* and *Atishudras*.⁶⁷ While condemning *Manusmriti*, he indicated various instances where Manu has directed to exploit and oppress *Shudra-Atishudras*. According to Phule, Manu has discriminated with *Shudras* on various grounds. For instance, he dictates that during the time of scarcity or drought, Brahmans are allowed to consume the properties of *Shudras*. The *Shudras* are not allowed to exercise certain educational, religious and civil rights because *Manusmriti* imposes greatest hindrance in every walk of their life.⁶⁸ To Phule, *Manusmriti* is a book of Brahmanism which lays various rules favouring the priestly order so that it could enjoy highest position in society. One can quote several dictates from *Manusmriti* reflecting Manu's favouritism for his caste-fellows. Phule quotes some of its portions in his *Cultivator's Whipcord*, and underlines the necessity of dethroning the *Brahmanical* elite:

Even if a king is starving, he should not take as tax parts of the produce from a Brahman, but the king should arrange for annual feasts for the Brahmans. If a scholarly Brahman finds a treasure, he alone has the right to use it, but if a king finds a treasure, he should give half of the

66 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of the True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 233-236.

67 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

68 J.R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: Nineteenth Century Maharashtra*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 88.

money to the Brahman. Whatever the crime a Brahman might perform (commit), he should not be harmed, but merely exiled.⁶⁹

Phule further quotes Manu, who directs that the Brahmans would make the *Shudras* to serve them because God has created the *Shudras* to do so. If a Brahman freed a *Shudra* from his bondage or helped him in some delicate manner, then any other Brahman can catch hold of him to make him his slave for, the duty of *Shudra* is not but to be slaved.⁷⁰ On this account, Phule predicted that *Shudras* and *Atishudras*, who had been “traditionally condemned as mean, ignoble and insignificant” by the *Arya-Bhats* for centuries, would, in due course, “when properly educated,”⁷¹ denounce the “Brahman law.” The students of modern Indian history know that in 1927 Dr. Ambedkar, one of his great disciples, made his prediction come true and burnt the *Manusmriti* publicly at Mahad.⁷²

Phule not only explained the origins of caste and caste-ridden social order, but also tried to explain the causes of untouchability in Hindu society. In 1885, he published a small booklet namely *Asprashyacha Kaifiyat (Untouchable's Apologia)* in order to highlight the miserable conditions of the Untouchables. In addition to it, he wrote extensively on the problem in his other writings. To him, the institution of untouchability originated from the same conflict which had resulted in the “pernicious caste system” and on this account, the Untouchables became the most “disadvantaged” and “oppressed” people of the land.⁷³ He opined, as stated earlier, that *Mahars* and *Mangs* of the present day were those whose ancestors had put up the fiercest resistance to the Aryans and, therefore, were called *Maha-Ari* (great enemy) by them. They actually continued

69 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 148.

70 *Ibid.*

71 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 36.

72 Eleanor Zelliot, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Untouchable Movement*, Bluemoon Books, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 77-78.

73 Jotirao Phule, *The Untouchables' Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 86.

their resistance in order to free their brothers from the hands of the invaders. They fought with such prowess that they were also known as *Dvaiti* (means, in Marathi, one who disagrees), and a corruption of the word had become *Daitya*. Finally, Parshuram inflicted a terrible defeat on the *Maha-Ari* people. Thereafter he began their banishment from the society, which caused the origin of the institution of untouchability. Since the brave ancestors of the present day *Mahar* and *Mang* communities were the last valiant resisters, the Aryans marked them out for the most severe punishment.⁷⁴ They were even forced to wear a black thread round the neck as a sign of identification and were treated as *Atishudras* whom even the other *Shudras* could not touch. Phule writes in *Slavery*:

...He (Parshuram) prohibited their *Shudra* brothers from even touching them. Then, he began the custom of calling those great *Maha-Ari Kshatriyas* by such insulting names as *Ati-Shudra*, *Mahar*, *Antyaj*, *Mang* and *Chandal* and of oppressing them to such an extent that it would be difficult to find a more horrifying example of such behaviour in the whole world.⁷⁵

Hence, Phule concluded, the Untouchables were punished to an extent of ruination because they had fought with great force. He further opined that the conquerors assigned very low type of works to them, like scavenging, tanning, sweeping etc. They were forced to perform these filthy works, which continued down to the Muslim, Peshwa and the British regimes. Phule describes in detail the hardships, sufferings and problems of the Untouchables and also suggests certain remedial measures to be adopted for the solution of the problem in *Asprashyacha Kafiyat*.⁷⁶

Some scholars, however, believe that *Untouchables' Apologia* was not originally authored by Phule. It was later found in the collection of a prominent biographer of Phule, Pandharinath Patil. In fact, Phule's original contribution to social thought, i.e., *Shudras*

74 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

76 Jotirao Phule, *Untouchables Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 86-93.

and *Atishudras* belonged to the same race/people, has been, to some extent, contradicted in the book.⁷⁷

In any case, what Phule propounded in his theory of the rise of the *Brahmanic* society/caste/untouchability was to become a major theme in the subsequent debates on the issue(s) in modern India. As Gail Omvedt remarks:

(It) was to become a major and continuing theme of *Dalit-Bahujan* analysis. The elite dropped its interpretation of Aryans and non-Aryans around the 1930s, probably in reaction to the fact that emerging *Dalit* movements (and also non-Brahman movements) was taking it up on a massive scale. (Though) 'Aryan' continued to be a symbol of superiority for them, but now their stress was on the argument that Aryans had originated in India itself (and) that they were the builders of the newly discovered Indus civilization. This remains a major theme of the *Hindutva* ideology today, while a 'non-Aryans' identity and remembering the kingdom of Bali have retained their appeal for the *Dalit-Bahujans*.⁷⁸

(2)

Exposition of *Brahmanic* Mythology,
Scriptures and Theories

As Phule studied the causes of slavery and oppression of the *Shudra-Atishudras* in Hindu social order/caste-society, he noted they were subjugated and exploited by the *Brahmanical* elite in the name of religion, *Karmakand* (rituals), various myths, religious scriptures and the theories enshrined therein. Particularly, the *Puranic* mythology or *Itihas-Purana* was its main source and on this account, the priestly order was at the apex of the religion and social hierarchy.⁷⁹ Therefore, he felt the need to expose the religious literature, myths and stories which directly or indirectly supported or strengthened the *Brahmanic*/orthodox religion. Phule did it on an extensive scale.

77 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-68.

78 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 169.

79 Wendy Doniger & Smith, *The Law of Manu*, Penguin Books, 1991, rpt. 2000, p. xxxvi.

During the four decades of his public life, he brought about various polemic works that presented a broad paradigm of mythical history from the standpoint of the lower castes and the downtrodden.

In fact, the ideological mainspring of the hegemony of the priestly order lay in the mythical history and religious literature. Phule maintained that at the root of all calamities in Hinduism was the blind faith propounded by the orthodox Brahmins that their religious literature was created or inspired by God. This blind faith had to be abolished in the first instance. He, therefore, argued that every religious book was a product of its time and the truths it contained had no permanent and universal validity. All religious works were authored by men and for this reason; they were not free from the prejudices and the selfishness of its authors.⁸⁰ Changes were also made in them at certain occasions. As such, they did not contain truth from beginning to end. For this reason; they were not proved equally helpful to all and had given rise to divisions in society.⁸¹

Phule opined further that the ignorant masses had been mentally 'enslaved' through religious scriptures and myths, particularly the *Itihas-Purana*, which also got integrated in the popular culture and oral traditions. Arvind Deshpande suggests here that Phule was the first to have decisively broke from the erstwhile upper caste reformers who took an easy rescue to the myths of the 'great' tradition.⁸² While creating the culture of the 'rustics' whose tradition he represented, he had, however, to face a dilemma. As a rationalist he was against superstitions and yet he could not accept a complete severance of ties of the masses with popular traditions. To avoid this dilemma, he decided to revitalize those elements of the popular mass traditions that could be interpreted as struggles of the natives against the Aryans. At the same time, in the process of reinterpretation he insisted upon robust rationality that made the supernatural elements

80 Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, *National Biography: Jotirao Phule*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 3-4.

81 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 38-39.

82 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, Vol. 25, No. 21, p. 1325.

ridiculous.⁸³ In view of this, Phule came up with his exposures and reinterpretations of *Brahmanic* myths and theories from the perspective of the *Shudra-Atishudras*⁸⁴ and to counter the same, as Sharad Patil points out, he created an alternative history wherein he tried to continue their popular/folk tradition with the hypothesis that non-Aryans were subjected by the Aryans.⁸⁵ In this process, again, Umesh Bagade is right in suggesting that Phule tried to read the myths as ‘real’ historical accounts almost in the same way which Vico has advised historians to do, and, thus, in his own way exposed the “hegemonic functions of mythology”:

... As Vico has argued, myths were “true and severe narrations” expressed in poetic language of actual historical events. Phule presented the mythology of Vishnu’s incarnations as historical accounts of *Arya-Anarya* revelry. Vico observed that divine heroes of the mythology are the class representatives of society. Phule portrayed the gods as the representatives of Aryan elite and demons as the representatives of the *Shudra-Atishudras* and *Anarya* masses. Phule has explored the genesis and development of caste domination on *Puranic* mythologies. He maintained that the historical memory of caste struggle is deliberately garbled by Brahman writers. Important aspect which he emphasise is hegemonic functions of mythology. He demonstrates how Brahmans created and distorted the myths to bolster their authority.⁸⁶

In *Gulamagiri*, Phule constructed a sequential of one incarnation to the next and attempted to historically interpret and expose them as leaders of *Aryans* and their actions of invasion over the original inhabitants of the land. As stated, exposition and rejection of the *Pauranic* history was the main object of Phule and his aim was also to re-write a history which could give self-respect, consciousness and freedom to his people. The reconstruction of history and mythology was also propelled by the purpose of uniting labouring classes

83 *Ibid.*

84 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-68.

85 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, “Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance”, *EPW*, Vol. 25, No. 21, pp. 1326-1327.

86 Umesh Bagade, “Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge”, *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 66.

and also all women, traditionally divided into hundreds of castes, against their common historical and cultural adversaries.⁸⁷ He, thus, identified the emancipatory potentials of historical knowledge. He believed that true history will unravel the trickery of Brahmins as a dominant caste and will lead the downtrodden castes to resist it. If the downtrodden castes recover the history of their glorious struggle against Brahmanism and unjust caste system, they will revolt against it.⁸⁸ Thus, Phule was well aware of the hegemonic role of the mythical history which had been making the *Stree-Shudra-Atishudras* docile objects. He felt that true history would raise the consciousness of the downtrodden castes and make them active subjects who would fight against the exploitation and dominance of the caste system.

Phule argued that the religious myths represented the real history of ancient India, which was deliberately garbled by later *'Arya-Bhat'* writers in order to conceal their misdeeds and consolidate their power over the lower classes. He endorsed his proposition also by reinterpreting central elements of the social structure and popular culture of nineteenth century Maharashtra, arguing them to be survival from the remote past.⁸⁹

While writing his alternative history, Phule was more interested in offering devastative critique of myths. It, however, appears that his attempt to present myths as direct narratives of history failed to meet the standards of present-day history. Therefore, a historian of his period, Sunthankar, expresses that "Phule's reading of history and mythology was lacunary, mere imagination and unhistorical."⁹⁰ Similarly, Aparna Devare has termed Phule's history as 'mythological' and 'imaginative' as boundaries between myth and history blur in his historical writings.⁹¹ Indeed, we cannot accept all of Phule's facts,

87 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 268.

88 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 56.

89 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

90 Quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2008 (hereafter: *Seeking Begumpura*), p. 168.

91 Aparna Devare, *History and the Making of a Modern Indian Self*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New Delhi, 2011, p. 83.

details and conclusions based on myths as ‘historical truths’ and even his great disciple B.R. Ambedkar had rejected his treatment of myths and his analysis of social history of India. But despite this, we cannot say that he was not ‘mythologizing’ history or was involved in pre-modern world of identities. In fact, both Sunthakar and Devare have failed to understand the historical and social intricacies embodied in the matter. The religious myths, legends, particularly the *Puranas*, structured the hegemonic ideological apparatus to perpetuate caste and patriarchal domination. This was, however, not all the time accepted by the lower castes who invented their own alternative myths, infused with historical consciousness, to negotiate in caste relations. But by doing so, they subconsciously accepted the basic logic of *Brahmanic* mythology that caste and untouchability are unchangeable. But Phule was equipped with modern historical consciousness. He gave a radical turn to history writing which empowered lower castes to challenge the hegemonic designs of caste and untouchability constructed by the *Brahman Dharma*. As such, as Bagade points out, Phule was not ‘mythologizing history’, but actually ‘historicizing’ mythology⁹² for deriving insurgent subject position of the *Shudra-Atishudras*.

For Phule, history also functioned as the basis of social critique in the present. As Devare also accepts, Phule wanted to understand the present conditions of the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* as a ‘historical process’ showing how the caste relations developed through the ages of past. By doing so, he believed he could expose how they came to be what they are in the present, and, thereby, he hoped it would allow the possibility for transformation. It was, therefore, imperative to his mind that his people should acquire a historical consciousness.⁹³ With this preface, we can understand his efforts to historicize the popular *Brahmanic* legends which form a part of the everyday world of the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* who, actually, constituted the masses of Hindu society.

92 Umesh Bagade, “Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge”, *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 56.

93 Aparna Devare, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

Assessing his critique of the *Avatarakalpa* or the theory of incarnation, G.P. Deshpande writes: *Puranic* mythology or *Itihas-Purana*

Phule attacked the *Avatarakalpa*. He heaps utter scorn on the various godheads. His analysis of the various godheads, his analysis of the various *Avataras*, however, may not stand the scrutiny of either history or even plain reason. But that is, perhaps, not the issue. His attempt was to subvert the *Brahmanical* structure of ideas and beliefs so that a new, more equitable order can emerge. His is a *Shudra-Atishudra* rewriting of history. It is not scientific as much as it is subversive. That is its purpose: subversion and destruction. His writings on the *Brahmanical* gods and on the history of the Aryan race have to be understood in terms of their purpose.⁹⁴

Hence, while writing history, Phule was actually rejecting hegemonic ideology and discourse from a *Shudra-Atishudra* perspective. If we keep this in mind, we could sense of Phule's polemic and its historical necessity and inevitability. The following were his objectives behind exposition of *Brahmanic* mythology, particularly the theory of incarnation:

1. To deny the privileges and superiority of the priestly order;
2. To reinterpret historically the important mythical figures and symbols from the perspectives of lower classes; and
3. To make *Shudra-Atishudras* aware about their 'forgotten' identity of original inhabitants and to make them realize of their human rights.⁹⁵

According to Phule, the '*Arya Bhats*' purposely developed the theory of incarnation etc. to cover up their foreignness and actions to dethrone the *Shudra-Atishudras* forever. So, there was need to expose and reinterpret this theory to make them aware of their original *Kshetriya/Kshaytriya* identity. Rosalind O'Hanlon points out:

The idea of an original *Kshatriya* identity for the lower castes bears a very obvious similarity to the myths of a high status, now lost, that are a common feature of the culture of low and untouchable castes. But Phule's was an original myth with a difference. Rather than limiting

94 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

95 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

himself to a history of a particular caste, his account projected a central historical and cultural tradition for Maharashtrian itself. This tradition was shaped and given meaning by the struggles of Maharashtra's lower castes, her warrior and peasant cultivators.⁹⁶

Hence, Phule clubbed all non-Brahmans together as *Shudras* while *Mahars* and *Mangs* as *Atishudras*, and declared them previously 'fallen' *Ksheytriya/Kshaytriya* and all of them were victimized by a common bond of oppression.

In *Gulamagiri*, Phule for the first time, endeavoured to define how *Brahmanical* thought, institutions and theories had come to dominate Hindu society. He stressed that it was an important prerequisite for social reformers to delve deep into history to find out when and how the *Arya Bhats* established their supremacy over Hindu society.⁹⁷ *Gulamagiri* begins this task with the famous quote from Homer, "the day that reduces a man to slavery, takes from him the half of his virtue."⁹⁸ Thus Phule introduced the notion of 'slavery', which was, to him, an integral part of nearly all ancient social systems including that of the Hindus. The history of the '*Brahmanic* slavery' in India could be reconstructed from the stories rested in the *Shrutis*, *Smritis* and *Puranas*.⁹⁹ His intention also appears to mock the theory of *Avatars* which was a major theoretical prop for the mass appeal of Brahmanism. It is further noted that Phule was writing not only for Indians but also to educate the Europeans about the caste realities of India, and it is shown by his English introduction of *Gulamagiri*.¹⁰⁰

It is pertinent to note that in the *Puranic* mythology, the first six incarnations of Vishnu are: Matsya (the fish), Kurma (the tortoise),

96 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

97 Mugali, Shailander Yallappa & Priyadarshini S. Amadaihal, "Mahatma Jotirao Phule's Views on Upliftment of Women as Reflected in Sarvajanik Satyadharma", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 69 (2008), pp. 693-694.

98 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery: In This Civilized British Government under the Clock of Brahmanism*, D. Keer & S. G. Malshe (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 147.

99 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28.

100 *Ibid.*

Varah (the boar), Narasimha (the man-lion), Vaman (the dwarf), and Parshuram (Ram with the axe).¹⁰¹ In *Gulamagiri*, Phule beings his historical analysis with the legend of incarnations of the god Vishnu as recounted in the *Bhagwat Purana* and attempts to analyse these stories and retell them as ‘they really are’: the historical stories of power, control and domination.¹⁰² He centred his analysis on the incarnations representing them as the consecutive ‘stages’ of the Aryan assault on the land of the ‘ancient *Kshatriyas*’.

In fact, Phule thoroughly reinterpreted the whole incarnation theory and explained it to the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* to disclose their ‘true’ identity and the ‘history’ of their enslavement. His historical interpretation of the theory can be depicted in a model as under:

TABLE 3.1
JOTIRAO PHULE’S HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION
OF THE INCARNATION THEORY¹⁰³

<i>The Incarnation Mystery</i>		
<i>Ist Stage: Invasions for Loot</i>	<i>IInd Stage: Brutality of Warriors’ Extermination</i>	<i>IIIrd Stage: Divisive Policy for establishing the Rule</i>
Matsya	Narasimha	Brahma
Kurma	Vaman	
Varah	Parshsuram	Manu

According to Phule’s interpretation of ‘*Avatarakalpa*’, the Aryans first attacked India in small boats that moved in waters like a Matsya (fish) and, as such, the nickname of the first Aryan leader came to be known as Matsya (the first incarnation of Vishnu). The ‘*Arya Bhats*’ writers ‘distorted’ this historical event in the *Bhagwat Purana* and claimed to say that Lord Vishnu incarnated from a fish. When the Aryans attacked the second time, they came in larger boats which were slow moving like a tortoise movement. This event was ‘distorted’

101 For details see: J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*, Geography, History and Literature, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968.

102 Aparna Devare, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

103 Bhima Ranganathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

in the *Bhagwat Purana* which presented it as Kurma (tortoise), the second incarnation of Vishnu. It has been said that Vishnu emerged from the tortoise to recover things of value lost in the deluge. And then Phule went on to give his unique explanation of the third, fourth and fifth incarnations of Vishnu as boar (Varah), man-lion (Narasimha) and dwarf (Vaman) respectively. Lord Vishnu took all of these incarnations in order to deliver the world from the tyranny of the so-called Datiya or demon kings who were historically the defeated *Kshatriya* rulers of the land, according to Phule.¹⁰⁴

Phule also re-interpreted the story of Bhakta Pralhad in terms of the lower caste perspective. Varah was followed by the fourth incarnation of Vishnu, i.e., Narasimha, the man-lion, as the leader of the Aryans. In Phule's account, Narasimha persuaded Pralhad to kill his father Hirnyakashyap, the great *Kshatriya* king, and in lieu, he was promised of his coronation. His father was a great 'protector of the peasants'. But the Aryans were against social equality and work culture. They gave honour to Pralhad's chanting the name of Vishnu day and night, without doing work. For this reason; the *Bhagwat Puran* honoured Pralhad and his sedition and, as such, work culture of India was replaced by the *Brahmanical* culture.¹⁰⁵

The next incarnation of Vishnu was Vaman, the dwarf, who assassinated Bali, the greatest indigenous king, considered as demon in the *Puranas*, but actually a brave and generous ruler. In fact, according to the mythical story, Virochan was the son of Pralhad and the great king Bali was the son of Virochan. Bali tried his best to unite again all the petty *Kshetriyal/Kshatriya* rulers of ancient India to fight the Aryans. It is said that Bali, by reason of his devotion and austerities, acquired supremacy over the 'three worlds' (*Triloka*) – the Heaven, the Earth, and the *Patal* (lower/underground regions), and also seized the then India's capital city, Amravati. In order to remove this 'insult' to the gods on the part of Bali, Vishnu appeared in the form of a dwarf and asked the king Bali for the grant of as much land as he could cover in three successive steps. No sooner was his request granted than miraculously expanding, the dwarf became a giant and

104 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

with one step he strode over the heaven and with the second covered the earth, but then, relenting, he left the dominion of the lower regions to Bali.¹⁰⁶

According to Phule's version, the above mentioned story of king Bali was an imaginary story composed by the selfish orthodox *Arya-Bhats* for their own interests. Actually, a conflict between Bali and Vaman had taken place in ancient times. Vaman took advantage of the kind heartedness of Bali who was tactfully deceived and defeated by him. In fact, Bali was a great caretaker of the masses but the *Aryans* hated him because they did not tolerate his love for the masses. Hence, they killed him. To support his view, Phule presented the evidence of the practice of performing religious rites in popular culture of Maharashtra where the idol of Bali is used by both Brahmans and Non-Brahmans. Among Brahmans, his idol is still used to make a fun of him; on the contrary, among the Non-Brahmans the idol of Bali is used, showing a mark of respect for him.¹⁰⁷ Particularly, the lower castes have been reviving their dreams of '*Baliraj*' (regime of Bali) every year on *Dussehra* day by saying: "Let all troubles and miseries go away and the kingdom of Bali come back!"¹⁰⁸

Then breaking with the traditional accounts of incarnations, Phule described Brahma as the next leader of the Aryans. Brahma has a central place in the *Brahmanic* mythology where it has been claimed that Brahmans came from his head, *Kshatriyas* from his arms, *Vaishyas* from his stomach/thighs and *Shudras* from his feet. It is noted that the *Vedas* are also claimed by the orthodoxy to have come from his mouth. Phule exposed all these stories as deliberate distortions by the *Arya-Bhats* to befool the masses and reinterpreted Brahma a typical popular stereotype of an orthodox Brahman. After Vaman died, Phule explained, the Aryans had no significant leader and, accordingly, a "cunning, turncoat and untrustworthy clever clerk called Brahma", who first invented the art of writing on palm

106 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 56-67.

107 *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

108 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Publication, Bombay, Third Edition, 2013, pp. 113-114.

leaves, got a chance to take over.¹⁰⁹ He composed little poems like those of the *Parsis* (here Phule was referring to the *Avesta* and the *Gathas* of Zoroastrians) which alongwith a few magical incantations, popular in those days, were put down by him on palm leaves and this gave birth to the belief of the *Arya-Bhats* that the *Vedas* came from his mouth. Taking advantage of the death of the native king Banasura, Brahma invaded his kingdom or '*Kshetra*' and after defeating the inhabitants (*Kshetriyas/Kshatriyas*) sought to permanently humiliate them by reducing them to the position of *Shudras* through measures like debarring from education etc.¹¹⁰

Parshuram, according to Phule, succeeded Brahma as the head of the Aryans. According to the mythical story, Parshuram, an incarnation of Vishnu, was the son of a devout Brahman *Rishi*, Jamedgni. In order to take revenge for the indignity offered to his father by a *Kshatriya* monarch, Karttavirya, he killed his aged and helpless father. He then vowed vengeance against the whole *Kshatriya* race, and twenty-one times over cleared the world of every male member of the race, filling with their blood, five large lakes. After taking this terrible revenge, he retired in peace to the Mahendra Mountain.¹¹¹ Interestingly, the story of *Kshatriyas'* massacre by Parshuram as to how he treated the *Kshatriyas* in every possible cruel and inhuman ways was described by Phule in a passionate manner. To him, the deeds of Nero or Alaric appear to be 'insignificant' before the ferocity of Parashuram.¹¹²

The incarnation was also undertaken by Phule for the purpose of explaining extermination of the *Kshatriyas* or the original inhabitants of the land. To him, Parashuram was actually attacked twenty-one times further by the small group of *Kshetriyas/Kshatriyas* still left unconquered. As noted, the Aryans called them '*Maha-Ari*' or the 'great foe' and described them as a demon race (*Daitya*) that had rebelled against the gods. As a result, according to Phule, they were reduced to such misery that they even had to eat the flesh of dead

109 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

110 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

111 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

112 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

animals. Hence were born the *Mahar* and *Mang* communities whom the high castes considered ‘untouchable’ because they eat dead animals’ meat.¹¹³ Thus, the story of Parshuram, to Phule, indicates the brutality of the *Arya-Bhats* who succeeded after a long struggle, and over 2000 years now they have been the dominant caste in India.¹¹⁴

In fact, Phule wanted to wipe off the belief and faith among masses about the existence of gods like Parshuram etc. It is pertinent to note that he was so angry with the Parashuram that he published and circulated one ‘notice’ for him. He challenged him to “appear before the society as he was described by the *Purans* to have been living for ages.”¹¹⁵

According to Phule, Manu was the last stage of the incarnation theory. He was not incarnation of Vishnu, but a follower of Brahma. He made, as stated, a caste-ridden ‘code of conduct’ for the *Shudra-Atishudras* and deprived them legally from all of their human rights.¹¹⁶

Thus, Phule exposed the myths of Matsya-Shankhasur, Kurma-Kasyap, Varaha-Hirnyakashyap, Narshimha-Hirnyakashyap, Vipra-Pralhad, Vaman-Bali, and Vaman-Banasur to explain conflicts between the *Arya-Bhats* and the aboriginal *Anaryas*. To him, the system of ‘*Brahmanic* slavery’ and the hierarchical society based on birth and ‘high’ and ‘low’ status was also the outcome of those conflicts.¹¹⁷ Particularly, the myth of dispossession of king Bali by Vaman was given high heed and read politically by Phule as the destruction of egalitarian and agrarian community of the original inhabitants.¹¹⁸ It is pertinent to note here that earlier radical saints like Kabir and Tukaram had also come out with an unorthodox interpretation of *Avtarakalpa*, either rejecting the idea altogether or turning it around to make it an accusation against God himself. Nevertheless, Phule

113 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery* in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. xxiii.

114 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

115 *Ibid.*

116 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery* in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. xxiii.

117 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

118 Mahesh Gavaskar, “Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule’s Critique of Brahman Power” in S.M. Michael (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2007, p. 102.

attacked the *Avatars* by historicizing the whole theory and using it as metaphor for verifying different forms of Aryan invasions.¹¹⁹

Now, to Phule, Indian political economy took a different turn accordingly which shifted from agriculture-centric mode to the unproductive *Karmakand*-centric mode of production. Since the Aryans' major principle was to destroy the 'work culture' and create 'freety culture', they induced the peasants to perform religious rituals/activities which were totally unproductive. While king Bali was protector and stimulator of agriculture, Brahma lamed the peasants, deprived them from education and made them listen to the falsehood of *Puranas*.¹²⁰ Hence, while reinterpreting many of the central episodes of the *Brahmanic* mythology – the incarnations of Vishnu, the story of king Bali, the legend of Parsuram's extirpation of *Kshatriyas* etc. – Phule argued that all those symbolized the 'real' history of ancient India deliberately garbled by the later *Bhat* writers in order to conceal their misdeeds and consolidate their power over *Shudra-Atihudras*.

In order to counter the orthodox religion, Phule did not stop at critiquing *Puranakalpa* and exposing and historicizing it with his 'perspective from below', he also went on to critique the scriptures and also other *Brahmanic* traditions and the theories/ideas enshrined therein. From the point of view of rationality, the whole system of superstition and religious traditionalism was to be overthrown. And Phule was a staunch rationalist. He was, therefore, saved from a good deal of unnecessary arguments, compromises and logical inconsistencies. He did not, for instance, waste his time in arguing over the relative merits of different parts of the *Brahmanic* texts and traditions. He simply treated them as legends which might offer some insight into past Indian history and as a product of a group seeking to establish control over the minds of people.¹²¹ He was clearly of the view that the so-called holy books were not the creation of the divine power, but they were man-made. Notably, his mentor Thomas Paine had argued the same way in his book entitled *The Age of Reason*,

119 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 166.

120 Bhima Rangathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

121 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 108-109.

wherein he writes that the Catholic clergy claimed that the Ten Commandments were given by God and they were received by the people through the God's Angel, but since "I did not see the angel myself, and, therefore, I have a right not to believe it."¹²²

Some critics argue that Phule did not study the original Hindu scriptures and he chiefly relied on their English translations, so he had no right to criticise them. It is true that Phule mostly referred to John Wilson's *India Three Thousand Years ago* and also Sir William Jones' *The Laws of Manu* and *Son of Brahma*, but there are also clear evidences which show that he knew Sanskrit.¹²³ Another charge levelled against him is that he was not a highly learned man; hence, his commentaries on the Hindu scriptures are worthless. Nevertheless, it has nowadays been admitted by scholars that Phule was an organic intellectual and his method of analysis was though not classical but rational and appropriate to establish truth to his readers from a perspective from below.¹²⁴ Most importantly, his criticism of the religious scriptures basically shows his zeal and enthusiasm for changing the old established orders and ideas of *Brahmanic* Hinduism.

We have already come to know about Phule's critiques of *Manusmriti* and *Bhagwat Purana*. He also raised questions on the authority of the *Vedas*. It is pointed out that for Hindus the *Vedas* were the most holy scriptures. Even Jawaharlal Nehru writes: "The *Vedas* were supposed to be the earliest records we possess of Indian Culture.... According to Prof. Winternitz, the beginning of the Vedic literature goes back to 2000 B.C. or even 2500 B.C. This brings us very near to the Mohenjo-Daro period."¹²⁵ What Nehru further opines about the *Vedas* is worth a Jew's eye, as his opinion was, in a way, close to that of Phule:

The *Vedas* were the out-pouring of the Aryans as they streamed into the rich land of India. They brought their ideas with them from that

122 Howard Fast (ed.), *Selected Works of Thomas Paine*, The Modern Library, New York, 1964, p. 287.

123 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

124 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

125 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, pp. 76-77.

common stock out of which grew the *Avesta* in Iran, and elaborated them in the soil of India. Even the language of the *Vedas* bears a striking resemblance to that of the *Avesta*, and it has been remarked that the *Avesta* is nearer to the *Vedas*....¹²⁶

Notably, the most important thing about the *Vedas*, according to Max Weber, is that “one of the few essentially binding duties of Hindu faith is not – at least not directly – to dispute their authority.”¹²⁷ But Jotirao Phule challenged the authority of the *Vedas* and, perhaps, this was done for the first time in the history of modern India by any reformer. It is noted that almost all of his contemporary social reformers supported the Vedic tradition and Swami Dayananda Sarasvati had even elaborated a plan for the regeneration of ‘*Aryavrata*’ through the revival of Vedic religion.¹²⁸ Phule, however, did not agree with the opinion that *Vedas* were the ‘holy books’ of the Hindus created by God himself. Phule argued that if the *Vedas* were holy books written by God himself, then why did God write them in Sanskrit? He claims that if God had created the *Vedas* he would have created them in a universal language which would also have been understood by diverse people speaking diverse languages.¹²⁹ He opined that *Vedas* were originally known as ‘*Bhedas*’ but the *Arya-Bhats* started to call them *Vedas*¹³⁰ though etymologically, such impression of him was not correct.

Phule argued that, in fact, the *Arya-Bhats* wanted to establish their hegemony through their ‘artificial’ religion, hence, they emphasized that the *Vedas* were the creation of God. Raising question on the “unjustified veneration” of the *Vedas*, he argued:

126 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

127 Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, (tr. & ed. By Hans Garth & Don Martin Dale), London, 1958, p. 26.

128 J.T.E. Jordon, *Dayananda Sarasvati*, p. 130, quoted in Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

129 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 37.

130 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

It is quite true that the cunning Aryan Brahmins have hidden their *Vedas* and hence, the *Vedas* have been regarded with an unjustified veneration by the ignorant *Shudras* and *Atishudras*. But if they bring their *Vedas* out into the open, translate them into Marathi and make them available to the public at large,... then I dare declare confidently that even the women from acrobatic class will not hesitate to make fun of the cunning Aryan Brahmins and their *Vedas*.¹³¹

Pointing at the fundamental issue of religious rights of the *Shudra-Atishudras* as Hindus, Phule further argued:

If God had created the Vedic scriptures for the liberation of entire mankind, the *Bhat* Brahmins would not have prohibited the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* from studying the *Vedas*. The *Bhat* Brahmins have thus violated God commandment, and are not the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* suffering for that (reason)? Why should they either trust the God who is supposed to have created the Vedic scriptures or the scriptures themselves or indeed why should they call themselves Hindus?¹³²

Needless to say that Phule raised some resentful, but highly fundamental questions. He boldly said that today's *Vedas* were gossip stories fabricated by '*Bhat* Brahmins' who interpolated many things in the *Vedas* from time to time taking advantage of their monopoly over Hinduism. Whatever they interpolated in the *Vedas* was entirely beneficial to them. Actually, the *Vedas* and other scriptures were used to spread superstition in society. The *Vedas* itself provide ample evidence that the Aryans used to consume an alcoholic spirit called *Somaras*, claiming falsely that it was used for making conversations with the gods. Several historians have corroborated this fact.¹³³ He, therefore, dismissed the notion that the *Vedas* and other scriptures upholding caste system are God-inspired and based on the true religion. On the contrary, he stressed that such texts are 'unethical' and 'political'.¹³⁴

131 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

132 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 188.

133 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

134 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

Phule said that the *Arya Bhats* always tried to conceal the *Vedas* from the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* because they could have come across the story of the Aryan encroachment in India and also how they harassed the original inhabitants and named them '*Dasyu*', '*Ahir*', '*Asur*', '*Danava*' '*Rakshasa*' '*Maha-Ari*' etc. He supported his argument from the explanation of John Wilson's *India Three Thousand Years Ago*.¹³⁵ He also believed that Muslim invaders made various attempts to 'emancipate' the *Shudras* from '*Arya Brahmkalap*'. In fact, he praised Muslims and also Christians because their holy books namely *Quran* and *Bible* were open to all.¹³⁶

While countering the *Brahmanic* mythology and scriptures, Phule also criticised the great ancient epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and opined that these epics were used by the *Arya-Bhats* to exploit the masses. The priestly order purposefully managed to tell again and again these fables to the *Shudra-Atihudras* in order to spill their minds.¹³⁷ In *Gulamagiri* he tried to expose some paradoxes/inconstancies found in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. For instance, there is a story of *Sita-Swayamvar* in *Ramayana*. One day Parshuram visited the king Janak. He put his bow outside the visiting room in the palace. The child Sita started playing with that bow, but later in *Sita-Swayamvar*, Ravan was not even able to lift the same bow and when he did try, he fell down. This means that Sita was more powerful than Ravan. Then Phule asked as to "why Sita did not oppose Ravan from carrying her forcibly to Lanka against her wish?"¹³⁸ He also raised question on the so-called ideal personality of Ram, who, according to Phule, was not faithful to Sita, otherwise he would not have agreed to have intercourse with the wife of Ahi-Mahi.¹³⁹ Phule also did not believe in various stories regarding Krishna in *Mahabharata*.

135 John Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

136 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.

137 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

138 Bhima Rangathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

139 *Ibid.*, p. 280.

He asked “if Krishna was a God, how could his maternal uncle be a *Daitya* or demon?”¹⁴⁰

It is pertinent to note that during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the *Bhakti* saints preached the ecstasy of devotional worship of God, freeing them from ritualism and casteism. But even the radical saints did not and could not achieve the use of reason to give a socio-historical analysis of caste. They could not even control the history of their own movement.¹⁴¹ Though Phule took his inspiration from some radical *Bhakti* saints like Kabir and Tukaram, he, nevertheless, rejected the literature written by *Brahmanic* saints in Maharashtra. He always raised his fingers against the *Bhagawat Dharma* which, to his opinion, was full of gossip. He pointed out that the books like *Viveksindhu* and *Dnyaneshwari* were written by *Brahmanic* saints in the language of the people so that they could spoil the minds of the farmers.¹⁴²

Here, it is also significant to note that the greater part of the Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason* consists of criticism of *Old Testament* from a moral point of view. He declared that “It is the reverse of truth and I become so tired of examining into its inconsistencies and absurdities that I hasten to the conclusion of it in order to proceed to something better.... Upon the whole, mystery, miracle and prophecy are appendages that belong to fabulous and not to true religion.”¹⁴³ Likewise, Phule also concluded about the *Brahmanic* mythology and scriptures that it was a powerful instrument at the hands of priests to exploit the masses. In fact, he rejected *in toto* the pseudo ‘*Brahman Dharma*’ along with the texts that uphold it.¹⁴⁴

Like almost all reformers of his times, Phule also rejected the practice of idol worship prevalent in the Hindu society traditionally. At various places in his writings, he has recorded his opposition to the idolatry. “He or she who does not venerate or worship a star or

140 *Ibid.*, p. 282.

141 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 164.

142 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.

143 Howard Fast (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 299 & 329.

144 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

any stone or metal icon as the true Creator – should be designated as votaries or follower of the Truth” – this was said in the second rule in the thirty-three guiding principles to be accepted by the followers of Universal Religion of Truth.¹⁴⁵ He used the word ‘*Murtipujak*’ (worshiper of idol) to denounce the followers of the religion of orthodoxy. He said that since the priestly order never permitted *Shudras* to learn Sanskrit, they were not able to read the original Hindu scriptures. For this reason; they started worshipping idols. They even prostrated themselves at the *Arya-Bhat’s* feet and, thereby, lost all their dignity and self-respect.¹⁴⁶ The orthodox priests, on the other hand, even thought lowly of *Shudra* kings like Bhonsale, Shinde and Holkar.¹⁴⁷

‘Idolatry is an attempt of the undeveloped minds to grasp high spiritual truth’ – such arguments in defence of idolatry were not acceptable to Phule. He held that idol worship was the improper way to worship God. In his poetry and plays, he condemned the priestly order for performing and propagating the idol worship. They offered food or other eatable commodities to their idols of gods/deities. These offerings were actually consumed by the priests themselves, not gods/deities. On the other hand, donors of these offerings, i.e., cultivators and their children were dying of hunger at their homes.¹⁴⁸ In one of his poems, he preaches:

The really thoughtful (discerning) person do not indulge in ceaseless recitations and sanctimonious ablutions. Offering of these to the Creator is, indeed, an empty exercise. The really thoughtful person never persecutes the helpless widows and does not have their heads shaved by the barbers. Such a discerning person never worships metal or stone images and never condemns the *Shudras* as mean and

145 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth* in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

146 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 149.

147 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 215-223.

148 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed (Some Poems)*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 70-74.

wretched. He whose actions (strivings) are not actuated by a balanced temperament should certainly be dubbed as a heretic, says Joti.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, in one of the plays authored by Phule – *Trutiya Ratna* (*The Third Eye*, 1855) – the cultivator, being persuaded and seeing that the god Maruti is only a stone, explodes into anger in the following words:

I can see now that this stone is not worthy of worship, and if I smashed it now and ground it into pieces and mixed it with the earth and made *Rangoli* pattern with it, then perhaps another credulous man like me would not listen the Brahmins, be deceived in its name and fall headlong into debt.¹⁵⁰

Phule also denounced the notions of heaven, hell, sin, virtue, fortune etc. According to him the notions of ‘heaven’ or ‘hell’ were imaginary creations of the orthodoxy to exploit the ignorant people whose knowledge was limited. To him, “men’s accounts of sin and virtues are once and all settled in this life only.”¹⁵¹ He remarked that the notions like heaven are nothing but “fertile imagination and facile guess-work” of the priestly order:

(The orthodox Brahmins) have imagined, in their own minds, the eternal peace of heaven, with the help of fertile imagination and facile guess-work, and have described it in their sacred books. Where is heaven? How anyone ever have seen it for himself?... I address my question to you, O quack or faith-healer (or witch-doctor). Don’t indulge in fruitless arguments or subtle sophistry, dear Brahmin elder brother!¹⁵²

He further argued that the toiling masses, being trapped in the notions of *Daiva* (fate), *Sanchit* (accumulated demerits of previous

149 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 151.

150 Jotirao Phule, “Trutiya Ratna”, *Purogami Satyashodhak* (Marathi), Vol. V, No. 2, April-June 1979, pp. 28-29, quoted in Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

151 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

152 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 147.

births) and *Prarabdha* (predestination), had lost the sense of their dialectical relationship with the world and had been *Dasa* (slave) to external forces.¹⁵³ Such types of man-made illusions were basically accountable for the slavery of lower castes in their life. It is interesting to note that his views in this respect were, to some extent, close that of Karl Marx who said “To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness.”¹⁵⁴ Though unlike Marx, he believed in religion, i.e., *Satyadharma* or the religion of truth.

On a profound note, Phule also denounced the basis religious theories which the *Brahmanic* Hinduism was based upon, i.e., the theories of *Dharma* and *Karma*. Questioning the theory of *Dharma* (religiously ordained duty), which was also oftentimes interpreted by the orthodoxy to justify caste and caste-duties by the terms like *Varna Dharma*, *Varnashrama Dharma* etc. Phule argued:

How are we justified in calling it (scavenging work) a (religiously ordained) duty (*Dharma*)? Supposing a dunce of an *Arya-Bhat*/Brahman were to be menial servant of other person, and if he were to perform the scavenging duties for that person, will you call that Brahman as a scavenger? (Similarly) keeping flocks of sheep and grazing them is not the (religiously ordained) duty of shepherds but their occupation; engaging in agriculture is not the (religiously ordained) duty of the cultivators but their occupation; engaging in horticulture is not the (religiously ordained) duty of the horticulturists but their occupation; to serve others for daily wages is not the (religiously ordained) duty of the servants but their occupation; building others' houses is not the (religiously ordained) duty of the carpenters but their occupation; shoe-making is not the (religiously ordained) duty of the shoe-makers but their occupation.... To refute to impart education to the *Atishudras* is not the (religiously ordained) duty of the victorious *Arya-Bhats* but is the result of their vengeful hatred.¹⁵⁵

153 Mahesh Gavaskar, “Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule’s Critique of Brahman Power” in S.M. Michael (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

154 Karl Marx & Fredrick Engels, *Religion*, Progress Publisher, Moscow, 1975, p. 39.

155 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

Similarly, the theory of *Karma* (alongwith the theory of rebirth), at a certain point, gets mixed with the theory of caste as it has been believed that the people belonging to high castes did 'good *Karma*' (deeds) in their last birth (life) whereas the lower caste people did 'bad *Karma*' in their last life and they are suffering in the present life as a result of those deeds. The lower caste people cannot change their 'misfortune'; it can be changed only in the next life, through doing 'good deeds' in this life. As such, they should not complain about their misfortune and also should not try to change the situation which is the cause of their sufferings. In view of this, Phule strongly opposed the theory of *Karma*. He opined that a turn of fortune was wholly dependent upon man's desires, abilities and deeds. Hence, his wheel of fortune could turn according to his will and actions.¹⁵⁶

In fact, salvation of soul was not a concern of Phule. He did not believe in heaven/ paradise which, to him, had never been "logically thought out". So there was no question of salvation after death. He argued:

... Can anyone think of a man who has actually seen heaven? Has it ever happened that a certain individual decided not to trust the word of the text unless experience were to endorse it, and, therefore, went in search of paradise and came back to report on its existence?... The fact is that this concept of paradise has never been logically thought out.¹⁵⁷

Hence, Phule trained his polemical gun on *Karmavipaka*, the theory of *Karma* and also the concept of *Moksha* which, according to him, made the people 'other worldly' and led them to shrink social responsibility.¹⁵⁸ He asked what kind of morality was there in constructing temples at Banaras, Prayag, Nasik etc.? It was far better to construct schools for the children of the *Shudras* and *Atihudras*. He deplored that the orthodoxy themselves had fallen in ignorance and corruption by the myths and theories created by them.¹⁵⁹ Curiously, however, Phule did not discuss *Punarjanma* (theory of rebirth) at

156 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-286.

157 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 230.

158 G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9

159 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

any length, even though it was closely connected with the theory of *Karmavipaka* (theory of *Karma*) and equally sustained the metaphysics of caste.¹⁶⁰

(3)

Attack on *Brahmanic* Exploitation

It is clear from the above discussion that Phule appears to us as the fierce critic of the *Brahman Dharma* which bound the Hindu faith in the multiplicity of gods/goddesses, the stories of incarnation and the 'imaginary' theories of *Dharma* and *Karma* etc. According to him, these aspects of the religion of orthodoxy further served as the foundation of superstitions, ridicules customs and a number of social evils that degenerated the social fibre of Hindu society and paved way for slavery and exploitation of a large bulk of the people belonging to the lower classes. In fact, the pre-British India was exploited by the priestly and feudal classes. According to Arvind Deshpande, Phule was the first Indian thinker to classify the '*Bhat-Brahmans*' not merely as religious class, but also as economic occupational class. He was convinced that the economic poverty was the main cause of the social backwardness of the Indian masses and it was perpetuated by the culture of Brahmanism.¹⁶¹ Thus, Phule used the concept of Brahmanism for exploitation since, due to this, the common people in Hindu society were exploited in their entire life at various stages. Brahmins were superior to all and had acquired rights to control and regulate man's life in nearly all wakes. As a result, Brahmanism transferred into exploitation. Phule argued that religious customs and superstitions were deliberately promoted in the name of Hindu religion by the priestly class in order to exploit the masses. He, therefore, attempted to ruthlessly expose their exploitation strategies.

As a matter of fact, Phule's theory of exploitation (under *Brahmanic*/caste slavery) was more focused on cultural and ethnic factors rather than purely economic and political ones, though he

160 G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 9

161 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, Vol. 25, No. 21, p. 1325.

was equally conscious about the later ones. His objective was to show how the priestly order had exploited *Shudras* and *Atishudras* by fabricating their holy books and that there was no natural or divine basis for this exploitation. This, he believed, would open the *Shudras'* eyes and break their shackles of slavery. According to Sharat Patil, Phule sketched Indian village as one with two clearly divided camps: that of two classes. Though he was also aware of the differentiation within the *Shudra* peasants, he nevertheless relegated it to the background as he was interested in uniting them against the *Bhatshahi*. To him, the concept of 'peasant community' rather than 'differentiated peasantry' would be more useful, if used as a historical category.¹⁶²

Being superior and at the apex of religious hierarchy, the priestly order had got a right to exploit all. Where Phule differed from other social reformers (including some of his Brahman colleagues) and drew together religious and political relationships within the Maharashtrian society to form his anti-clericalism, he regarded Hindu religion of his times as a worldview of specifically a particular social group. Though other castes might accept it, the *Brahmanic* religion could represent for them only a false consciousness and an unknowing servitude to the interests of Brahmans themselves.¹⁶³ According to Umesh Bagade, Phule identified the unique process of caste exploitation constructed in relations of dominance and subordination under the religious system of Brahmanism. In class society, the ownership of the means of production works as the basis of surplus appropriation. But in caste society, the elite castes never had total possession over means of production and the *Shudra* peasant castes had ownership over land. Nonetheless, their exploitation occurred through caste mode of exchange. Actually, the elite caste groups appropriated surplus through exerting control over process of exchange.¹⁶⁴

Phule traced the process of exchange between dominant and subordinate castes, i.e., Brahman priest and farmer, moneylender and farmer etc. The relationship between priest and farmer was not

162 *Ibid.*, p. 1326.

163 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

164 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 61.

mutually obligatory and reciprocal, as we see in the gift-exchange model in a free society, it was, unequal and exploitative transaction between the dominant and the subjugated where the Brahman priest was sacred, superior and privileged, and the *Shudra* farmer was impure, inferior and obliged; the priest was divine messenger and commanding father and the farmer was submitting *Bhakta*, obeying disciple and dependent child.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Phule also elaborated relations between the moneylender and the farmer where moneylender was patron, master, educated, cunning and commanding and farmer was needy, illiterate, servile, dependent, gullible client, constantly stumbling to manipulative games of the moneylender. Such relations of caste exploitation and slavery between Brahman and peasant or between moneylender and peasant acquired the form of hunter-prey relationship in the power structure under Hindu society. Phule called this slavery as “trammels of bondage by which the Brahmans have woven around them (*Shudra-Atishudras*) like the coils of serpent.”¹⁶⁶

Under the colonial rule, the key exploited class group in Maharashtra were the peasants and the key exploiters were high caste bureaucrats, moneylenders and priests which the Brahmans dominated. Taxes, cesses and state takeover of peasant lands were the crucial mechanisms of extracting surplus, supplemented by money lending and extortion for numerous religious rituals.¹⁶⁷ Psychologically, the farmers had accepted the ‘*Brahmanic* slavery’ and let the orthodox class rule and exploit under unjust Hindu social order. Phule opined that the institution of temple was a major tool of exploitation of the farmers. With the help of temple, the orthodoxy created various rituals and made the farmers observe them. Temple was not only made a tool of extortion, but it was made an emblem of casteism. Hence, Phule did an attack on the institution of temple and also the practice of idol worship in his writings, as discussed earlier.¹⁶⁸

165 *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

166 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 105.

167 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, p. 21.

168 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 120-127.

Phule describes an incident of *Brahmanic* exploitation of farmer in one of his polemical tracts *The Third Eye*. In the play, as described in Chapter-II, a Brahman priest goes to the farmer's house in his absence. His wife is pregnant for the first time. The Brahman begs alms. As she gives him alms in little amount, he becomes disgruntled and asks her for more. She tells him that her husband earns only four rupees per month. It shows that in those days, the farmer's earning for a month was only 4 rupees; and if calculated for a year, it would be Rs. 48. Nevertheless, the farmer had to spend Rs. 14 (with interest) to perform a religious ritual. As such, for only one ritual he had to spend about 30 percent of his income of a year. It also elucidates that due to such state of affairs, the poor farmer, his family and his unborn child all would be cursed to sink in poverty.¹⁶⁹

Through this play, Phule rejected for the first time the view that the sufferings of the lower castes were the product of a social system supported by all, except Untouchables, whose own backwardness was a part of the problem. By means of the commentator in the play, he argued that the old aged social injustice was not the result of merely of the greed of the priestly order, but it was result of mere a deliberate conspiracy in which generations of Brahmins had been involved to maintain the fiction of *Brahmanic* religious authority enshrined in the sacred books of the Hindus:

The Brahmins have for long time impressed upon the minds of *Malis* and *Kunbis*, with the display of their (religious) writings and powers, that the *Shudras* should never transgress the orders of Brahmins, and if any of them thought that this was not true, they were told to go and look at the books of Manu and the deeds of Parshuram which would confirm them in the proper belief.¹⁷⁰

In *Priestcraft Exposed (Brahmanache Kasab)*, a collection of four ballads, Phule, by depicting the omnipresence of the orthodox Brahmins in the roles of a priest, a schoolteacher, a *Kulklarni*, a *Mamlatdar*, a clerk, a reporter in the vernacular press and even a

169 Bheema Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

170 Jotirao Phule, *The Third Eye*, in *Purogami Satyashodhak*, Vol. 5, No. 2, April-June 1879, pp. 15-34, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

reformer, pointed out that all of them together built a “demonology of *Gramrakshas* (village demons) and *Kalamkasais* (wielders of the pen)”, all out to gobble up the ignorant *Shudra-Atihudras*.¹⁷¹ In the four narrative pieces, he traces the dependence of the cultivator (*Kunbi*) upon the priest at every stage of life. The first piece recalls the story of *The Third Eye*. The second piece describes how the priest plunders the *Shudra* farmer at his wedding. The third piece describes the ceremonies, expenditures and feasting that are necessary for the farmer when his daughter reaches puberty. And the fourth when the farmer builds a new house: here, Phule narrates that at the end of the day suddenly the priest comes to perform the ceremonies for the new house, and feasts on the delicacies provided by the owner of the house, and the labourers who have built it are deprived of their right.¹⁷²

The religion was being utilized by the priestly order to create ‘unproductive affairs’ in society and ‘favourable environment’ for exploitation. In the western countries economic institutions dominated in the nineteenth century, but in colonial Maharashtra *Brahmanic* religion was dominant and it was used to make a man lame. In this way, with the help of religion, according to Phule, the *Brahmanical* elite created a vicious cycle. The farmer, the poor, the common man was centre-point of this circle which he couldn’t come out from. He was stimulated to move by various ceremonies, rituals and superstitions.¹⁷³

Phule described that every stage of the farmer’s life was targeted to exploit. On his child’s birth, he was deceived by telling inauspicious things about his pre-natal child. After birth of the baby, he was wrestled from his joy by telling that *Shani* in his zodiac was wandering, and his baby’s horoscope was inauspicious for his future. In fact, the entire code of socio-religio-economic conduct in the religion of

171 Mahesh Gavaskar, “Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule’s Critique of Brahman Power” in S.M. Michael (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 99.

172 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, D. Keer & S. G. Malshe (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54, quoted in Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

173 Bhima Rangnathrao Rashkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-137.

orthodoxy was designed to exploit the poor peasant from the cradle to the grave.¹⁷⁴

According to Phule, the schoolmaster and the priest shared the common desire to conserve their caste privileges in religion and learning. On account of this, the schoolmaster treated his low caste pupils quite differently from the kids from his own caste:

If the children of their own caste make mistakes, they repeat and explain/
And give punishments wisely/ If other children make mistakes, they strike them with their fists /They twist their ears sharply/
When no one is watching, they beat the *Shudra* children/ And make them run away.¹⁷⁵

Here, Phule also made a critical comment on the working of the British Government which did not know anything about the malpractices of its Brahman employees: “When a blind man grinds, the dogs eat all flour.”¹⁷⁶ He further pointed first to the enduring ability of the religion of orthodoxy to command beliefs and obedience from its followers:

The circle of *Rishis*/ The strength of *Dharma*/ And the power of the *Vedas*/
A great shower of curses/ A kick on the chest of God! (This is a reference to one of the ancient Brahman sages, Bhṛigu, supposed to have kicked the god Vishnu in the chest, and escaped punishment because he was a Brahman).¹⁷⁷

In one of his important poems, ‘Lessons of Truth’, he exposes the hypocrisy of orthodox Brahmins:

The Brahmins have meat and liquor in the company of the British,
But disapprove of *Mangs* (the Untouchables) for doing the same and
boasts their purity.

174 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, D. Keer & S. G. Malshe (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54, quoted in Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

175 Jotirao Phule, *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department*, in *Satyadipika*, June 1869, pp. 88-91, quoted in Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

176 *Ibid.*

177 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, D. Keer & S. G. Malshe (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 54, quoted in Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

They take bribes while administering justice; and sweep the unjust things under the carpet.

They kiss the Muslim women with pleasure, but they consider the *Mahars* as low grade.

Thus the Brahmins disdain the world; they should be shunned, says Joti...

They attack the *Malechchas* (the Muslims) for their own gains.

...The Brahmins believe that they are superior by birth, and offend the rest of the world.

They created a different religion in their own interests; they exploit the *Shudras* in the guise of (that) religion.

...Make them followers of Truth, and make the world happy, says Joti.¹⁷⁸

As stated, Phule also described how temple enabled the priestly order to exploit the *Shudras* and *Atishudras*. In the modern economic sphere, bourgeoisie's exploitation of the proletariats produce output. In the 'Brahmanic exploitation', however, production was not taking place, and there was no question of innovation. In Hindu society, the places of temple were being used to hold fairs and people gathered there to worship gods. It is well known that four temples had been erected at the east, west, south and north corners of India which were known as the *Chardham*. It was believed that these four places should be visited by every Hindu. The farmer's economic condition was very critical in those days in Maharashtra, and he had not enough earning to meet even his daily needs. But the priests, Phule writes, suggested that his conditions would be 'improved', if the *Chardham* were visited by him:

If the pride/might of farmers is still not vanquished, the Brahman priests entice them to go for the holy pilgrimage of Badrikedar etc., and in the end, take them to Kashi and Prayag. There they loot them in thousands of rupees, shave off their beards and moustaches and bring them back to their homes. Later, they accept from them real big feasts....¹⁷⁹

178 Mahatma Jotirao Phule & Madhura Damle, "The Lessons of Truth", in *Indian Literature*, Vol. 58, No 1 (279), January-February 2014, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, pp. 16-18.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

On the persuasion of the priests the farmer even took loans from the moneylenders and visited the temples of *Chardham*. This pushed the farmer in the loan trap, and after few days, he had to wash his hand off his land.¹⁸⁰ In addition to *Chardham*, Pandharpur, Alandi, Jejuri, Nasik etc. were local pilgrimages and the farmer was further enticed to go to take *darshan* of different gods in *Vari*. *Vari* means to go to the pilgrimage on foot and in-group of people. It took minimum four days to visit the decided place. Pandharpur *Vari*, the most popular one, took one month to attend the *Ashadi Ekadashi*. Phule describes:

In Pandharpur, when all farmers along with their wives and children are bathing in the river Chandrabhaga, the priest Brahmins stand on the banks of the river and take cash gift of one *Shivari* each from them as a holy vow. This fair is never less than a lakh of people approximately and there from some farmers they collect enough to feed Ghee and *Roti*.... If you feel like it, give some cash gift to them. Otherwise, just make *Namaskar* to them from a distance and come out, and then they will send the offering to god Vithoba.... By following such 'honest' practices, hundreds of *Bhadave* Brahman priests in Pandharpur have become rich.¹⁸¹

Besides, the priests enticed the farmers from the neighbouring villages to perform the fortnightly *Vari* to *Alandi*, and from them, accepted on the twelfth day of the moon, on all the twelve months, feast for themselves of Ghee and *Roti*.¹⁸²

Phule further explained that even after all this, if some farming men and women were still left, the priest sermon givers would collect them all in some insignificant temple every night and enticed them to listen to the *Puranas* describing the amorous deeds of Radha and Krishna. At the conclusion, they kept all of them at a "fierce compe-

180 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

181 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in Asha Mundlay (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Vol. III, Mahatma Phule Source Material Publication Committee, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2002, p. 41.

182 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125.

tion” and collected from them great cash gifts in the tray of *Arati*, and then, sitting in palanquins with great magnificence, they went home in a procession with all their audience walking in front and behind them!¹⁸³

An important religious fest was *Saptaha* (holy week). In this week, all villagers had to participate in a ceremony, and the expenditure for this ceremony was collected from the poor villagers. The whole week, the men and women had to gather at the temple. The *Saptaha* was arranged on harvesting days. Phule expounds the incident in these words:

The priest Brahmins ... surround their necks with *Vina* and give cymbals in the hands of their friends and make them sing songs like parrots for days and nights and dance and jump around to the beat of the *Mrudanga* and all the while themselves sitting with grace... and every day collecting money for snacks. Then on the night of *Gokullashtami*, they collect cash gifts from the farmers without giving the excuse of new glass bangles for *Yashoda* on her delivery. In the morning at the time of breaking of the fast, they first gobble up meals of Ghee and *Roti* prepared at the cost of the farmers and leave the left over stale food for the farmers....¹⁸⁴

Phule elaborates further many other forms of ‘*Brahmanic* exploitation’ in his writings. For instance, when a farmer got his house built, he had to perform ‘*Vastushanti*’. Without this ritual ceremony, he could not step his foot in the house. Phule described this as under:

When the farmer’s children build their new houses, the *Shudra* labourers carry loaded baskets of building material on their chest and bellies in the heat of the midday sun.... (The Brahman priests) perform sacrificial rituals in their home, erect flags of rags under the eaves of house, gobble up elaborate meals of Ghee and *Roti* alongwith wives and children and then leave only the left over ... accepting cash gifts from the farmers and giving blessings, like the honest fox in a field of sugarcane.¹⁸⁵

183 *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

184 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in Asha Mundlay (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 41.

185 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

The marriage ceremony, further, became a big source of exploitation by the priests. Exploitation of the farmer started from the engagement, and at every stage of marriage, there was an involvement of the priest which was for the exploitation of the farmers.¹⁸⁶ Phule narrates it as follows:

At the time of the wedding of the farmer's sons, the Brahmans astrologers go to their houses, carrying an almanac in their hands. They delineate the zodiac circles in front of themselves and ask for the names of sons and daughters. Then having in mind the plan to benefit their own-selves, they make the tips of their thumbs dance on the phalanx of their fingers and take some money from the farmers in order to appease that planet through the establishment of the *Japa* ritual and for its ceremonial completion.¹⁸⁷

In fact, at the time of marriage, the priests say something inauspicious about bride or groom, and sow some seeds of fear in their mind. The beginning of their married life, thus, started from fear which was created by the priests for their own benefit. After performing marriage, the next ritual to be performed was known as *Sada*. On the day of *Sada* (i.e., the fourth day after marriage when the ceremony of giving new clothes to the bride and groom was performed), the priests charged amounts from the bride and groom's fathers, and also extracted some money for the ceremonial uprooting of the *Pandal*. Then the priests would compare certain wealthy farmers with known generous persons like Karna and excite them so much that at the conclusion of the ceremony, a big conference would be held in their homes to celebrate. At this conference, a gathering of "all kinds of Brahmans is arranged, and without distinctions, Vedic Brahmans, *Shashtris*, *Pauranic* story-tellers and *Bhikshuks* (wanderers), all and sundry, manage to get their *Dakshina*."¹⁸⁸ In a marriage, around Rs. 20 was charged as the marriage fee which were approximately 50 percent of the farmer's annual income.¹⁸⁹

After completion of marriage, the farmer had also to perform

186 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123

187 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

188 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

189 Bhima Rangnathrao Rasker, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

the *Pooja* of Satya Narayan. His duties did not stop here. He had to perform many other rituals. In fact, the priests have made a circle of rituals; the farmer cannot break it, and thus exploitation became a privilege of the priests.

According to Phule, even after death of the farmer, the exploitation continued. After his death his family was exploited in the name of various rituals:

In the end, when the farmer dies, the Brahmans, presenting themselves as the (authorised and trained) Brahmans who perform the ritual of death, make the family perform all manner of rituals, read the *Garudpurana* every day at the house and then on the tenth day, bring some respectable crowd of *Bhatjis* (Brahmans) from Dhankavadi or some such place, make the son pay him for crowing over the ritual, and alongwith the money for reading the *Garudpurana*, take at least metal jugs or brass, umbrellas, walking sticks, mattresses, and pair of dhotis as donation. They have also established the custom of annual *Shradha* for the dead farmer which is performed until all the children of that farmer are dead.¹⁹⁰

As such, even after the farmer's last funeral, he was not released from the grip of the priest. His soul was, said Phule, 'kept' at his home for not less than ten days. After ten days, *ShraddhalPinda* was performed at the bank of the river, and the son of the farmer was looted again here. On this occasion a big amount was charged and the farmer's son would be made to donate a ladder of gold. Every year, this ritual had to be performed by the farmer's family. On this occasion, the priest's feet were washed by the son and also worshipped by offering flowers, rice, *Kumkum* etc. He had to appease the priest by giving sweat feats and *Dakshina*. He had to do this until his death, and after his death his son would have to perform this ritual.¹⁹¹ Thus, exploitation started by the priestly order before birth would not end even after the farmer's death. It is hereditarily transferred from one generation to another and the vicious circle of exploitation worked continuously and unconstrainedly.

190 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

191 *Ibid.*

Phule also described in his writings, the role of orthodox Brahmins as clerks, accountants, administrators, judges and teachers drawing together different aspects of the 'Brahmanic exploitation' and power, and showed that they constituted parts of the same phenomenon. The most powerful groups among them were the *Kulakarnis* (village accountants), who "already have their influence firmly established over the *Shudras* by means of their cunning religion."¹⁹² The office of the *Kulakarni* provided immense opportunities for corruption and extortion. They especially caught, according to Phule, some illiterate farmers who could not read and write, lent money to them and, while writing the mortgage deeds, incorporated 'terrible conditions' with the help of their own kinsmen who wrote these deeds. While these deeds were read out aloud, these conditions were not read out or something else was read out instead.¹⁹³ Comparing the *Kulakarni* with the *Mulanis* (butchers), Phule writes in *Slavery*:

You know, how the Muslim kings had once assigned the task of slitting necks of birds and beasts to produce *halal* meat, to people from their own religion called *Mulanis*. But these expert Brahmins have perfected the art of slitting *Shudra* throats to such finesse that they have left the *Mulanis* far behind. Therefore, all village people have conferred on them the title of 'pen-wielding butchers'.¹⁹⁴

In *Priestcraft Exposed*, Phule further took up his argument (of the Brahman power) in the revenue and judicial departments, and the corruption which resulted. In the registration of mortgage bonds and debts and in the drawing up of deposition of cases of debt in the courts, the illiterate cultivators were at the mercy of clerks, accountants, administrators and judges belonging to a particular caste. He points out in one of his *Akhandas* how a small clerk could extend his power by helping the moneylenders in all possible ways:

He lives for money only.../The size of the debt is doubled/ He copies it down onto the mortgage bond/ Now two owners (i.e., the debtor and the creditor) are given the card in the register/ With his ritual purity

192 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 81.

193 *Ibid.*

194 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

and the mark of the sacred ashes on his forehead/ He storms at the owner/ He blames him for everything.¹⁹⁵

While estimating the historical implications of Phule's critique of 'Brahmanic exploitation' of the peasantry, Rosalind O'Hanlon remarks:

In this equation of the Brahman with the money lender, Phule raised a question that was to be of increasing significance in the history of the non-Brahman movement from 1870s: the identification of the money lender, as well as the Brahman, as the enemy of the lower castes. Phule was overwhelmingly concerned with contemporary Hindu religion as a worldview and the legitimization of the social structure which entangled the Shudra in a never ending series of illusions (and exploitations) ... Later, non-Brahman polemicists added the figure of the money lender to that of the Brahman, and concerned themselves also with more purely economic exploitation of the former's usurious practices.¹⁹⁶

Finally, it emerges from our discussion that Jotirao Phule countered *Brahmanic* Hinduism in its all premises. Since Brahmanism was a system of caste-slavery so far as the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* were concerned, he critiqued, countered and also rejected it *in toto* as a 'religion' to be accepted. Being a fierce critic of the *Brahman Dharma*, he heavily attacked its ideology, its social system based on caste, its irrational religious theories and dogmas and its exploitation strategies. He equally made it clear that whatever he had written had not a slightest degree of exaggeration and what he had described "is not one-hundredth part of the rogueries that are generally practiced on my poor, illiterate and ignorant *Shudra* brethren."¹⁹⁷ Phule did not stop with critiquing the religion of orthodoxy alone, but came out with his own framework of Hindu social reform. In the next chapter, we'll discuss his framework of Hindu social reform.

195 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, in D. Keer & S. G. Malshe (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 57, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

196 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-213.

197 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

Proposing a Framework of Hindu Social Reform

(1)

Alternative Model to *Brahman Dharma*

Jotirao Phule was an organic intellectual who not only anticipated the hegemony in *Brahmanic* religion and culture¹, but also came out with an original and, of course, dynamically radical framework of Hindu social reform to provide an alternative model to the *Brahman Dharma*. While discussing Phule's framework of social reform, the most important thing to remember is that he represented a very different set of interests and a very different outlook of the Indian renaissance. The upper caste elite and its intellectuals expressed an ideology of the renaissance (and also nationalism) based on bourgeois class aspirations and the 'great' tradition. Phule, however, represented the idea of a cultural revolution with an outlook based on lower class/caste aspirations and the 'little' tradition. His framework of social reform, therefore, represented the desires of the lower castes for social transformation along revolutionary lines.² That, if the '*Shudras*', '*Atishudras*' and women had to be liberated from the

1 J.V. Naik, "The Reformer and the Quest for Social Justice in History" (General Presidential Address), *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Vol. 67, Calicut, 2006-07 (hereafter: "The Reformer and the Quest for Social Justice", *IHC*, Vol. 67), p. 32.

2 Gail Omvedt, "Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 September 1971, p. 1969.

'Brahmanic slavery', there was a need of radical blueprint of social reform.

To understand Phule's framework of Hindu social reform, we should know firstly, the state of affairs in the field of 'social reform' in Maharashtra during his times. As discussed in Chapter-I, different reformers of different spectra were active in Bombay presidency during the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century India witnessed the beginning of social reform movements by educated members of the Indian upper caste elite. Naturally, such reform movements represented the concerns of upper caste/educated middle class elite for the urgency of reform in the institutions of family, marriage and some inhuman social customs/traditions, particularly affecting the women. They were indeed for a regeneration in Hindu society. But in Maharashtra (and some other parts of India), there also emerged some radical mass-based movements. In fact, the peasant, tribal and low caste sections of Hindu society were all adversely affected by the colonization process and responded, unlike the upper caste elite, with their peculiar efforts of renaissance and rebellion. But due to the lack of access to education and control over media of communication, their renaissance and reformation remained in a more incipient, localized and incomplete form. Through Jotirao Phule's movement, however, the lower caste masses expressed their consciousness with a forceful voice.³

No doubt, Phule was the founder of a radical reform movement in Maharashtra. Nevertheless, the social reform movement he founded should also not be seen in isolation but in the larger context of the colonial situation and Indian responses to it. In Maharashtra, the Brahman and non-Brahman social and political activities developed parallel to and influenced by one-another as well as by the presence of the British colonial masters. This process, termed by the historians as 'Indian renaissance', mainly applied to the efforts of the first generation of Indian intellectuals and social/political activists under

3 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society: Non-Brahman Movement in Western India*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976; rpt. Manohar, New Delhi, 2011(hereafter: *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*), pp. 96-97.

colonialism. With ruthless self-criticism, they sought to lay the ground for a social transformation in accordance with science and rationality in Indian culture in order to recreate a modern society in India. In this generation, Phule stood first as an expression of the lower caste Hindus for a desire to total reformation in Hinduism.⁴

But even before Phule (and other reformers), the Christian missionaries were the first who came in the field of social reform. They attacked vehemently the old/orthodox Hindu religion on various accounts like practice of idolatry, dominance of Brahmans, caste-system, untouchability and some misogynistic social evils in it. They tried their best to undermine the public credibility of Hindu religion including its belief system and mythology. We know that Phule also understood theoretically the shortcomings of his paternal religion through the missionary propaganda.⁵

As regards the caste Hindu reformers, the general leadership of their movement in Maharashtra was chiefly in the hands of Brahmans and some other elite intellectuals. Reformers like Balshastri Jambhekar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh 'Lokahitwadi', Justice M.G. Ranade, Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, Vishnubua Pundit etc. took their inspiration of reform from the scriptures and religious literature, though the orthodoxy also justified the old social systems and practices on the basis of the same texts. In the meetings of *Prarthana Samaj*, various prayers were chanted, which were mainly based on the literature of *Bhakti* saints in Maharashtra. During 1870s, Ranade delivered a couple of lectures in the meetings of the *Samaj* where he argued that the *Samaj* was founded to strengthen the *Bhakti* cult.⁶ Other example is of *Arya Samaj* which was founded by Dayananda on the basis of Vedic philosophy and 'Return to the *Vedas*' was its call. With such an ideological framework, the mid-nineteenth cen-

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

5 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002 (First published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p. 52.

6 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *Contribution of Phule and Shahu to Caste and Religion*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 1987, p. 270

tury mainstream social reform movements of the Hindus in Bombay presidency directed their campaign against some harmful social customs and practices of Hindu society and for promotion of women's education etc. The drawback of such movements was, however, that their framework was *Brahmanical* and their activities were confined to the upper caste Hindus. Jotiba Phule was the first reformer from the lower castes, who drew attention to the limitations of such movements and raised a forceful voice against Brahmanism, *Brahmanic* hegemony and the entire *Brahmanical* social order.

Phule accused *Prarthana Samaj* and *Arya Samaj* of representing the 'Aryan heritage' which, according to him was pro-Brahman. It was for this reason, that he attacked the aforesaid societies. Though, to be fair to these societies, it must be said that they were never antagonistic to Phule or his *Satyashodhak Samaj*. Moreover, the leaders of *Prarthana Samaj* sympathized with Phule's movement. R.G. Bhandarkar, one of the patriarchs of the society, agreeing with Phule, affirmed that "if we ask England to remove our disabilities, we must, as a necessary preliminary, show that we are worthy of the favour by removing the disabilities of the oppressed classes of our society."⁷ Ranade, another stalwart of the *Samaj* and the founder of the Indian National Social Conference, condemned the 'disgraceful oppression' of, and 'injustices' meted out to the members of lower caste Hindus.⁸ Obviously, Phule, despite his differences, also had high regards for those reformers and, as told earlier, once on the request of Ranade, helped in organizing a successful procession of Dayananda in Poona in 1875, notwithstanding the threat of the conservatives to intercept it.⁹

As a matter of fact, Phule's difference with other high caste reformers was based on some profound and fundamental grounds. Other reformers, despite their sincerity to the cause they represented, had not got rid of the ideology of Brahmanism altogether. They just

7 N.B. Utgikar (ed.), *Collected Works of Sir R.G. Bhandarkar*, BOIR, Pune, 1928, Vol. II, pp. 501-502.

8 J.V. Naik, "The Reformer and the Quest for Social Justice", *IHC*, Vol. 67, p. 33.

9 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, pp. 106-107.

wanted to 'repair' the old orthodox religion, and, actually, wanted to revive it. No doubt, they tried to build a positive public opinion on some issues of Hindu social reform like Sati, child remarriage, widow remarriage, ban of foreign travel, women's education, eradication of untouchability etc., their approach was, however, patronalistic, caste-bound and *Brahmanical* and their high caste worldview/prejudices were apparent in much of their activities and pronouncements. From Lokahitwadi to Ranade, all accepted the validity of ancient Hindu scriptures and sought their support to justify their social reform agenda. But Phule accepted only rationality, morality and humanism and judged all prevailing customs, traditions, social practices, religious beliefs, rituals and even scriptures on the parameters of these values.¹⁰ To make any concrete reform in Hindu society, he believed, it was a prerequisite for a genuine reformer to get completely rid of the ideology of Brahmanism/ *Brahman Dharma* altogether which was not a religion, but a system of religious slavery.

We know that the bulk of Phule's writings on religion consist of a fierce polemic against *Brahman Dharma*. The *Nyaya Sutra* talks of sixteen methods/ways of knowing the existence (*Sat*); *Vitanda* (destructive criticism) is one of them, and Phule's attack on the religion of orthodoxy belongs to this method. He appears to be ferocious and unforgiving in his attack. According to Gopal Guru, his theory and method of hermeneutics was against the hegemonic and monological mode, generally found in *Brahmanical* tradition where there was no scope of equality and learning from others.¹¹ In *Slavery* (and his other writings), he puts his finger squarely on 'Brahmanism' and the intellectual arrogance and authoritarianism found in it and clearly defines it as a system of 'slavery' which imposes almost the

10 M.H. Jadhav, "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra: Review of Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra by J. R. Shinde", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 17, 26 April, 1986 (hereafter: "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra", *EPW*, 26 April 1986), p. 740.

11 Gopal Guru, "Liberating Jotirao Phule: Review of G.P. Deshpande (ed.), Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction)", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 30, 2003 (hereafter: "Liberating Jotirao Phule", *EPW*, 30 Aug 2003), p. 3703.

same hardships upon the lower castes in India, like the Black ones had to suffer under American slavery:

Now the only difference between them and the slaves in America is that whereas the Blacks were captured and sold as slaves, the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* were conquered and enslaved by the *Bhats*. Except for this difference, all the other conditions in which they lived were the same. There is simply not an iota of difference between them. All the calamities suffered by Blacks were endured by the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* who probably suffered more but not less at the hands of the (orthodox) Brahmans. The tales of their sufferings would not only cause the hardest hearts to shed tears but would also dissolve the hardest layers of rocks on the earth and release streams of tears from within which would drown the whole world.¹²

Needless to say that Phule's position was altogether different from that of the elite reformers. He found that though most of his contemporary reformers spoke of the Hindu social reform, their thoughts and actions, in fact, expressed the interests of an elite class and not of a whole Hindu society. They opted, as elites do, not for a revolutionary transformation but for 'modernization' and, in fact, revitalization of the traditional social orders. They developed such frameworks through which 'eastern morals and western science' could meet. For this end, they took up, as discussed in Chapter-III, the 'Aryan theory of race' which had the implication of identifying the high caste elite ethnically with their British conquerors rather than the majority of their low caste fellow countrymen who were dark-skinned 'non-Aryans' and were called in traditional *Varna* terminology *Shudras* and *Atishudras*.¹³ Their agenda of the so-called modernization of 'Hindu culture' and the moral advance of India did not speak of the larger interests of the lower classes. As such, while most of the upper caste elite reformers/nationalists adopted the twin strategy of championing the cause of Indian renaissance and denouncing major social reforms in the name of the Hindu religious traditions, the ideas and actions of these reformers/nationalists evi-

12 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, Left Word, New Delhi, 2002, rpt. 2016, p. 40.

13 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 101.

dently expressed the interests of a class and not of the entire Indian society/nation as a whole.¹⁴

As such, it is quite clear, as Gail Omvedt has also argued, that Phule was sharply different from his other contemporary social reformers. Brahmanism, according to him, was the chief cause of all inequalities and other problems in Hindu society.¹⁵ He argued that the priestly order had to be attacked because their hegemony was clearly conspicuous as they exercised their hegemony over heterogeneous categories of the *Shudra-Atishudras*. He was, no doubt, a social revolutionary in his ideas and was more practically-oriented than other social reformers.¹⁶ These characteristics made him a radical social reformer of his times.

According to Sharad Patil, the Indian renaissance was bound to be unfinished as it was visualized through the so-called nationalist or class viewpoints, which were basically hegemonic and *Brahmanic*. It is notable in this context that in Western Europe, the problems created by religious bigotry, sway of tradition and social inequality were tackled in renaissance, reformation, and the social struggles associated with the industrial revolution. The Indian renaissance, led by the upper caste elite and its intellectuals, was, however, far from taking such a leap. It could be only successful when it represented an ideology of the radical social reform.¹⁷ Obviously, Phule was also concerned about the nation and nation-building, but his nation consisted of and represented the interests of a different people, i.e., the non-Brahman and lower caste majority of Hindu society. According to the elite reformers/early nationalists, the rem-

14 M.H. Jadhav, "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra", *EPW*, 26 April, 1986, p. 741.

15 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, pp. 98-104.

16 Braj Ranjan *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2005, rpt. 2013, p. 255.

17 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance" (Report on a Seminar organised by Centre for Social Studies, Surat on 9-10 January 1991), in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 21, 25 May 1991 (hereafter: "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, 25 May 1991), p. 1327.

edy for regeneration of Hindu society/India was that at first all castes must have to unite – through faithful adherence of their respective caste duties – and return to the ‘purity’ of their great ancestors. The unity thus achieved, they believed, would make the Hindu society strong enough to drive away the foreigners and to establish *Swaraj*. Phule was dismissive of this brand of renaissance/nationalism, seeking in it subtle elite attempts to preserve traditional socio-religious hierarchies.¹⁸ His advice to the ‘learned *Arya Bhats*’, in his treatise *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, to this respect was worth consideration:

But if the learned *Arya-Bhat* Brahmins really wish to unite the people of this country and take the nation ahead, then first they must have drowned their cruel (*Brahmanic*) religion... and, publicly and clearly, must cease using any artifice in their relationship with the *Shudras* who have been demeaned by that religion, and trample on inequality and the *Vedanta* opinion. Till a true unity is established, there will be no progress in this country.¹⁹

Thus, being a radical reformer, Phule wanted to abandon *Brahman Dharma* tooth and nail and also to provide an alternative ‘*Satyadharm*’ model of the same, especially for his lower caste fellows. According to him, other reformers were chiefly interested to resolve the petty issues of reform concerning their own class interests and, therefore, they betrayed the interests of vast majority of lower castes Hindus. For instance, Phule wrote a letter through M.G. Ranade to the organizers of Marathi Literature Conference saying that since they were ignorant and indifferent about the tremendous sufferings of the lower castes in the countryside, he did not desire to attend the conference.²⁰

Before proceeding further to discuss Phule’s framework of Hindu social reform and his alternative model to the *Brahman Dharma*, we must also know that there was a problem in Hinduism which

18 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

19 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 178.

20 *Dnyanodya*, 11 June 1885; also see P.G. Patil (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule – Reflections*, Vol. II, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1991, Vol. II, pp. 109-110.

every reformer, including Phule, had to face. It was about how to distinguish the religious institutions from the social institutions. Definitely, it was a big problem from a sociological point of view. There has been in almost all other religions a difference between the religious institutions and social institutions. But in the case of Hinduism, we come across the fact that here it is relatively difficult to distinguish between the two. In fact, the Hindu social order was basically prescribed and consecrated by the religion. B.R. Ambedkar has noted this problem in these words:

The Hindus are the only people in the world whose social order – the relation of man to man – is consecrated by the religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate.... It is not, therefore, enough to say that the Hindus are the only people in the world with a sacred code of religion. So are the Zoroastrians, Israelites, Christians and Muslims. All these have sacred codes. But they do not prescribe, nor do they consecrate a particular form of social structure – the relationship between man and man in a concrete form – and make it sacred and inviolate. The Hindus are singular in this respect. That is what has given the Hindu social order its abiding strength to defy the revenges of time and the onslaught of the time.²¹

According to Tarkatirtha Laxmanshastri Joshi, each and every situation of the daily life in Hindu society in the nineteenth century Maharashtra was being determined by the religious traditions, customs and manners. There was a religio-philosophical ground for all such traditions.²² Particularly, the social institutions, customs and traditions were so intermingled in Hindu religious philosophy and its traditions that one couldn't think of reforming the 'society', leaving aside the 'religion'. In fact, roots of nearly all social problems of Hindu society lay in Hindu religion. For instance, the roots of problem of social hierarchies and inequalities could be traced to the

21 *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (ed. Vasant Moon), Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, Vol. III, pp. 128-129.

22 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *National Biography: Jotirao Phule*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992, p. 79.

idea of *Varnashrama Dharma* and it was enshrined in the doctrines of *Dharma, Karma*, rebirth etc.

Therefore, for reforming a caste-ridden society, one would have to reform the Hindu religion itself, and for that purpose, a dynamically radical approach became a necessity for any genuine reformer. Phule was the first Hindu reformer (and later on his disciple B.R. Ambedkar) who could understand this problem and accordingly devised his strategies of social reform. As Arvind Deshpande rightly remarks that while other social reformers aimed at social change within the 'framework of (Hindu) culture', Phule, having a broader and critical understanding of Hindu culture and society, came out with a radical approach of Hindu social reform. As such, his attack was not just on Brahmanism, it was on the entire social culture of Hindus (which was largely based upon *Brahman Dharma*).²³

It is also pointed out that there was a risk of becoming anti-religious for reformers in such a situation, but, admirably, Phule, despite of his all radicalism, never became anti-religious or anti-Hindu. In fact, as G.P. Deshpande has pointed out, Phule hardly used the term Hindu or Hinduism for denouncing social evils. He referred to 'Brahmanism' instead, though his opposing of Brahmanism included "almost everything within the (orthodox) Hindu system."²⁴

A genuine reformer, Phule, as such, had come out with a religiously radical approach to Hindu social reform. In fact, he was a deeply religious man from the core of his heart. His religious thoughts got prominence in almost all of his writings. His first book, published in 1853, was *Quest for the Creator* which indicates that he began his contribution to social thought with his insights on religion. And his last writing – *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth* – was also a marvelous treatise on religious ethics and universal spiritualism.²⁵

Phule understood that the strongest hold of religious traditions on the lower castes and other Hindus was derived from the extensive integration of Hindu religious literature into the popular and

23 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, 25 May 1991, p. 1325.

24 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

25 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

oral traditions of Maharashtra. His answer to this, as discussed, was to provide an alternative interpretation of texts, myths and stories most common in popular Hinduism. He linked his interpretation to important popular symbols and structures found in contemporary Maharashtrian society in order to convey its 'real' meaning, purpose of which was to unite all lower classes against their 'historical' and 'cultural' adversaries.²⁶

While in Hindu society the caste-slavery rested upon the religion of orthodoxy, Phule, who aimed at complete destruction of caste hierarchies and inequalities, proposed an alternative model which was fundamentally in opposition to *Brahmanical* religious and social order. As such, his non-Brahmanism was not simply a result of the British policy of 'divide-and-rule' or 'missionary propaganda', as could be argued from a nationalist point of view, but it traced its origins in his idea of religious radicalism and, in the words of Gail Omvedt, emerged as the "first expression of Hindu reformation movement" in modern India.²⁷ G.P. Deshpande remarks on this aspect of Phule's activism in the following words:

Phule's achievement was that he widened the very idea of a social organization, which Bombay and Calcutta had restricted to being an upper-caste *Bhadralok*, or, to use the Marathi word, *Pandharpesha* phenomenon, Phule and the (*Satyashodhak*) *Samaj* began their activity at the lower end of the social spectrum. This activity took Phule to all corners of western Maharashtra addressing meetings of *Shudras*. Unlike many *Bhadralok/Pandharpesha* reformers and their organizations, Phule's vision, and the scope ... was broad, sweeping. There was virtually no aspect of social life that did not engage his attention.²⁸

It was clear to Phule that Brahmanism was a religious, or more accurately *Dharmik*, order which perpetuated, rationalized, and made sacrosanct, the dominance of the priestly order and high caste elite in Hindu society. Needless to say, his was not on an attack on Brahmans, but essentially on the ideology of *Brahmanic* hegemony (*Brahmanache Varchaswa/Varchaswavad*). Interestingly, this

26 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

27 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p. 98.

28 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

view of Brahmanism was not held by Phule alone. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, Phule's bitter adversary and a staunch orthodox, admitted this dichotomy, though unconsciously. He (Chiplunkar) used the word (*Dharma*) in all everyday practices and even in politics and administration, where he defended the religion of orthodoxy and the 'superior powers' of the priestly caste: "it is the Brahmans that hold the key to knowledge."²⁹ Phule was a critic of such representation of *Dharma*.

Understandably, Phule's method in the analysis of Hindu social order was not to separate *Jati* from *Varna* as other Hindu reformers and thinkers usually stressed upon. In fact, the term *Jati* hardly makes an appearance in his writings, he mainly used the term *Varna Vyavastha*. As the caste-ridden social system derived its authority from the *Vedas* and especially from the *Purusha Sukta* in the *Rigveda* which asserted *Varna* superiority, it was necessary to develop a counter-discourse to it in *Varna* terms. Deshpande, while comparing Jotirao Phule with Karl Marx, informs us that as a social critic, Phule created the dichotomous structure of Hindu society by placing:

Brahmans against the *Shudra-Atishudras* at one level ... by putting *Brahmanic* theory of its head. It was argued at that time that in the *Kaliyuga* (the last of the four epochs according to *Brahmanic* Hinduism, and the one in which we live), there are only two *Varnas*, the first (Brahman) and the last (*Shudra*). This was, of course, supposed to be a sign of the degeneration that society had suffered. Phule turned this notion into a dichotomous structure, in order to emphasize the bipolarity of society. It will be recalled that Marx did something similar in his analysis of capitalism, by emphasizing the bipolarity of modern society between the bourgeoisie and proletariat.³⁰

It appears that Deshpande places the structural setting of Phule's analysis of Hindu social order into crude binary opposites which leads to us to reductionist arguments and it also sounds simplistic. It is true that his main emphasis was to demonstrate the basis on which

29 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phoolley: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Publication, Bombay, 1964, Third Edition, 2013, pp. 147-148.

30 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

all the oppressed could come together and unite, rather than on the infinite divisions which split them.³¹ This, however, does not mean that he did not specially recognize the problem of Untouchables. In fact, he had more passionately raised the issue of their oppression in the *Brahmanic* Hinduism as ones who were reduced to highly “dis-advantaged and oppressed” state as a result of the “religious bigotry and tyranny” practiced by the orthodoxy³², and it would be difficult to find a “more horrifying example” of such a behavior in the whole world.³³ Phule even wrote a full-fledged book entitled *Asprashyacha Kaifiyat (Untouchables’ Apologia)* explaining their ‘hardships’ and ‘sufferings’ and demanding ‘special measures’ for their upliftment.³⁴ Admittedly, he equally emphasized that the Untouchables were part and parcel of the larger ‘community of the oppressed’ (i.e., the *Shudra-Atishudras*), who were all victimized, though in different degrees, by their common adversaries.

Hence, Phule, by and large, founded his ideology, framework and model to enable all the victims of ‘Brahmanism’ to know the real reasons of their plight so as to set them free from the caste-slavery. In the introduction of *Gulamagiri*, he clarified his ‘intention’ as under:

Since hundreds of years, the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* have suffered innumerable tribulations and lived in wretched conditions under the yoke of the *Brahmanic* rule. They have had to endure abject poverty and severe afflictions for ages. The sole intention of this treatise is to direct the attention of all these oppressed people towards their (common) plight and make them consider their situation properly so as to enable them to free themselves from the slavery of the Brahmans, from their oppression and injustice.³⁵

31 Jagganath Begari, “Jotirao Phule: A Revolutionary Social Reformer”, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. LXXI, No. 2, April-June 2010, (hereafter: “Jotirao Phule: A Revolutionary Social Reformer”, *IJPS*, Vol. LXXI), p. 407.

32 Jotirao Phule, *Untouchables’ Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

33 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), p. 68

34 Jotirao Phule, *Untouchables’ Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 86-93.

35 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

It is significant to note here that Phule's approach/framework/model was not solely based on caste, in fact, he was also the first to think of Indian/Hindu society in terms of class. He argued that all those who produced society's wealth were the lower castes. They were made to suffer in the name of *Dharma* or *Varnashrama Dharma* by the high caste elites whom Phule regarded as bloodsucking consumers of society's resources. He made every effort to bring together all laboring classes – *Kunbis, Malis, Dhangars, Ramoshis, Bhils, Kolis, Mahars* and *Mangs* (alongwith minorities) – under one umbrella, to wage a morality-driven and knowledge-based struggle against the *Brahmanical* falsehood.³⁶ In *Satsar-I (Essence of Truth-I)*, he expresses the anguish of the toiling classes in these words:

When your *Aryan* ancestors became the rulers on earth and lords of the *Shudra-Atishudras* taking support from the word *Dharma* and ruined the lives of the people like *Kunbi, Mali, Agari, Koli, Bhil, Ramoshi, Mang* and *Mahar*, why should we be angry with the virtuous people like the Christians and Muslims even if they became the rulers of your *Aryan* ancestors?³⁷

It clearly appears that Phule's motto was to unite the peasant castes with the artisan, untouchable and tribal masses, and his broad-based 'community of the oppressed', which was the cornerstone of his alternative model to the *Brahman Dharma*, comprised all those who were at the receiving end of the *Brahmanical* system. Significantly, one of the aims of Phule's first play, *Trutiya Ratna*, was to convince his audience that all castes/groups belonging to *Shudra-Atishudras* did share some common interests and common social position and plight. Nonetheless, as told, he did not declare the struggle of the 'community' with the *Brahmanical* elite to be a perpetual or prolonged one and his ultimate aim was not revolution but reformation of Hinduism and the restoration of equality, brotherhood and love among Hindus in particular and all human beings in general. Hence, while rejecting the *Brahmanic* notions of 'high' and 'low', 'pure' and

36 Jagganath Begari, "Jotirao Phule: A Revolutionary Social Reformer", *IJPS*, Vol. LXXI, p. 403.

37 Jotirao Phule, *Satsar*, Number I, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 208.

'polluted' and 'sacred' and 'unsacred', Phule, in his alternative model, preached the idea of universal brotherhood, particularly through the principles enshrined in his book *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*. This idea transcends all artificial divisions/distinctions based on caste, class, gender, community, status, position, privilege, physical condition, faith, opinion, political ideology, food habits or the mode of apparel, etc.³⁸

In his alternative model, Phule argued further that before trying to overturn the material power of the upper classes, it was necessary to step out of the ideology of Brahmanism, for which proper access to knowledge was an essential prerequisite. In *Cultivator's Whipcord*, while suggesting some concrete measures for improving the farmers' conditions to the Governor General of India sitting in the "cool mountains of Shimla", he wrote:

Thus the Brahmans, employed in government jobs, and the mythologists, storytellers, teachers in schools strive day and night, using all their cunning, to prevent the breakdown of these distinctions and hierarchies. Therefore, until the farmers' children become able enough to manage positions in Government, not more than the proportionate number of Brahmans should be employed in Government jobs, and the remaining posts should be given to *Mussalmans* or (non-Brahman) Hindus or Britons. It is only then that they (Brahmans) will stop obstructing the education of the farmer.³⁹

It should be clarified here that Phule did not want simply jobs for the lower castes in Government administration; he also demanded for a radical restructuring of the administration itself, and also for the transfer of power to the non-Brahmans, so that the lower castes might be re-educated to a set of values more secular and egalitarian than those represented in the *Brahman Dharma*. He considered this as a prerequisite for all other forms of liberation for the lower castes.⁴⁰

It is clear that to Phule, a more essential and continuing way to

38 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 33-37.

39 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 179.

40 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

change the existing power structure and power relations in Hindu society could be through the means of mass education. No doubt, other reformers also emphasized on education, but there was a difference. The kind of education that Phule stood for was rational, modern and scientific which could work as a means for social change and transformation in Hindu society. As a staunch rationalist, he laid maximum emphasis on imparting of such education and wanted to use *Vidya* (education/knowledge) as a weapon to bring about social change. It would lead, to use the words of Gail Omvedt, to a 'cultural revolution', and also scientific/rational thinking in Hindu society. He viewed that education must be rational as it provokes and stimulates our minds and gives us a sense of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong and what is truth and what is untruth,⁴¹ Significantly, the 'truth seeking' was seen by him as a quest guided by the individual's own 'rational faculty', not by the dictates of any religious leaders or authoritative text:

Why have you gone mad (lost your reason)?The Creator has endowed all beings with eyes (eye sight) with which they are able to see one another. He has also equipped them with the rational faculty with which they can search for the (real) truth and lead the ignorant to the (right) path. The Creator has ordained (only) one Religion of Universal Truth (for us all). What is propriety of the people quarreling (among themselves) on various counts? Let all human beings conduct themselves in awe and fear of the Creator, and thus lead happy lives, says Joti.⁴²

One of the foremost features of Phule's framework of social reform was that unlike other Hindu reformers, he never thought that the lower castes should imitate the *Brahmanic* way of life. To use the sociologists' terminology, he was against the tendency of *sanskritization* by which, in those days, a low Hindu caste started changing his customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of high

41 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to Education Commission* (19 October 1882), in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 210-12.

42 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

castes, particularly Brahmans.⁴³ Perhaps, this was also a reason of his opposition to the activities of *Brahmo Samaj*, *Prarthana Samaj* and *Arya Samaj*. In the regard, Omvedt observes:

He also rejected any tendency to 'sanskritize', to try to develop programme of uplift and social mobility through adopting the customs of the elite. Such 'sanskritization' has been a part of many low-caste social movements of India, and was very much part of the *Arya Samaj*, *Prarthana Samaj* and *Brahmo Samaj* tendency. But it was not to be found in the *Satyashodhak Samaj* at all which, instead, stressed the rejection of priests, proposed some very simple marriage ceremonies which also stressed woman's equality and urged a modern scientific outlook and a vow to educate one's children both boys and girls. Though, a tendency towards *sanskritization* did develop later in the non-Brahman Movement⁴⁴

As matter of fact, Phule strongly opposed *Brahmanical* practices such as wearing of the sacred thread etc. and mocked at attempts claiming a higher status by adopting the customs and practices of the high castes. Such moves, he argued, obscured the reality that all social divisions were part of the same engine of social oppression. Braj Ranjan Mani also clarifies that Phule stressed the need to reject outrightly, all *sanskritizing* activities and tendencies which led people into the trap of Brahmanism and inculcated further, the constitution of new divisions among the marginalized.⁴⁵ Phule also stressed that the sacerdotal literature and knowledge system were produced to establish cultural hegemony; distinguishing markers like *Gayatri Mantra* or the sacred thread were devised to legitimize birth-based superiority; and religious leaders like Shankaracharya preached and philosophized the theories that enforced orthodox worldview.⁴⁶ Hence, his mission was not to 'modernize' the *Brahmanical* distinguishing markers by making them accessible to some upwardly

43 For a theoretical understanding of the concept of *sanskritization*, see M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1972.

44 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, pp. 127-128.

45 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

mobile castes (like Marathas etc.), but to construct an alternative culture for the community of the oppressed based on morality, equality, fraternity and reason.

Here, the critics could point out a contradiction in Phule's framework. He used the term '*Kshatriya*' for the *Shudra-Atishudras* of ancient times. However, in arguing that all lower castes could rightfully call themselves 'ancient *Kshatriyas*', an existing process of upward social mobility among Marathas etc. was, perhaps, in his mind. Further, he did so in a very unconventional and radical way: what of suggesting a paradox between the orthodoxy and all other classes in Hindu society. It was a source of strength in the sense that it allowed the retention of traditional loyalties and aspirations in a new radical guise. It was definitely a weakness, as Rosalind O'Hanlon points out, in that there was always the possibility of slipping back into the simple *sanskritizing* claims without any of the qualifying radicalism of Phule's own thought.⁴⁷

In any case, Phule was originally for *de-sanskritization* of the lower caste Hindus and his criticism of the religion of orthodoxy and all of its dogmas, customs and traditions, as noted, was an evidence of this. His alternative model to *Brahman Dharma* was actually a sort of '*de-Brahmanized* Hinduism'. Throwing light upon Phule's vision of his alternative system, a leading sociologist, Thom Wolf, writes:

The starting point for Phule, however, was beyond the Manu world-view horizons, outside the *Brahmanic* system. Thus, Phule called for Manu alternative seeking an alternative to the traditional Hindu system, by calling for nothing less than a foundational change of Indian society. Phule looked around his India and saw the necessity for an alternative.... Therefore, Phule almost 100 years before Ambedkar, saw need for total transformation – political, economic, social and spiritual and sought a comprehensive alternative to the 3000 years old system.⁴⁸

Similarly, Kancha Ilaiah, a renounced scholar of Dalit Studies, believes that Phule was the only public intellectual other than and

47 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

48 Thom Wolf, "*India Progress-Prone: 21st Century India and the Baliraja Proposal of Mahatma Phule*", Oakes Worldviews Bulletin, Vol. 7. Issue-2, Lucknow, 2007, p. 12.

before Ambedkar, who thoughtfully saw the changes needed for Indian transformation. As a result, he became the person whom both Ambedkar as well as Gandhi acknowledged as their own Guru. It was Phule alone, who in the nineteenth century, worked from a “comprehensive scheme for India’s social, political, economic and spiritual transformation.”⁴⁹ Assessing Phule’s alternative model for transformation, G.P. Deshpande keenly observes:

Phule’s canvas was broad, his sweep (was) majestic. He identified and theorized the most important questions of his time – religion, the *Varna* system, ritualism, language, literature, British rule, mythology, the gender question, the conditions of production in agriculture, the lot of the peasantry. This list, already formidable, can be extended as well. No other Indian figure of the nineteenth century comes to mind who displayed this sort of range. Was Phule then a social reformer? The answer will be ‘no’. A social reformer is a liberal humanist. Phule was more of a revolutionary. He had a complete system of ideas.... He identified the *Shudra-Atishudras* as the leading agency of a social revolution. And the *Shudra-Atishudras* will lead the revolution on behalf of the whole society, to liberate the entire people from the shackles of Brahmanism.⁵⁰

A system of ideas, again to use the words of Deshpande, is not complete till there is a principle of hope that underlies it. Phule also did so. To actualize that hope was the responsibility of future reformers.⁵¹

However, the cultural base for a transformed India and also for a ‘reformed Hinduism.’ lay in the cultural mentorship of *Baliraja* or king Bali, a utopia of Jotirao Phule which he propounded in *Slavery* in 1873, as an alternative model to the *Brahman Dharma*.⁵² It is well known that he made *Baliraja*, the mythical king of inhabitants, a symbol of oppressed humanity. *Baliraja*, in his usage, was a peasant, a common man. He was an ancient symbol of peasants and a sort

49 Kancha Ilaiah, *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism*, Samya, Kolkata, 2005, p. 38.

50 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

52 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

of golden age, representing in a Marathi saying that “*Ida pida javo, Balica rajya yevo*” (let troubles and sorrow go, and the kingdom of Bali come).⁵³ This was clearly pointed out in *Gulamagiri* where he has termed the whole *Brahmanical* tradition as ‘anti-Bali’ (anti-egalitarian).⁵⁴ While describing the greatness of king Bali, whose kingdom included not only various parts of India, but even “several islands near Simhaldweep; one of which exists even today ‘called Bali’, Phule writes:

...He was also called *Malla-Ari* (the enemy of the wrestlers). *Malhari* by which he is worshipped today (in Maharashtra) is probably is a corrupt form of the word. He was famous for his just warfare. He never attacked any warrior who was running away from the battlefield, from behind.... He was a champion of the downtrodden.... (Even today) the womenfolk perform the ritual of waving earthen lamps around their husbands’ face and wish for the kingdom of Bali to descend again. Just imagine, how excellent the coming *Baliraja* will be! Oh what a great king!⁵⁵

Hence, king Bali, in Phule’s re-figuration of the popular myth, was the ‘original’ king of ancient Maharashtra, reigning over an ideal state of beneficence, equality and prosperity. A scholar argues that in order to give a new cultural orientation to the non-Brahman castes, Phule tried to make *Baliraja* a ‘cult figure’ among the peasantry because he felt that to bring about a social revolution in India a cultural tradition having popular heroes of the *Shudra-Atishudras* at its heart was essential. He, therefore, described king Bali as a peasant king who led the non-Aryan combat against the Aryan aggressors. As such, the myth of *Baliraja* was essentially a ‘political myth’ which sought changes in the power structure and power relations in Hindu society.⁵⁶

53 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

54 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of An Indian Identity*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 1995 (hereafter: *Dalit Visions*), p. 112.

55 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 57-60.

56 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, “Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance”, *EPW*, 25 May 1991, p. 1326.

As a matter of fact, Phule's reinterpretation had a strong resonance with popular culture (s) also, for, in Maharashtra (and also in other parts of India, e.g., Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana etc.) Bali was indeed seen as a popular mythical hero and also a 'peasant king' among the rural masses.⁵⁷ Even the popular religious festivals of the rural areas in Maharashtra today are fairs centring on non-Vedic gods, all of whom (except the most widely known, *Vithoba*) continue to have non-Brahman priests. Phule's alternative model, woven around *Baliraja*, could evoke an utopia of a peasant community and his anti-Aryan, anti-caste and equalitarian message with the use of poetry, dialogue, and drama, could reach beyond the literate elite to a wider audience of the non-Brahmans.⁵⁸ In fact, Phule constructed his utopia of casteless moral society around the *Baliraja* model.

Certainly, in his '*Baliraja* proposal', Phule thought about social, economic, political and spiritual liberation of the people of the marginalized castes/classes. In his utopia, economy was agriculture-oriented where exploitation was not allowed at all. King was chosen from the peasants and workers on his merit. While pointing at "true followers of *Baliraja*" in the west, Phule mentioned the names of Jesus Christ, George Washington and Lafayette in his *Baliraja* paradigm icons.⁵⁹ In a collection of *Pavadas* entitled *Brahmananche Kasab (Priestcraft Exposed)*, he recalls '*Baliraj*' (kingdom of Bali) wherein happy moral communities of 'inhabitant *Kshetriyas/Kshatriyas*' lived in India before the advent of Aryans. In this utopia, liberty, equality and fraternity prevailed; patriotism, democracy and republicanism were integral to its polity; art, science and knowledge prospered; efficient and pro-people officers like *Khandoba* and *Kulbhairi* were serving people and all the subjects were living a happy and prosperous life:

A power with nine provinces [*Khanda*] was united together
 Kashi was the tenth
 The many took care to preserve their unity
 Serious and virtuous, brave in battle
 To each province [*Khanda*] one was appointed to rule

57 Rosalind O'Hanlon, op. cit., pp. 154-155.

58 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, p. 20.

59 Thom Wolf, op. cit., p. 14.

He was called a '*Khandoba*'
 Great heroes; *Martand* their chief
 The black *Bahiri* was also made a leader
 He treated the other nine *Khandobas* well
 The country was great; mighty officials [*Subahs*] were appointed
 They carried out the business of their masters
 All who saw the country were struck with admiration
 The chief official [*Maha Subah*, rendered as '*Mhasoba*'] supporting
 them
 No less clever and strong; Another like the black *Bahiri*
 Enquiries about justice were given to the wise; they appointed may
 help
 The chief justices of the nine districts [*Navakhandacha Nvaya*, ren-
 dered as '*Navakhanachi Janai*']
 Many foot soldiers, strong horses, the archers no less skilled
 The spears bound to their shoulders
 They fought both with diplomacy and with arrows
 The wrestlers went into battle
 The many took care to preserve their unity....
 Rainwater was plentiful
 Power was exerted gently
 The happiness of heaven pales beside.⁶⁰

Here, Phule, according to Rosalind O'Hanlon, has encompassed a whole range of figures, symbols, and beliefs from popular culture of Maharashtra. The popular village gods and goddesses of the region – *Khandoba*, *Jotiba*, *Naikba*, *Mhasoba*, *Chandoba*, *Vithoba* etc.– which had been a central part of the religious life of the village cultivator, were no longer deities of a 'little tradition' in the Hindu pantheon, but were *Sardars* or regional chiefs in the regime of *Baliraja*. Phule coined his own etymology to explain the origin of their names. For instance, *Khandoba* emerged because Bali made his lieutenants, the chiefs of nine *Khandas* (provinces) of his kingdom, while *Mhasoba* is a corruption the original *Mahasuba* or large province.⁶¹ For Phule, it was not a matter of research in the national library as was the approach of his German contemporary Karl Marx. Phule was a

60 Tr. by & quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

61 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 150-151.

transformational leader who was involved in local system and everyday struggles of the downtrodden.

In fact, Phule anticipated Max Weber's thesis that cultural pre-suppositions deeply carve out the tracks on which popular culture routes their people. He saw what the cultural mentorship of king Bali had done for the society: 'When they became the followers of the king Bali, their patriotism knew no bounds.' He included America, France and England in the same orbit as India. He traced the growth of nationalism in the West: the English, he pointed out, learned patriotism from the Greeks but only later learned the importance of the Bali (peasant) and, thereby, developed a democratic nationalism, while the American revolution made the Bali (common man) the centre of society.⁶² He understood that, as O'Hanlon suggests, in every part of the world popular heroes had always arisen to protect the weak from oppressive authorities in the way that *Baliraja* had tried to do, and presented Buddha as another example from Indian history.⁶³ Hence, Phule discarded the *Brahmanic* caste ideology, endorsed the Dravidian theory to counter the prevalent mythology, and dreamt of a *Bali-Rajya* utopia of equality and justice in opposition to the *Brahmanic* utopia based on the *Vedic Varnashrama Dharma*.

In one of his ballads, Phule depicted Shivaji as a *Shudra* king and social rebel as against caste tyranny whose descendants were robbed off their power by the treacherous *Peshwas*. Notably, M.G. Ranade identified Shivaji with the orthodox Brahman saint Ramdas seeing in him the 'Guru' of Shivaji. Alongwith this interpretation, there was also an anti-Muslim thrust that was similar to that of the interpretation of overt 'Hindu nationalists' like V.D. Savarkar. In his writings, Ranade refer to "Muslim excesses" and their "bigotry and fanatic cruelty", and see the lack of Urdu in Maharashtra as a "boon for peoples' language." He contrasts the rise of Marathas with "Mohammedan confusion."⁶⁴ Similarly, B.G. Tilak also constructed an image of Shivaji in 1890s as an orthodox anti-Muslim and savior

62 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, p. 112.

63 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

64 M.G. Ranade, *The Rise of the Maratha Power*, Bombay: Manaktala & Sons 1961, pp. 1-5.

of the *Brahmanical* culture – ‘the *Gau-Brahman Pratipalak*’ (protector of cows and the priestly class).⁶⁵ As of anticipating the orthodox resurrection in Shivaji, Phule thoughtfully placed him (Shivaji) within the non-*Brahmanic* tradition of Maharashtrian history and culture. Hence, his ballad on Shivaji portrays all lower castes as the descendants of the original *Kshetriyas/Kshatriyas*, who were protected by the legendary popular heroes like king Bali in ancient times and Shivaji in modern times.⁶⁶

The culmination of Phule’s emphasis on *Baliraja* was that through it he replied to the elite’s use of deities like *Ganapati*: it was symbol to unite Maharashtrian peasants and the downtrodden with the tale of Aryan invasion. Hence, Phule proposed the ‘*Baliraja* alternative’ to the Brahmanism and caste-society. He saw morality, equality, fraternity, prosperity and happiness in the benevolent rule of king Bali. This was his alternative model of socio-spiritual liberation of the downtrodden from the *Brahman Dharma*.

(2)

Idea of Equality

In his ‘*Baliraja* alternative’, Phule envisions a dynamic idea of equality which appears to have many dimensions. As Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar suggests, an idea of all-round equality appears to have prevailed thoroughly in his thought wherein he mainly advocates of five types of equality, i.e., social equality, religious equality, educational equality, gender equality and equality of opportunity.⁶⁷ He declared that restoration of equality in a society is the pre-requisite of its real reformation.

As regards social equality, Phule says that without restoration of social equality, disparity and discrimination continues to exist in the name of caste, race, gender etc. and on account of this; no civil

65 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-270.

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

67 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *The Study of the Economic Ideas of Mahatma Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwara University, Aurangabad, 2015, pp. 250-251.

society or nation could be formed. Giving the example of the *Mang* and the *Brahman*, the two poles of caste-ridden Hindu society, he clarifies his position on the issue of social equality in these words:

If you try to find a mark of distinction between the *Mang* (and the *Brahman*), you will perceive that both of them possess the self – the same Soul. They are identical (and equal) in most things – in their food and drink and are actuated by the same desires and impulses. The *Mang* and the *Aryan Brahman* both of them – are truly an adornment, a distinction among men, and both are identical in their behavior. Self-knowledge is the crown and summit of all knowledge and nobody is an outcast.⁶⁸

Commenting on the caste-society, Phule further opines on this issue in the following words:

Listen to me carefully. The cunning Brahmins who follow the mischievous, cunning and treacherous religion of their Aryan ancestors look down upon all the ignorant *Shudras*. (It is ironical fact) that the ignorant *Shudras* treat the *Mahars* as contemptible, while the ignorant *Mahars* treat the *Mangs* equally contemptuously. The taboo-ridden ultra-orthodox cunning Aryan Brahmins not only treat the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* contemptuously, but they refuse to inter-dine and inter-marry with them. They have gone one step further and have totally forbidden the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* to inter-dine and inter-marry even among themselves. If the mass of the people is so riven and divided among themselves, they form a veritable hotchpotch. How can such hotchpotch ever form a 'Nation'?⁶⁹

In fact, the question of what is to be seen as a center of a 'national culture' was crucial to Phule. If the emphasis is towards *Brahman Dharma*, Aryan culture, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* stories (as other reformers did), this implies a bias in favour of the upper castes and towards indirect support of *Varna Vayavastha*. But if the emphasis is towards non-Aryan culture, peasant traditions, and traditions of religious radicalism running through *Shramanik* and *Bhakti* cults, then

68 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 150.

69 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 26-27.

bias would naturally be non-elitist.⁷⁰ That's why; Phule's approach appears to be clearly in favour of the non-Aryan culture and lower caste masses.

Phule believes a nation cannot be formed without restoration of social equality. For nation-building; existence of equality, harmony and emotional integrity among all nationals is highly desirable. He, therefore, expects elimination of all social hierarchies and privileges/disabilities based on birth and also many more things for founding a nation in his framework.⁷¹ He wanted a reformation, if not revolution, to achieve this goal.

Phule was fully convinced that the lower castes themselves would have to shoulder the responsibility of revolutionizing Hindu society and restructuring it on the basis of the principles of equality, fraternity and morality. In this context, he also looked forward to the British rulers for helping the plebeians in throwing away the centuries-old yoke of caste-slavery and oppression. He did not see any significant difference between the alien rule and the independent rule, as advocated and understood by the upper caste nationalists. He characterized the Indian National Congress demanding higher positions for Indians in bureaucracy and judiciary having been represented the needs and aspirations of the educated urban elite.⁷² Here, some of his critics raised a question on his national credentials. Then was Phule an anti-national? Not at all. In fact, he had his own conception of 'Indian nation' which was based on his social philosophy and wherein he stressed upon the restoration of "emotional integrity" among all nationals of the land:

There cannot be a 'Nation' worth the name until and unless all the people (nationals/inhabitants) of the land of king Bali – such as the *Shudras* and *Atishudras*, *Bhils* (tribal people) and fishermen etc. become truly educated, able to think independently for themselves and are uniformly unified and emotionally integrated. If (a tiny section of the

70 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 118.

71 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-289.

72 M.H. Jadhav, "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra", *EPW*, 26 April, 1986, p. 741.

population like) the upstart Aryan Brahmins alone were to found the 'National Congress', who will take any notice of it?⁷³

For Phule, a nation means a democratic society. The birth of a nation requires the growth of a civil society, calibration of citizenship and beginning of the process of empowerment of the marginalized sections and women. As such, his idea of nation-building is based upon the theory of change from a hierarchical to an egalitarian type of society. It was for this reason, he dismissed the Congress brand of elite nationalism.⁷⁴

He vehemently contested M.G. Ranade's "shallow advice" that caste distinctions should not hinder our social goals and national advancement. In his opinion, as long as traditional restrictions on meeting, dining and marrying outside the caste remains intact, it would not possible to create a sense of social harmony and nationality among the people. He therefore, argues that social equality and massification of education are necessary prerequisites of nation-building.⁷⁵ If one see it from the perspective of the lower castes, it is possible to understand as to why the downtrodden sections of Hindu society who were made to suffer from disabilities and disadvantages under the religion of orthodoxy remained skeptical of the 'nationalist promise' of the elite.⁷⁶ Phule gave voice to their skepticism.

Phule argued that not only the ultra-pure *'Arya-Bhats'* considered the *Shudra-Atihudras* inferior; but marriage, dining and other social relations were forbidden among all the *Varnas/castes* of Hindu society. He asked: "how then such a conglomerate of eighteen grains could be united to become a 'nation' of integrated people?" A nation for him had to be built upon the foundations of individual freedom and social equality which would allow the world of commonness (*Ekmeva Lok* was the term he used) to develop.⁷⁷

73 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 29.

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

75 P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. xxxxi.

76 Gopal Guru, "Liberating Jotirao Phule", *EPW*, 30 Aug 2003, p. 3704.

77 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste*

As such, to Phule, social equality is not only important for individual's development, but also for nation building.

Then, Phule advocates for religious equality. It means that every individual should have the right to embrace any religion and observe freely the religion of his choice. While expressing his views about religious equality and freedom in *Sarvajanik Satyadharm Pustak*, he envisions an ideal family in which the lady embraces Buddhism, her husband Christianity, their daughter Islam and son Universal Religion of Truth; and all of them were "behaving towards one another in a spirit of love and understanding."⁷⁸ Thus, Phule thinks about religious equality and freedom very rationally and in secular as well as in spiritual terms. According to him, religion does not create any restrictions or barriers, and it can be accepted after reading the fundamental principles of a particular religion by the individuals. By following the *Satyadharm* (religion of truth and righteous conduct), Phule hopes that people would indeed be the "blessed citizens of our creator's kingdom."⁷⁹ In short, in the words of Raskar, Phule's understanding about religious equality could be summed up as follows:

- 1) Anyone has a right to accept any religion at any time, therefore, there is no possibility to create domination of a particular religion. All religions should be respected.
- 2) Religion means adaptation of the principles of universal truth.
- 3) Man and woman both have equal rights to observe religion of their choice and its principles.
- 4) There are and may be various religions in the world, but since all are created by our Creator, universal fraternity must be one of the principles of religion.

Intellectuals, Navayana, New Delhi, 2008 (hereafter: *Seeking Begumpura*), p. 182.

⁷⁸ Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 39-40.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40.

- 5) Religion is the way of emancipation from inequality, illiteracy and discrimination and also a way to create fraternity, peace and happiness.⁸⁰

In Phule's idea of equality, educational equality also occupies a very significant place. During his movement, he visualized three purposes of education: (i) intellectual emancipation from the *Brahmanic* religion, (ii) getting a share of lower classes in employment, and (iii) facilitating a process of reform from below.⁸¹ Educational equality depends on two main factors. The first is fairness, and the second is inclusion. But the *Brahmanic* education system in India was neither fair nor inclusive as it did not permit the *Shudras*, *Atishudras* and women to have access to education and knowledge. Hence, Phule believes that all the miseries of the downtrodden were caused due to the lack of knowledge. His thought-provoking book *Cultivator's Whipcord* reflects his deep understanding of the problem. In the opening lines of the book, he says:

Without knowledge, intelligence was lost;
Without intelligence morality was lost and
Without morality was lost all dynamism;
Without dynamism money was lost;
Without money the *Shudras* sank.
See how many miseries were caused by the lack of knowledge!⁸²

The above mentioned famous and most quoted lines of Phule, if understood carefully, exhibit not only his entire educational philosophy but also his model of 'equitable development.' In this model, according to Raskar, he hints at five components which are inter-related to each other: knowledge, intelligence, morality, dynamism and money. As he studied the causes of the sorrowful conditions of *Shudra-Atishudras*, alongwith women, in Hindu society, he found that they were oppressed and enslaved and highly backward in all

80 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

81 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, 25 May 1991, p. 1327.

82 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 117.

respects – mentally, religiously, socially, morally and politically. The main cause of their backwardness was illiteracy and denial of access to knowledge. Hence, he put forward a model of equitable development in which he emphasized the importance of education and knowledge.⁸³

In fact, Phule was fully conscious that education could be a powerful instrument of equality and development. So throughout his life he thought about education and believed that education could be a powerful device to cut the roots of social inequalities prevalent in Hindu society. He believed that no social reform could be established without propagating education among masses. Hence; he proposes that if the social reforms are to be executed on permanent footing, the individuals at all levels must be educated.⁸⁴

While thinking about a model education system to be adopted in modern India, Phule found the conventional education and pedagogy totally unacceptable because it was thoroughly status-quoist. Its sole purpose was to nurture Brahmanism and inequalities based on caste and gender. It did not allow any scope for criticism and maintain the flow of instructions in such a way that casual analysis and hermeneutical exercise gets relegated in a certain way. For this reason; Phule offered a devastating critique of conventional pedagogy where he pointed out how it makes the *Shudra-Atishudras* lose track of reality.⁸⁵

According to Umesh Bagade, Phule also found that as hegemonic ideology of caste, Brahmanism separated knowledge from labour and thus affected adversely the progress of empirical knowledge. The priestly caste which monopolized knowledge, loathed productive technologies as impure and celebrated only other-worldly knowledge. Physical and natural sciences was interpolated by mythological accounts which were considered as divine/sacred authorities of knowledge. In fact, production of social relations of caste-slavery

83 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

84 N.L. Gupta, *Mahatma Phule: An Educational Philosopher*, Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2008, p. 38.

85 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

remained the sole concern of the conventional pedagogy and knowledge system. Due to despicable state of labour and technological knowledge under the religion of orthodoxy, the productive disadvantaged castes had to live with their stagnant caste specific technologies. For this reason; Phule rejected the *Brahmanic* pedagogy and criticised its method of unrestrained imagination as non-empirical.⁸⁶

As against the conventional pedagogy, Phule propounded his method of acquiring knowledge based upon empirical observation and inferences. He underlined the preference of truth-enhancing values and methods through an integration of critical rationality of modern science and the scepticism and self-reflection of ancient non-Vedic knowledge. Bagade points out that his idea of education was based on the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, industriousness, philanthropy, rationality, self-criticism/self-reflection etc. as an alternative set of values against the *Brahmanical* tradition. He initiated a new kind of pedagogy in his schools, nurturing thinking-ability among his students.⁸⁷ He also rejected the conventional teacher-student relationship prescribing commanding position to teacher and obedience to student. He encouraged inquisitiveness and enquiry among the students. He introduced a problem-posing dialogue-pedagogy which brought teacher and student on same level of active engagement. The pedagogic technique of raising questions and finding solutions made students critical thinkers. Not only did it enable his students to approach the reality in critical creative ways but also encouraged them to take up the struggles of the people to transform this reality.⁸⁸

86 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge: Phule's Path of Alternative Education", in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No 1-4, S.P.P. University, Pune, January-December 2015 (hereafter: "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42), pp. 57-58.

87 *Sharmila Rege*, "Education as 'Trutiya Ratna': Towards Phule-Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogical Practice", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, No. 44-45, 30 October 2010 (hereafter: "Education as Trutiya Ratna", *EPW*, 30 Oct. 2010), p. 93.

88 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, pp. 71-72.

Sharmila Rege informs us that the first modern Marathi play *Trutiya Ratna* (1855), authored by Phule, draws complex linkage between religious, cultural and educational authority and reimagines education as ‘*Trutiya Ratna*’ (third eye) that has potentials to enable the oppressed to understand and transform the relation between knowledge and power.⁸⁹ She observes:

(Phule), therefore, seeks a rational engagement with the pedagogy of culture to see how power works through the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge within particular context and reimagines a culture of pedagogy based on truth-seeking. Thus, he conceives education not only in terms of cultures of learning and teaching but also dissenting against that which is learnt and taught by dominant cultural practices. This entails constituting teachers and students as modern truth-seekers and agents of transformation who seek to become “a light unto themselves”. This democratisation of method of knowledge marks the different of Phule’s educational perspective from methods based on binaries of reason/emotion, public/private, assumption of neutral objectivity/celebration of experience that inform our teaching and research.⁹⁰

Hence, to Phule, the acquisition of education/knowledge by the downtrodden sections of Hindu society was ‘emancipatory’, as education provides the power to think clearly, the power to act well in the world’s work and the power to appreciate life. For him, knowledge matters because it can question, change and transform the individual as well as society. Education can make society more democratic.⁹¹

It is also pointed out here that to ensure educational equality, Phule wanted mass education rather than ‘trickle-down’ education. The British Government did not have a desire to carry this out, as the very purpose of the colonial educational system was to train the intermediary elite in order to get personnel for their administrative machinery. Phule opposed it. In one of his writings, he even goes to

89 *Sharmila Rege*, “Education as *Trutiya Ratna*”, *EPW*, 30 Oct. 2010, pp. 92-93.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

91 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

the extent to advise the Government that it should enact a 'special legislation' to effect opening of special vocational schools for the children of agriculturists and artisans and making the attendance of the students 'compulsory' in such schools, otherwise, he apprehends, their youngsters would be tempted to commit crimes:

If the ignorant cultivators and the artisans persist in refusing to send their children to these schools opened by the Government especially for them, then the Government will be well-advised to compel them so to do by enacting a special legislation, making attendance at such vocational schools compulsory by law. Further, the Government Inspectors (pastors, evangelists) should try to advise and convince them as follows: 'If you do not send your children to the vocational schools, they will be tempted to commit petty thefts to earn their sinful livelihood'.⁹²

To Phule, educating the downtrodden was a 'remedy' to each and every problem that they were facing. Hence; he not only emphasised the issue of educating the oppressed classes in his principles, but also declared education as "remedial whipcord" for "nauseating wrong" done to them in the past:

So (I feel that) the only sure remedy for this nauseating wrong is that the Shudra farmers should take proper education (be properly educated), should flourish their whipcord in the air and lash these errant hired ponies soundly till they release (throw off) their droppings.⁹³

Phule believed that the lower castes (which mostly comprised peasants and workers) were the life and sinews of the country and, therefore, the Government must ever look to tide over their difficulties, social as well as educational. In nutshell, to use the words of Bhaskar Bhole, the crux of his idea of educational equality was to do away with elitism in the field of education.⁹⁴

Phule's argument that knowledge, education and science were weapons for the exploited masses for attaining equal human rights, was in contrast to all elitist theories that sought to link western

92 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 43.

93 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 46.

94 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, 25 May 1991, p. 1327.

science and eastern morals and argued that Indians could maintain their tradition while adopting science and technology from the west for material development. For Phule, rather *Vidya* or knowledge was in direct contrast with the ritualistic *Shastra* and was a weapon for equality and human freedom as well as economic advancement. He constantly stressed the need for the lower castes/classes to stand forth and think on their own, and, in the words of Gail Omvedt, his response to the ideological confusions of his day sounds strikingly ‘post-modern’:

There is a cacophony of opinions,
 No one heeds another;
 Each one thinks the opinions
 He has found is great.
 Pride in untruth
 Dooms them to destruction –
 So the wise people say,
 Seek truth⁹⁵

As emerges from above discussion, Phule believes that there must also be gender equality, particularly equality between man and woman. To him, woman is superior to man because she gives birth to posterity. In fact, continuity of society depends upon procreation. For this, man and woman have to perform a role. Man performs a role, but chiefly for his pleasure; but woman is “self-restrained by nature”, according to Phule. He writes:

The Creator has created in the world sources of pleasure for both man and woman. They also enjoy each other’s company. Woman is, however, self-restrained by nature. She permits a man to make friendship with her. The clever man, however, plays upon the natural desire of the woman. Their closeness grows to the extent that the woman decides to make him her partner and close friend. The laws of nature take course. The patient woman carries their child without complaint.... Don’t we have the proverb that one can repay all debts except the mother’s debt. Doubtless, woman is superiors to man.⁹⁶

95 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, pp. 23-24.

96 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of the True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 231.

But, despite these facts, women are not treated equally in our society. Phule, therefore, advocates for the restoration of gender equality. To him, enlightenment is the way to fight all unjust orders including patriarchy. Though he does not directly talk of patriarchy and it also appears, as a feminist scholar Vidyut Bhadwat complains, that while defending women's rights and their role in society his writings "occasionally betray biological mode of reasoning,"⁹⁷ yet he emerges as a radical supporter of women's equality. He believes that women have been subordinated in Hindu society as a part of the process of subordination of the lower castes/classes. He presented women, alongwith the oppressed classes, as victims of *Brahmanic* religion, because it treated all women – irrespective of their castes – as inferior creatures. The *Brahmanic* scriptures (like *Manusmriti* and other *Dharmashastras*) invariably clubbed them with *Shudras* or *Dasas* and, thus, the subordination of women was similar to that of the lower castes in the religion of orthodoxy. As such, the assertion of gender rights was, for Phule, a fundamental part of the struggle of the *Shudra-Atishudras*.⁹⁸

We know that keeping in view he seriousness of the problem of sexually abused and pregnant young widows, particularly of the upper castes, Phule opened a 'Home for the Prevention of Infanticide' in his own house in 1863.⁹⁹ He appealed to the pregnant widows of Poona to come and deliver there safely and secretly. As told, many widows came there to deliver their unwanted babies. In this Home, about 35 infants were born, though most of them died before the age of 5.¹⁰⁰

Phule's depth of feeling for the woman cause was so sincere and deep that he was even ready to attack one of his co-workers, Krishnarao Bhalekar, who had written a severe criticism of the

97 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, 25 May 1991, p. 1327.

98 Ashwini Deshpande, *The Grammar of Caste: Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 33.

99 Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Rammabai*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1998, p. 76.

100 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

book authored by Tarabai Shinde entitled *Stree-Purush Tulana* (*A Comparison between Women and Men*). While comparing men and women in her book, she writes how women were treated as subordinate to men and inferior in all spheres of life. Phule replied to Bhalekar in 1885 with a scathing attack, which was more severe than his attacks on 'Brahmanists'. His colleague's criticism was condemned by him as a "representative of the old beliefs." By reiterating Kabir's words "*Jis tan lage wohi tan jane, bija kya jane gavara re*" (the affected body alone can know the pain, others cannot know it), he claimed that the experience of the woman is concrete and particular to her, which no man can understand. He writes "the waves of anger of wife of a polygamous husband cannot be known to men."¹⁰¹ To him, the issue was the formation of a new equalitarian husband-wife relationship and the goal was breaking down of the old *Brahmanic*-patriarchic structure. For this reason; he endorsed Tarabai's views in one of his writings *Satsar-II* in these words:

...Even before Pandita Ramabai came to Pune, Tarabai Shinde of Buldhana wrote a book called *Stree-Purush Tulana*. In this book, she has given excellent advice to men, for, most of them behave... sinfully in the presence of their women. Naturally their respectable women feel bad, but since they are powerless and ignorant they are infuriated and great storms and bad deeds arise in their imagination. She (Tarabai), therefore, decided to advise the men-folk. Her advice was a little stern and pungent, and an adamant editor of a newspaper did not like it.¹⁰²

Actually, Tarabai herself came from *Satyashodhak Samaj* background and shared much of its radicalism against the orthodoxy. Her rebellion against women's subordination among the non-Brahman castes was not taken kindly, even by many *Satyashodhak* activists. It was for this reason that Phule intervened and presented a stirring defense of Tarabai, arguing that women of non-elite castes suffered doubly.¹⁰³ He believed that as long as there was inequality in the

101 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42), p. 72.

102 Jotirao Phule, *Satsar*, Number II, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 217-18.

103 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

family, there could be no true equality in the society; and this would perpetuate suppression of women.

While Phule was sensitive to common gender problem faced by all women, he was equally conscious of crucial differentiation among women based on caste and their place in the system of production. In *Cultivator's Whipcord*, he has shown how the women of the toiling castes had to labour at homes and in the fields and lives in highly miserable conditions. On account of his poverty, the cultivator could not buy good clothes for himself and his women.¹⁰⁴ Whereas the Brahman women, on the other hand, lived a relatively comfortable life. In his famous poem *Kulambin (The Peasant Woman)*¹⁰⁵, Phule writes that while the *Kulambin's* labour nourishes and sustains the whole society including the "beggars and Brahmins", the "*Bhatin* does not look after *Shudra* children, and does not kiss them":

As the cock crows at the crack of dawn,
A Shudra's wife sits at the grinding stones
Listening to the clamor of her songs,
Her husband wakes up and takes the bulls out for grazing.
As the day breaks, she collects cow-dung and carries in the basket with
garbage.
The shrewd Brahman calls her ignoble, but she is meritorious, says Joti.
When the sun rises, she pats *rotis* and keeps curry on the stove.
When the cooking is over, she proceeds to field with basket of food on
her head
She works in the fields with others; she does not dine at leisure sitting
at home.
She donates grains to beggars and Brahmins,
Thus she provides food for the Brahmins – the so-called deities, say
Joti....
She does not worship idols, unlike a Brahman woman,
Who walks arrogantly flunking her ornaments.
The wicked Brahmins calls her ignoble, this is a stigma to the human
race, says Joti....

104 Jotirao Phule, *A Warning*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 55.

105 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 111-114.

A Brahman woman neither applies fragrant scrub to a Shudra woman nor baths her...

She does not look after Shudra children or kiss them, says Joti.¹⁰⁶

At another place, Phule mockingly comments that “if a European lady happens to experience the drudgery of peasant woman, she would not withstand and would run from the situation.”¹⁰⁷ In fact, by showering praise on the uncombed, untiring laboring woman and speaking negatively of the slothful Brahman woman or luxurious-living European lady, both of whom idle away their time on titivating themselves, Phule appears to be crying for a radical change in the traditional criteria of caste/class-ridden values of beauty and aesthetics.

Despite his awareness of class/caste based differentiation among women, Phule’s position on women’s problem was very clear. He tried to link subordination of women with a structure of relations that might be recognized as akin to patriarchy. He saw the subjugation of women, alongwith that of the lower castes, as a part of the larger hegemonic design inherent in the ideology/system of Brahmanism. His critique of the ideology/system implied the view that abolition of the system would ensure the end of patriarchy as well. As such, according to Uma Chakravarty, Phule emerges as a staunch critique of *Brahmanical* patriarchy:

He alone, among nineteenth century social reformers, was able stand outside the *Brahmanical* patriarchy and, although gender was not a central factor in his analysis of caste and the reproduction of inequality, his rejection of caste system and of *Brahmanic* Hinduism enabled him to adopt a more radical approach to gender inequality than any of his contemporaries.¹⁰⁸

It is pertinent to note that Phule was the only reformer who

106 Mahatma Jotirao Phule & Madhura Damle, “The Peasant Woman”, in *Indian Literature*, Vol. 58, No 1 (279), January-February 2014, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, pp. 12-13.

107 Umesh Bagade, “Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge”, *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 73.

108 Uma Chakravarty, *Rewriting History: The Life and Limes of Pandita Ramabai*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1998, p. 65.

came forward to support Pandita Ramabai's struggle against orthodoxy (even reformers like Vivekananda were among her detractors). As a Sanskrit scholar, she came to the conclusion that women were marginalized by the *Brahmanic* Hinduism (she did not, however, similarly react to caste which was, to her, a 'division of labour' like other caste Hindu reformers)¹⁰⁹, and this was what she stressed upon as the main reason for rejecting it and embracing Christianity. Giving her example, Phule said that women had declared their right to move away from the '*Brahmanic* slavery'. He applauded her efforts for the spread of education and awareness among high caste women. In *Satsar-I*, he argued that Ramabai had seen for herself the discriminatory orientation of *Shastras* against women and, therefore, rightly decided to break away from the 'tyrannical' paternal religion.¹¹⁰ He observed upon the issue in the following words:

I did not think that the lectures delivered by Pandita Ramabai not endorsing Hindu religion when she came to Pune were very great.... However, once she went to England and could compare the Christian and Hindu religions, didn't she see the mulishness and partisanship of Hindu religion and condemn it and accept Christianity?¹¹¹

In *Satsar-II*, he again praised Ramabai, giving her the credit of spreading education among high caste Hindu women:

These days, in the regime of England, due to the efforts of Pandita Ramabai so many great learned men from the Arya Brahmans have become ashamed and in order to absolve their rishi ancestors of guilt have begun to make their weak and helpless women educated like themselves.¹¹²

109 Pandita Ramabai, *The High Caste Hindu Women* (Originally Published in 1887), Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1982, pp. 3 & 29.

110 Jotirao Phule, *Satsar*, Number I, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 210.

111 Y.D. Phadke (ed.), *Mahatma Phule: Samagra Vangmya* (Marathi), Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Ani Sanskriti Mandali, Bombay, 1985, p. 353; quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 216.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 372; quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 217.

In fact, with regard to the issue of gender equality and women's liberation, Phule was one of very few male social reformers in Indian history who deserves respect, specially of women. His approach to the gender issue was most radical in comparison to that of his contemporary counterparts and his was also the first systematic understanding of the gender question by a modern reformer/thinker in India. As Deshpande rightly remarks, "His was a remarkably modern and gendered view, which saw gender itself, not *Varna*, as the basis for the oppression that women faced."¹¹³

In his spiritual treatise *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*, Phule talks of '*sarva ekandar stree-purush*', all women and men together. This was, according to Gail Omvedt, 'innovative' in Marathi as he did not use the common Marathi word *Manus* (human being), but insisted upon using '*Stree-Purush*', thus emphasizing gender differentiation, while pleading for equal human rights for women and men.¹¹⁴ Thus Omvedt estimates that, Phule was the first in India to expose the "double standards" prevalent among the reformers of Hindu society:

His writings assimilated women into his general theories of conquest and violence (seeing them as the primary victims of force and violence, emphasizing the miserable life of peasant women). However, in his later years and (perhaps) under the influence of the great feminist radicals of his day such as Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde, he took a stronger position describing male patriarchal power as a specific form of exploitation.... He (saw) the oppression of women not only in the pitiable conditions of Brahman widows, but also in the patriarchy of *Shudra* households in which the woman was expected to remain loyal *Pativrata* while the man was free to have as many women as he wanted.¹¹⁵

Phule wanted that the traditional society and family and marriage system should be changed in the light of reason and gender justice. Uniform norms/law should be applicable to both, husband and wife. In his *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*, he suggests new

113 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

114 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p. 113.

115 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, pp. 21-22.

marriage rites laying stress on man-woman equality.¹¹⁶ In the context of customs like widowhood and *Sati*, Phule asks a very pertinent question: “Has anyone heard of a husband burning himself alive in the event of his wife’s death and became a ‘*Sata*?’”¹¹⁷ *Sata* is, of course, an ironical coinage by him to suggest a male *Sati*. Similarly, his *Satyashodhak* marriage ceremony appears to be innovative in two ways: in dispensing with the priest class intermediaries and in including in the ceremony, a strong promise by the husband that he will give his wife equality and rights such as education.¹¹⁸ He notes that man is allowed to marry more than one woman, but a woman marrying more than one person is not tolerated. You will never find that a woman likewise gets indulged in polyandry. According to him, social deterioration is largely due to the illiteracy of women:

Deterioration of society is because of woman’s degeneration. Woman is deprived of education. Man does not consider her for advice; therefore, various wars are taken place. Second thing is there, that a man, for his pleasure, marries more than one (woman), and wastes his time for pleasure. Due to this cause, his health deteriorates and it makes him ineligible to work. Thus, he degenerates society, its culture and production system.¹¹⁹

While urging to follow his idea of *Satyadharmā*, Phule advises his followers to “treat all men and women as your own brothers and sisters without discriminating among them in any way so that you will be truly blessed in the eye of our Creator.”¹²⁰

Phule believed that the “only sure remedy” for the nauseating wrong done to the *Shudra-Atishudras*, alongwith women, under the social order based on the caste system and patriarchy was that they

116 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of the True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 227-236.

117 *Ibid.*, p. 231.

118 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p. 113.

119 D. Keer & Malashe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule* (Marathi), Maharashtra State Society for Literature and Culture, Bombay, 1969, p. 468.

120 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 40.

should take proper education. He demanded the Government to ensure the mass education.¹²¹ It is also pertinent to note that Phule was the only one who emphasised on female education, even before the Hunter Commission. His suggestion of making primary education compulsory for both boys and girls was in consonance with his primary concerns for the diffusion of knowledge among both sexes.¹²²

To Phule, woman is a symbol of culture and prosperity. Therefore, he insists on women's education, because she is the best teacher and the best carrier for virtues and culture. So, for the sake of social equality and prosperity, women should be educated and empowered. In sum, Phule was not merely for improvement in women's position; he believed in gender equality and wanted nothing less than equal and common human rights for all women and men.

In his idea of equality, Phule also insists on equal opportunity for everyone. During his times, opportunities were confined to the certain caste groups. Noble professions were the monopoly of the so-called upper castes and elite groups. Everyone's work/profession was assigned by birth. Menial vocations were imposed upon the *Shudra-Atishudras* and it was called their '*Dharma*' or religiously ordained duty to be engaged in such vocations. As a result, they had no opportunity to do a work of their choice. But Phule was of the view that, "every work is occupation and it cannot be linked to religion." He further points out that a work/vocation cannot be a 'religiously ordained duty'; it is a way to earn one's livelihood. He asked: "Washing other people's clothes by the washerman for a consideration for wage is a kind of occupation. Similarly, scavenging for others for a consideration of wages is a kind of occupation. How are we justified in calling it a religiously ordained duty (*Dharma*)?"¹²³ Phule, therefore, stressed that there should be equal opportunity for everyone to exercise his rights to do work as per his choice and

121 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

122 Suresh Mane, *Glimpses of Socio-Cultural Revolts in India*, Samrudh Bharat Publication, Mumbai, 2006, p. 104.

123 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 15.

skills. There should not be any barriers to choice a work. Occupation and the ordained duty must be differentiated. No person in society should be deprived of his opportunity on the basis of his birth, caste, community or gender. Everyone should have fair opportunity; it is important for restoration of human rights of all women and men. He explicates: "The creator has ordained that all human beings be entitled to enjoy human rights; hence, each person has an inalienable right to occupy positions of power and authority in his village or in the particular administrative division or religion."¹²⁴

Phule also stood to break down the monopoly of the elite groups over certain opportunities, e.g., education, civil services, religious services etc. Demanding fair access and representation of the lower castes in education and civil services, he asked the British Government on their behalf:

The cunning *Arya-Bhats* had totally forbidden us to take education all these years. If you do not allow us to be educated (so long as we are not qualified to hold high offices) and, at the same time, if you (continue to) appoint the cunning to high and responsible administrative posts under the Government, would they not try their utmost to suppress and condemn us to the meanest level (position) in society?¹²⁵

In his writings, Phule has also discussed in detail issues related to the basic needs of human beings. For instance, in his book entitled *Ishara (A Warning)*, he writes that the farmers, who supply food grains and vegetables to the city dwellers, are not in a condition to fulfill their own basic needs. They strive to meet their basic needs and have to satisfy with "un-nutritive and unpalatable food."¹²⁶ When the basic need of food is not satisfied, people cannot think for other things. To Phule, food problem is a big problem of society as it increases dependence of the lower castes/classes on others. This dependence makes them more superstitious. The superstitions exploit them further. As a result, they lose their self-esteem. In such a state of affairs, equality of human beings can never be imagined. Being an advocate of human rights, Phule was fully aware of man's

124 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

125 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

126 Jotirao Phule, *A Warning*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 56.

desire for self-esteem. He writes that poverty does not let the farmer get respect in society. He can't buy good clothes for himself and his women. Phule expresses the feelings of the farmers about their self-respectlessness and helplessness:

(One may well ask) were the poor *Ryots* quite well off so as to afford to pay such (heavy) taxes to the Brahman (*Peshwa*) rulers? The answer is an empathic 'No'. Words fail us to describe their miserable conditions. The poor *Shudras* had to toil and moil on their farms throughout the year. They could not afford even coarse clothes to cover their bodies, and coarse un-nutritive food to satisfy the pangs of biting hunger. A tattered narrow length of cloth about twenty-odd feet long served to cover their heads with what was an apology for turbans.... They went bare-footed throughout the year. They could ill-afford a piece of cloth by way of a shirt.¹²⁷

It is significant to note that farmers' own conditions of their poor clothing did humiliate them, but the "painful and sad condition" of their women who had to wear the same rough unwashed *sari* bearing with multi-colored patches "for four or five days together" dealt more insult on them:

We are most distressed to describe the clothes worn by the *Ryots'* womenfolk. They used to eke out their miserable existence (living) somehow, as their menfolk could afford them no joy or comfort. If they were lucky enough to get a very rough *sari* worth Rs. two or Rs. two and half, they had to make do with it for at least two years. They did not have a spare *sari*. Being immersed in hard manual work (domestic chores and working on the farms), they had to wear the same rough unwashed *sari* for four or five days together In due course of time, the *sari* would be worn tread-bar. Then they would stitch up half the portion at one time and would attend to the other half at a later date. Later on, the *sari* would be so threadbare and tattered that the poor women had to sew it up with multi-colored patches (of cloth) Alas! Alas! How painful and sad is that condition!¹²⁸

Phule noted that the scriptures, *Manusmriti*, texts etc. all were used to propagate respect for the Brahmans and high castes and

127 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

128 *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

disrespect the *Shudra-Atishudras*. The highly conservative ideas of *Dharma* and *Karma*, which supported the social divisions of *Jati* and *Varna*, perpetuated social stagnation and inferiority of the *Shudra-Atishudras*.¹²⁹ Hence, if the downtrodden had to achieve self-respect, they could do so only in an egalitarian reformed Hinduism.

To sum up, it can be stated that Phule's idea of equality was very comprehensive having all dimensions, i.e., social, religious, educational, gender, economic and moral. His idea of equality was the foundation stone of his framework of social reform.

(3)

Idea of *Satyadharma*

As is clear, a great rationalist and radical reformer, Jotirao Phule wanted to change the entire pattern of the outmoded old Hindu religion. In his earlier writings, for instance *Brahmanche Kasab*, *Gulamagiri* and *Shetakaryacha Asud*, Phule appears to have engaged in critiquing the old orthodox religion. But in his later writings, especially *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*, he also comes forward with his own organic idea of religion. In this treatise, he attempts to supersede the belief structure of *Brahman Dharma* with an alternative understanding of religion and its practices. Sections of this book deal with nearly all subjects – true faith, proper worship, ethical behavior, righteous conduct, social and gender equality and notions such as *Karma*, fate and predestination, etc.¹³⁰ Actually, while dismissing the religion of orthodoxy altogether, Phule presumed that something had to be put in its place. Even a revolutionary culture requires an ethico-moral foundation. Hence, he did not reject the idea of *Dharma* but rather attempted to establish the '*Satyadharma*' (religion of truth), as, to him, the basis of Hindu society had to be centered on truth and morality.

It is pertinent to note here that some of Phule's critics were of the opinion that he was close to Christian missionaries like John

129 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

130 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 177.

Wilson,¹³¹ and all of his ideas, including his idea of religion, was inspired by them, and he also worked in accordance with their designs. They even suspected that, to defame Hinduism, he also might have embraced Christianity. In fact, he was accused by his orthodox opponents, not only in his lifetime but even after his death, of having become a Christian. It was clearly nonsense and a mala-fide attempt by his opponents to denounce him. We know that he never embraced Christianity nor conferred his concern for the people of Christ as many other high caste social reformers (like Keshab Chandra Sen, Baba Padamji, Pandita Ramabai etc.) did.¹³²

In fact, Phule never thought of conversion. No doubt, he was admirer of some of the humanitarian and egalitarian aspects of Christianity, and also of Islam. He had the highest regards for both Jesus and Mohammad. As mentioned earlier, he called Jesus a “true follower of *Baliraja* in the west.”¹³³ He also wrote a poem on Mohammed which is indicative of his adoration for the Prophet and for the progressive potentials of Islam. The poem read as under:

He established the book that God is one, and made human all over the world as brothers....
 The majority became his disciples,
 So many came to Balisthan ... (and) freed the Shudras from slavery....
 They took advantage of caste differences and became great
 They took the Untouchables slowly to themselves, shamed the Aryans all the time.¹³⁴

Phule also argued that even the forcible conversions by the Muslims had had “liberatory effect” on the lower classes because such efforts on their part made them “free from the traps of the

131 Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82.

132 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p. 109.

133 Mugali, Shailander Yallappa & Priyadarshini S. Amadaihal, “Mahatma Jotirao Phule’s Views on Upliftment of Women as Reflected in Sarvajanic Satyadharma”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 69, 2008, p. 695.

134 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, pp. 40-41.

Aryan religion”¹³⁵ as they “established inter-dining and inter-marriage with them (and) gave them all equal rights.”¹³⁶ Though, he was also sorry to note that this liberating role declined when the Muslim rulers made a compromise with the high caste elite and sank into indolence. Similarly, he noted that the Portuguese rulers forcibly converted thousands of *Shudras*, *Atishudras* and even Brahmans to Roman Catholicism and made them free from the “artificial Aryan religion” and “nowadays, it is for everyone to see that thousands of the suffering lower castes have chosen to deny the religion of orthodox Brahmans and willingly convert to Christianity.”¹³⁷ Despite all these appreciations, Phule didn’t suggest his people and followers to embrace other religions. He had made it equally clear that he did not believe in ideas like ‘revealed truth’ or ‘divine sanction’ and, as such, had nothing to do with the fundamentalism of any creed or faith.¹³⁸

In fact, throughout his life, Phule remained a Hindu and lived and died a Hindu. But, to him, only “*Arya Bhats*” alone did not constitute the Hindus, but “*Shudras, Atishudras, Bhils and Kolis...* all were Hindus”¹³⁹, though, unfortunately, those Hindus were “put to great deprivations and hardships” by the orthodoxy.¹⁴⁰ Phule, therefore, devised strategies for their liberation and amelioration. His idea of *Satyadharma* was one of those strategies advanced by him to provide the oppressed Hindus an alternative to the religion of orthodoxy.

According to Phule, the deplorable condition of the peasantry and lower castes was the result of the old orthodox regime (i.e., *Peshwai*) and religion. Contrary to other contemporary traditions of Hindu social reform, he did not take the standpoint from within the ‘great’ tradition of Hinduism; rather he took a position from

135 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 150.

136 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 177.

137 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 150.

138 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 264-65.

139 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 28.

140 *Ibid.*

the 'little' one, i.e., the tradition of the downtrodden masses. As told in previous Chapters, he forcefully assaulted on the *Brahmanic* Hinduism and criticized it on account of its unjust orders of *Varna*, caste and patriarchy; theories of incarnation, *Darma* and *Karma*; multiplicity of gods and goddesses; the fables concerning the indulgence of gods in pleasures and passions like the mortal men, etc. In *Gulamagiri* he makes snide remarks about the body structure of Brahma, a deity who is identified with the creation of *Varna Vyavastha*: "If the *Brahmadeva* had four faces, he might be having eight breasts, four belly buttons, four genitals, and four anuses."¹⁴¹ Similarly, in one of his poems '*Ganapati*' he makes a fun of the deity *Ganapati* who sits on a rat and throws moist mucus through the trunk. Phule also exposes the exploitation of the people by the priestly order through various regional festivals, especially the festival of *Ganapati*.¹⁴² Notably, during the reign of Bajirao-II, the festival of *Ganapati* was celebrated by the *Peshwa* state and everything was done to benefit the priestly caste. G.S. Ghurye has pointed out that god *Ganapati* was the family deity of the *Peshwas* and the orthodox Brahmins were mainly responsible for the glorification of *Ganapati* in Maharashtra.¹⁴³

It is true that Phule attacked almost everything in the so-called 'great' tradition of Hinduism (i.e., *Brahman Dharma*) and rejected it. He always referred to that religion as a "religion of *Arya-Bhats*". But despite all of his criticism of the old orthodox religion, we should not conclude that Phule was speaking as an alien to Hindu religion, as his writings as well as actions show a clear identification with the common Hindu masses and their popular culture and tradition. In fact, his stand was against the hegemonic religio-cultural system of Hindus, as Gail Omvedt also suggests.¹⁴⁴ It is also noted that despite endorsing the racial theory, Phule never treated Brahmins as simply a racial category or a group which is 'unalterably evil' but regarded

141 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

142 D. Keer & S.G. Malashe (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 471.

143 G.S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1962, p. 121.

144 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 108.

them worthy to be accepted if they would have given up their claims to be the “earthy gods”:

When all the *Aryan-Bhat* throw away their bogus scriptures and begin to behave towards all human beings in the way of truth, then there is no doubt that all women and men will bow down reverently before the Creator of all and pray for the welfare of the *Aryans*.¹⁴⁵

He further asked them:

O *Aryan Bhats!* Please gird up your loins and beg pardon on bended knees of all the world. You forbade the *Shudra* vassals to take education, and regarded even the shadow cast by the *Atishudras* as polluting. You should kiss (treat kindly) the *Shudras* (and *Atishudras*, the allied castes) and behave truthfully, honestly, with all human beings.¹⁴⁶

In fact, despite being a fierce critic of the *Brahman Dharma*, Phule was, after all, a religious man from the core and believed in the institution of religion and its true spiritual values. Like most of the great leaders and spokesmen of the lower caste Hindus, he also felt the need to establish a religious alternative based upon the philosophy of egalitarian theism. He always thought of the religion. Since his childhood, he was impressed by the concept of true devotion to the ‘Creator’ and that of truly religious conduct/behavior. His thoughts and insights about religion may be traced in almost all of his writings, particularly *Quest for the Creator* (1853), *The Third Eye* (1885), *Life of Shivaji – A Balled* (1869), *Priestcraft Exposed* (1869), *Slavery* (1873), *Essence of Truth (Satsar)*, Number I and II (1885), *Warning (Ishara)* (1885), *Rituals of Satyashodhak Samaj* (1887) and *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth* (1890) etc. We also know that Jotirao was highly impressed by Thomas Paine’s ideas of religious radicalism and natural rights.

While thinking about writing his ‘book of religion’, Phule found that there was not a single religious book which contained truth from the beginning to the end. Since all the religious books were written by human beings, it was quite easy to interpolate dogmatic views in

145 Quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, p. 22.

146 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 146.

them; the writers of the religious books were pig-headed men.¹⁴⁷ In such state of affairs, Phule opines that every religious and revelatory book contains some elements of dogma in response to the dictates of time, place and situation, and as a result, creates divisions, envy and hatred:

All the religious and revelatory books that man has produced on our planet, one and all, do not contain a consistent universal truth. This is so because in every such book are to be seen passages interpolated into these texts by certain groups of individuals as the situation in their view warranted and as their dogmatism and mulishness dictated. Consequently, the religions or faiths did not in their final analysis work towards the good of all. This in turn resulted in sects and sectarianism. Small wonder that these sects hated and turned against each other.¹⁴⁸

He further stated that if God had created any religious book on earth, then He would have made it in a simple and universal language so that any human being on the earth could read and understand it easily. Moreover, He would not have created inequality between male and female.¹⁴⁹ Since all religious books were authored by men, they did not contain good things about women. They refuse all human rights to women: "If a holy woman had written any scripture, the men would not have been able to ignore the due rights of women and the men would also not have waxed ebullient about their own rights,"¹⁵⁰ Phule argued.

As a matter of fact, Phule's alternative model to orthodox religion was not just for Hindus alone. He actually came out with a concept of 'universal religion of truth' (*Sarvajanik Satyadharmā*) to all people of the world irrespective of their different faiths or organized religions. As a result; all the ideas and principles of his 'religion' appears to be flexible and rational even to the extent that except 'truth', he does not suggest anything. Notably, in his *Akhandas* on the subject,

147 D. Keer & S.G. Malashe (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 353.

148 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of the True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 229.

149 *Ibid.*, p.37.

150 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

he preached the truth and truth alone. He was of the firm opinion that there can't be a religion where there is no truth. He writes:

... Unless all men follow the path of truth and treat one another (conduct themselves towards one another) with pure and holy feelings in their hearts (with love and charity), they will not be knit together by pure, loving and fraternal bonds (of feelings and emotions). And, hence, I am sorry to say, the kingdom of God is not likely to come to pass (will not be inaugurated in this unfortunate, hapless, sorrow-ridden) world of ours, for the present.¹⁵¹

To understand Phule's deep concern for truth, we can take, for instance, his concept of 'Creator' which is totally different from the old traditional concepts of 'God'. As noted earlier, he referred to Him as '*Nirmik*' which means the Creator.¹⁵² He believed that the terms hitherto coined for Creator had grown out of practices or observance of prayer or worship, which only created social rift amongst human beings. It was for this reason that he avoided terms such as *Ishwar*, *Allah*, *Brahma*, and even 'God'. It is interesting to note that his mentor Thomas Paine has also used the word 'Creator' for God in his *Age of Reason*. There is a similarity between Phule's concept of *Nirmik* and Paine's concept of Creator. To Paine, God is omnipotent and omnipresent and also benevolent. He asks:

Do we want to contemplate His power? We see it in the immensity of the creations. Do we want to contemplate His wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible whole is governed. Do we want to contemplate His munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate His mercy? We see it in His not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful.... To know what God is, search not the book called the scripture.¹⁵³

151 *Ibid.*, pp 19-20.

152 Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, *National Biography: Jotirao Phule*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992, p. 56.

153 Howard Fast (ed.), *Selected Writings of Thomas Paine*, The Modern Library, New York, 1946, p. 303, quoted in Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

Paine further states that everything that is created in the world is for the benefit of human-beings.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, Phule's *Nirmik* is also omnipresent, omnipotent and benevolent. He is so kind-hearted towards human beings that the creation of everything in the world is favorable to the human life. For example, there are oceans on the earth; and to provide water for the human beings, God has mingled salt with the water in the oceans so that it will not be spoiled.¹⁵⁵ And also the Creator has planned to provide various types of trees, flora and fauna etc. on the earth all of which are useful to the human beings. The whole universe is created by Him for our comfort, but we have created "different religions for different human beings":

The Creator has created this earth (the universe) which sustains us all. It is adorned with different kinds of grass (brushes) and trees. The trees bear many luscious fruits. These fruits and the kindly shade of the trees are meant for our comfort, night and day the earth moves ceaselessly (on its axes) for our comfort, and fondly looks after all of us. There should not be different religions for different human beings as our Creator is one.¹⁵⁶

Phule's *Nirmik*, like Kabir's, was conceived in radical monotheistic terms. He did not believe in prophets or messengers of God as propounded in the institutionalized religions. Nor did he believe in the theories of hell and heaven, incarnation and predestination. His own mind and conscience, to paraphrase Thomas Paine's 'maxim', was his temple. In this sense, Phule's *Nirmik* was transcendental but resided within his own being.¹⁵⁷ He believed that though the Creator has created all living things, but he has endowed humans alone with intellect and by its judicious use, humans can improve their lot. With such ideas at the core, Phule came out with his concept of *Satyadharma*. In the introduction of his *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*, he visualizes of the restoration of "*Nirmik's* kingdom of truth" on earth in these words:

154 *Ibid.*, p. 321.

155 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 13.

156 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 136.

157 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

In this vast boundless space of ours, the *Nirmik* has created all living beings alongwith innumerable solar systems and their planets and satellites. By the grace of God, I have written this humble book for the good of humanity to show to men and women what kind of conduct to adopt towards others with His thoughts always in their minds and which will please Him. I ask of Him that this book be accepted by all and that all of us enjoy equally *Nirmik's* kingdom of truth.¹⁵⁸

Phule did not like the methods of worshipping God prevalent in the old Hindu religion (and, of course, other religions). He did not believe in offering any flower or *Naivedya* (food offered at the time of worship) to *Nirmik*. Since *Nirmik* has created flowers and sweets and scented things for the use of humans, it is useless and meaningless to dedicate these things to *Nirmik*. Similarly, *Nirmik* can't be pleased by meditation etc. Repeating in mind countless times the name of God is not the proper way to worship. Then what should be the proper way to "make ourselves blessed?" He clarifies:

Repeating *Nirmik's* name is not going to make ourselves blessed. Those who do not earn their livelihood on the strength of their own labour, or do not strive for the good of the world, but, in order to fill their own bellies, resort to donning the garb of hypocritical mendicants, forever intoxicated with *bhang* or gorging on the delicacies offered by the ignorant, simple-minded persons and indulge in meaningless repetition of God's name, expose themselves to the derision of the sagacious. With gratitude in one's heart for God and by treating one another like brothers and sisters, all human beings can be happy, *Nirmik's* regime will be established and His kingdom will come.¹⁵⁹

Thus, according to Phule, righteous conduct is the true remembrance of *Nirmik*. Instead of offering food or sweets etc. to Him, we should offer it to the poor, the handicapped and the needy people.¹⁶⁰

As a matter of fact, Phule intended to write his book of religion to teach how men and women should, keeping in heart the Almighty, follow the right path of conduct and live peacefully for the happiness

158 Quoted in Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

159 *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

160 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 36-37.

of all humanity and enjoy the fruit of the holy and veracious kingdom of *Nirmik*. This book is a significant proof to show that Phule was not just mere a social reformer but also a theologian who was interested in suggesting a right path of spiritual elevation and moral conduct to his followers and guide them in their socio-religious life. He begins his book with the injunction that people could never be happy in the world unless their conduct was true:

Truth is the primary home of all,
 The refuge of all religions.
 All the happiness in the world
 Is the offspring of truth.
 Truth is the shelter of happiness,
 The rest is all darkness.
 Verily, truth reigns supreme,
 It does away with spite and gall.
 Those sustained by truth
 Can verily rout the false-hearted.
 On seeing the power of truth
 The jester turns green with envy.
 Real happiness is not for the actor
 Who attempts to shun truth and God.
 Joti prays to all the people,
 Do not give in to untruth.¹⁶¹

‘Those who are followers of truth are happy human-beings’ – this was Phule’s major contribution to the religious thought. One comes across various words which mean ‘truth’ in his writings, for instance, ‘*Satyaprakash*’ (light of truth), ‘*Satyodaya*’ (rise of truth), ‘*Satyaish*’ (the godly truth). ‘*Satsar*’ (essence of truth), ‘*Satyadharm*’ (religion of truth/righteous conduct), ‘*Satyashodhak*’ (researcher of truth), ‘*Satyasamaji*’ (follower/worker of *Satyashodhak Samaj*) etc.¹⁶² It is also pertinent to note that he named his association as *Satyashodhak Samaj* and it is needless to say that his classical book entitled *Sarvajanik Satyadharm Pustak* aims at defining the fundamental principles of religion of truth. He used the spiritual axiom ‘Truth alone triumphs’

161 Quoted in Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

162 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

and displayed it on his letter-heads. Significantly, great sages of India had also stressed this message, which has been the mainspring of Hindu/Indian culture and tradition.¹⁶³ Hence, the most important feature of his idea of religion is that it was totally based on 'truth' and reason. He writes:

If you yearn for happiness (in life), then take your firm stand on the truth (always follow the truth). Propitiate the truth and act courageously, and make all the people of the world quite happy and contented. Only then you will be the picture (embodiment) of true happiness, you will be a victor of the race of life and you will also enable others to be such victors. Deep self-introspection is the true (authentic) knowledge (wisdom), and is an unerring sign of an enlightened intellect, says Jyoti.¹⁶⁴

Hence, Phule suggested truth should be the basis of any religion or society. Without observing truth in daily life, human-beings cannot be happy and the kingdom of *Nirmik* is not likely to be manifested. As a true *Satyashodhak*, Phule preached truth throughout his life. Thus, Jotirao wanted to suggest an alternative monolithic religion of truth. Based upon this idea, he did a severe critic of the *Brahman Dharma*:

If *Nirmik* is the creator of us all, then he should grant human beings mercy to suitably enjoy all the human rights that have been created. Since this does not happen, human beings have to undergo various kinds of unbearable sufferings. Feelings of enmity have flourished among the people of the nations of the world giving rise to undue pride in one's country and religion. Rivers of numerous nations of the world join the sea. How can any (particular) river be termed holy, for, even that holiest of holy rivers carries the excreta of a dog in its womb before proceeding to the sea. When all human beings are equal in body and mind, how can some acquire holiness by birth and thus attain superiority?¹⁶⁵

A staunch critique of the Brahman's superiority in Hinduism,

163 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

164 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 157.

165 Quoted in Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

Phule had attacked several times, the profession of priestcraft and the conduct of the priestly caste in Hinduism. In stripping Brahman of his religious authority and the social hierarchies created by the *Brahman Dharma*, he hoped, the *Satyadharm*a would make the lower caste women and men understand the working of the natural world and distribution of power and authority in their own world.¹⁶⁶ As noted earlier, his *Priestcraft Exposed* (1869) was specially intended to throw light on the exploitation of peasants etc. by the priests, wherein he attempts to undermine existing belief of Hindus in the necessity of a priest or mediator to carry out religious rituals. He argued that no such intermediary was necessary between the man and *Nirmik*, and what orthodox Brahmans did attempt to interpose themselves was in search only of power and money, and not for the spiritual well-being of the Hindus.¹⁶⁷

Notably, his mentor Thomas Paine also never felt the need of a mediator in his concept of religion. According to him, "He (Jesus Christ) preached most excellent morality and the equality of men; he preached also against the corruptions and greed of the Jewish priests, and this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of the whole order of priesthood."¹⁶⁸ He further raised a question: "Can we conceive anything more destructive to morality than this?"¹⁶⁹ Phule held the same opinion about the priestcraft prevalent in Hinduism. In his one of his poems, he opines that being "representatives of the Hindu religion", the orthodox Brahmans have only "exploited" and "robbed" all the ignorant and simple people of their faith:

The Brahmans are the representatives of the Hindu religion, and they have exploited all the ignorant people. These spokesmen have robbed the simple folk under the guise of religion and, thus, have feathered their own nests. No spokesman, interceder, or intermediary is necessary in the divine court (before God), and pious devotion is truly authentic, says Joti.¹⁷⁰

166 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

167 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

168 Howard Fast, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-90.

169 *Ibid.*, p. 286.

170 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 144.

In fact, one of his prime concerns was how to dethrone the priest from his preeminent position of go-between God and man, and if such categories of analysis and discourse were available to him, as G.P. Deshpande points out, he may have, a bit like Ernst Bloch, argued that he was “rescuing Hinduism and secularism from (Brahman) philistines”.¹⁷¹

According to J.R. Shinde, a significant feature of Phule’s religion was that it was not confined only to individual but was open to the whole society and universe as well. In other words, the nature of his religion was more social, more public, and more universal than individualist.¹⁷² Therefore, universalism appears to be one of the most prominent features of his idea of *Satyadharma* and, it was perhaps for this reason that he named it “universal religion of truth” and called himself “true brother of all human beings”:

He who never treats his fellow human beings unjustly, who regards all of his brothers and sisters (kith and kin), who never indulges in the pastime of vilifying the *Mahars* and *Mangs*, and who consigns the spurious Scriptures of the *Aryan Brahmins* to the flames and he who never persecutes others, out of arrogance born of his affluence, and who abjures all hatred from his heart – such a person alone deserves to be called as the follower of the truth. Joti is true brother of all human beings.¹⁷³

In his book of religion, Phule has laid down thirty-three principles for the guidance of the followers of *Satyashodhak Samaj* and the believers of his religion of truth. These principles are the crux of his idea of *Satyadharma*. Some of the important principles are as under:

- (1) Our Creator has created human beings. All men and women are by birth independent, and are entitled to enjoy all due human rights. Those who accept this view are the votaries/followers of the truth.

171 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

172 J.R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 106.

173 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 152.

- (2) Our Creator has created the Sun (Solar system) and the stars and planets of the galaxy in the vast void. He or she who does not venerate or worship any of these, or a freak star or any stone or metal icon as the true Creator – should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (3) Those who do not trouble any human beings created by our Creator (in His goodness) unnecessarily should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (4) Our Creator has graciously bestowed all human rights on all men and women, without any distinction. No particular man or a group (gang) of men has any right to oppress any human being. Those who do not so oppress their fellow beings should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (5) Our Creator has bestowed full religious and political autonomy (freedom) on all human beings. So nobody is justified in troubling other persons. Those who respect other persons' rights scrupulously and do not trouble others in any way should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (6) Our Creator has created all human beings. Each woman will choose one man as her husband, and each man will choose one woman as his wife. Barring such legitimate instances (cases, examples), if all men and women behave towards all other human beings as brothers and sisters, they should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (7) Those who take scrupulous care not to harm other human beings while exercising the... freedom (to express, to write down and to publish) in their personal lives should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (8) Those who accept the view that our Creator has endowed all human beings with the requisite capacity to hold (and enjoy) any position of authority in matters of religion or village administration or revenue administration, in consonance with their innate ability and capability, should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (9) In accordance with the dictates of our Creator, all human beings have rights regarding matters of religion or village administration or revenue administration – such as their freedom (to

enjoy these rights), their property, their defense and their protection from being oppressed. Those who do not hamper these rights should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.

- (10) Such men and women as take proper care of their parents in their old age and honor duly other senior (aged) worthies or those who honor such people duly (as mentioned in the previous clause) should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (11) Those men or women who do not consume narcotics such as opium or heroin or who do not imbibe wine (as per the direction of the doctors) and who do not commit any acts of injustice (to others) or who do not give any quarter to those who indulge in such habits, should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (12) Men or women who do not indulge in immoral acts or who do not treat with respect persons indulging in such acts should be designated as the votaries or followers of the Truth.
- (13) Men or women who do not commit theft of any kind, or who do not help such thieves should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (14) There are (selfish and crooked) persons who brag loudly that the religious scriptures have been composed for the common weal of all people in this world, but who keep them tightly under their own vicious grasp and refuse even to show them to other fellow-citizens. Men or women who do not trust such treacherous braggarts should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (15) Men or women who do not regard themselves or their blood-relations or their own kith or kin or their own friends and companions only as pre-eminent, sacrosanct or specially privileged hereditarily, and who do not regard other human beings as of mean lineage or as unholy – such persons should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (16) Men or women who, on the dubious authority of their spurious and wicked Scriptures, do not stigmatize other human beings as hereditary slaves (helots, thralls) or who do not pay

- respect to those who stigmatize others – should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
- (17) Men or women who, in order to perpetuate their own domination, do not discriminate against other people's children while imparting instruction to them in the schools, or who condemn persons so discriminating should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
 - (18) Men or women who, while dispensing justice in Courts of law, award due punishment to the guilty in accordance with the canons of justice impartially and fairly, and who condemn those who act unjustly and partially in such cases, should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
 - (19) Men or women who honor farmers or other artisans who earn their livelihood honestly, the hard way, and who pay respect to those who diligently help the farmers and allied classes, should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
 - (20) Men or women who do not look down upon persons earning an honest livelihood by working as unskilled laborers under a cobbler, but who, moreover, praise persons aiding such artisans, should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
 - (21) Men or women, who, without engaging in any useful activity, putting on spurious religiosity do not exploit the ignorant masses by threatening them with dire doom consequent upon the baleful influence of the inauspicious planets, and who also do not write spurious, wicked books better to feather their own nests unjustly, should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
 - (22) Men or women who do not pretend to be mercenary devotees to propitiate imaginary gods and who do not earn an unrighteous livelihood by engaging in ceaseless recitations only to fleece and exploit the ignorant folk or who do not honor persons aiding and abetting such exploiters – should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.
 - (23) Men or women who do not discriminate human beings created by our Creator or who do not make any (artificial) distinctions in their dealings with them regarding their food-habits or the

mood of their apparel, but conduct themselves with pure hearts to them, should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.

- (24) Men or women who do not discriminate against human beings, but who are ever ready to help, to the best of their ability, lepers, physically handicapped persons or orphans, or honor those helping such persons should be designated as the votaries or followers of the truth.¹⁷⁴

Phule even writes that those who do not kill living beings except bugs, lice, scorpions, serpents, jackals, lions and tigers; and also do not help greedy persons, murderers and suiciders are the followers of truth. Further, those who lie for meeting their selfish ends are not the followers of truth.¹⁷⁵ He declares:

All men are created equal by the Creator, and no one is inferior to anyone else. He has bestowed intelligence (intellect/rational faculty) in a varying measure (less or more) on all, but has not bestowed it on selected (chosen) individuals hereditarily. The Shudras and the allied castes are in no way inferior and they have got the same physical features (limbs etc.) as the Aryans.... Man should not discriminate against any other human being on the ground of religion, and all should live in harmony and unison in this world.¹⁷⁶

Significantly, the major thrust of Phule in his religion of truth was mainly upon the universal values of morality, equality, fraternity and rationality. As such, these values could be identified as its precepts. Phule himself followed strictly all the principles of his *Satyadharma*. For instance, he preached the ideal of monogamy in the principles of his religion. Though Jotirao and Savitribai had not any ward, he did not think of another marriage. Sometimes, he was advised to do so by his relatives, but he always refused because it was his principle that all those who regard all other women except their

174 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 33-37.

175 *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

176 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 147-148.

own wives as their sisters, are the followers of truth.¹⁷⁷ Pointing out the adverse effects of the “sinful injustice” done by men to women in India, Phule remarked:

Men in our country did not treat their own daughters or daughters-in-law equally. On the other hand, they stigmatized (treat with contempt) their mothers, sisters, daughters or daughters-in-law (i.e. all women as such in India) as an un-natural (unbecoming), and a very untruthful and cunning breed as a whole. They further treat them with great contempt as though they were serfs and slaves captured as booty in a battle. As a result of this injustice, truth declined, an atmosphere of discontent spread everywhere, and sorrow was born (and held its sway in this world).¹⁷⁸

Phule was a great advocate of human rights. He always demanded that rights of all men and women must be honored and ensured. In this context, his mentor Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* again appears to be a great source of inspiration to him. In his ‘Declaration of the Rights of Men’, Paine considered twenty-seven principles. In one of his principles, he declares: “Men are born free and equal, and always continues to be free and equal in respect of their rights.”¹⁷⁹ Phule also preached in the same line: “Our Creator has given all human beings full freedom to express, to write down and to publish (propagate) their personal opinions and views regarding the human rights (which He has so kindly bestowed upon them all).”¹⁸⁰ As we cast a glance on *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak* or any of his other major writings, it suddenly appears that he always pleaded for human rights of all individuals. His basic argument in this respect was that since our Creator had created all of us as “free human beings”, the human rights are bestowed to all of us as natural rights:

When our Creator created all beings on this earth, He created man as a free human being (endowed him with an independent judgment, with

177 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

178 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 19.

179 Howard Fast (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 155-157.

180 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 34.

a 'free will'). He has also ordained that all human beings are entitled to enjoy their human rights freely (without any curbs or restrictions on their rights). And, hence (it follows that), each person has an (inalienable) right to occupy positions of power and authority....¹⁸¹

He further argued if our Creator had written a holy book, he would have "surely" and "impartially" ensured human rights of all men and women in it:

Suppose He had been pleased to write a holy book or Scripture so that all the human beings inhabiting this earth should follow the straight and narrow path of truth. In that (unlikely) event, He would surely have defined impartially the fundamental human rights of all men and women without discriminating among them. And He would (also) have taken care ... (that it) would have been understood by diverse people speaking diverse languages (all over the world).¹⁸²

Naturally, in the principles of his 'religion of truth' Phule's main stress also seems to be on restoration of human rights of all men and women belonging to all caste, classes and communities. In fact, he came forward as the first champion of human rights in modern India. In the principles enshrined in his book *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*, he opines that the natural rights are inherent to all human beings regardless of all artificial divisions/distinctions based on caste, gender, community, class, faith etc.¹⁸³ While giving advice to the members/followers of his society, he says:

Men and women should not discriminate against one another (should treat others justly) irrespective of the consideration of their villages, or presidencies, or countries, or continents or irrespective of religious beliefs which they profess, but they should regard themselves as members of one world-wide family, (and) should behave amicably and in unison, observing strictly the truthful doctrine (path). Only thus can they please Creator....¹⁸⁴

He advised the dominant castes who had "enslaved" and "tor-

181 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

182 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

183 *Ibid.*, pp. 33-37.

184 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

tured” the lower castes for generations, to restore their due human rights immediately. He did not hate them and was kind enough to forgive them if they would have accomplished it:

Since you did enslave the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* and have tortured us through generations as if it were your inherited right until today, you should first restore to the *Mahars* and *Mangs* their due human rights and apologize to them. Having accomplished that if you would then come and consult the ignorant *Shudras* like us, we shall see what we can do.¹⁸⁵

Similarly, at some other place, while appealing particularly to the orthodox Brahmans to “follow the path of truth”, he, on behalf of the downtrodden, again exhibited the same kindness:

If they genuinely repent for their crime, and if they search for the eternal truth and if they sincerely try to follow the path of truth, then (and then) only will the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* and the *Bhils* (tribals) and the fishermen etc. will not take revenge upon them for their past and present crimes committed against them, but will certainly forgive them (magnanimously).¹⁸⁶

Phule was, perhaps, the first modern Indian thinker who pleaded for equal rights for both men and women openly and, thereby, anticipated the ‘U.N. Charter of Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, adopted on 10 December 1948¹⁸⁷, the first articles of which states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and as a result of common birth into human family they are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one-another in a spirit of brotherhood”¹⁸⁸

A true champion of human rights, Phule had deep sympathies for the Depressed Classes. He always preached for the upliftment of

185 Jotirao Phule, *Satsar*, Number-I, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 207.

186 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 32.

187 Gundappa Singe, *Jyotiba Phule’s Concept of Human Rights*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Gulbarga University, Kalaburagi, 2017, pp. 165-166.

188 J. V. Naik, “The Reformer and the Quest for Social Justice”, *IHC*, Vol. 67, p. 34.

the Untouchables. Therefore, he taught in his religion of truth that those who do not exploit poor and downtrodden people “either in the name of religion or because of astrological superstitions” are the followers of truth. Similarly, those who do not look down upon the untouchable people (like cobblers) etc. are the followers of truth.¹⁸⁹ Thus, Phule objected to all kinds of degradation of one human being by the other. To him, all those who observed the practice of untouchability or caste discrimination were not but the followers of ‘untruth’. Similarly, those who do not show their respect for handicraftsmen were also not the followers of truth. The man who conduct does not show discrimination and who loves and serves all irrespective of caste, race or creed, be he a Brahman, or a Red Indian or a Mahar, he should be entertained at dinner.¹⁹⁰ He attacked the orthodox *‘Arya-Bhats’* for the “absurdity of their queer behavior” with the lower castes:

The *Shudras* and *Atishudras* are absolutely ignorant (illiterate). The cunning Aryan Brahmans do not think it below their dignity to worship the crawling poisonous snakes, as also the monkeys. But they take a great delight in eating and drinking (and also in associating shamelessly) with the prostitutes whom the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* abominate.... So what then is the basis (authority) for the evil practice of the cunning Aryan Brahmans in regarding even the best among the *Atishudras* as mean and contemptible? A little reflection will prove to you the absurdity of their queer behavior.¹⁹¹

To Phule, the true faith gives vision to people to make “self-inspection” and advised the Brahmans that it is an “opportune time” to do and “avoid the impending disaster”:

When all the people will come to know their human rights who will be the protector of the Aryan *Bhats*? The *Shudras* and *Atishudras* will surely ask, ‘how is it that all of us are condemned to a mean, despicable level while the Aryan Brahmans are elevated to a higher station in the land of Bali (India)? if you quarrel with one another, all of you stand

189 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 36.

190 Gundappa Singe, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

191 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

to lose, and hence, you should get rid of all the heretic practices. O Aryans, try to avoid the impending disaster, and embrace the *Shudras* and allied classes as brothers. This is an opportune time to practice some self-introspection, and to remember our Creator, says Joti.¹⁹²

Phule opines that illiterate people do not know which factors affect the progress of human beings. Even the Brahman priests, who exploit the lower castes and behave with them contemptibly, are actually doing this in ignorance, but right education of “love and charity” would also make them enlightened:

Truthful conduct is the essence of the true religion of humankind and the (orthodox) Brahman does not know this secret. *Laxmi*, the goddess of wealth, massages the feet of the hardworking *Shudras*, and she never spurns them as (mean) *Kunbis*. Human beings will surely be happy if they try to please one another through love and charity. Then all evils will flee from them helter-skelter. A hard working person is the true brother (helper) of a *Shudra*, and you should always try to benefit him, says Joti.¹⁹³

Phule describes the character of a true follower of truth in one of his poems as under:

He to whom truth has revealed itself will never (even dream) to trouble any other person in the least. He will never profess himself, as a Brahman falsely (does), in thought, word and deed, and will never try to flaunt his superiority over the *Shudras* and allied persons. He does not show-off his high birth (social rank) and does not practice his hypocrisy on any one. We should regard such a person as one (follower of truth) who appreciates the merits of others, and should always associate with him, says Joti.¹⁹⁴

In another poem, he further throws light on the character of a “truly enlightened person”:

He who has developed an aptitude to follow the path of truth is, indeed, an adornment to humanity, and is also truly happy. His earnest

192 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 150.

193 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

194 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

desire is that all (human beings) should be happy. He is avid for virtue and is truly enlightened (learned). He unerringly identifies the source of joys and sorrows of others, and conducts himself towards them in befitting manner. He alone is truly blessed..., says Joti.¹⁹⁵

According to Phule, educating the down-trodden was a ‘remedy’ to almost each and every problem they were facing. As noted earlier, poverty and exploitation of *Shudras-Atishudras* was, to him, chiefly due to lack of education. Hence, he not only emphasized the issue of educating the lower classes in the fundamental principles of his *Satyadharma*, but also declared education as ‘remedial whipcord’ for ‘nauseating wrong’ done to them in the past.¹⁹⁶ In a poem, he enthusiastically advises the reformers:

Having taken education, you should travel from village to village, advising (enlightening) the *Shudras* (to take education) ... (and) to send all your boys and girls to schools (without fail) ... Light (a thousand) lamps by opening plenty of Government schools (for the children of the downtrodden) and illuminate the lives of the (teeming) *Shudras* and allied persons (in the country) ... Demonstrate the *Shudras* that what wonder you can work (for them)!¹⁹⁷

Phule was so much certain about his ‘remedy’ that he even predicted that when the down-trodden would be educated and “learn the tenets of the true knowledge, one day a person of “saintly character” and a “true follower of truth” will arise from among them and “will glorify our names”:

All the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* as also our other compatriots such as the *Bhils* (tribal people), the fishermen etc. who have been traditionally condemned as mean, ignoble and insignificant by the *Arya-Bhats* for centuries, should send their sons and daughters to the schools where they will begin to learn (imbibe) the tenets of the true (universally valid) knowledge. When, in due course of time (in the fullness of time),

195 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

196 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 46.

197 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 143.

all our sons and daughters will be properly educated in the tenets of the true knowledge, a saintly character will arise from among the ranks of the *Shudras* and other allied classes who will strew flowers over the graves of us all and will truly sanctify and glorify our names. I prophesy thus with my heart brimming over with joy and grateful thanks!¹⁹⁸

Definitely, this was the prediction by a true Mahatma, a follower of truth, which later on came true in the rise of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the champion of the weaker sections in India, from the ranks of Untouchables who really “strew flowers over the grave” of Mahatma Phule when he declared that he (Phule) was one of his three great Gurus, other being Mahatma Buddha and Mahatma Kabir. Notably, apart from Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi also took inspiration from Phule particularly from his concept of truth. Everyone knows that Gandhi was also a follower of truth. In beginning, he worshiped God as truth. But, interestingly, after some time he changed his views and corrected himself and said: “In fact, it is more correct to say that Truth is God (rather) than to say God is Truth.”¹⁹⁹ Gandhi came closer to Phule this way.

It is pointed out that though Phule considered ritualism a part of overall mechanism of exploitation in Hinduism and, therefore, severely criticized rituals prevalent in *Brahman Dharma*; yet he himself introduced some new rituals for the followers of *Satyadharm*. In these rituals, however, needy and the poor were to be served, instead of ‘lazy’ and ‘greedy’ priests. The question arises why did Phule try to keep intact the outer form of rituals? Giving answer to this question, J.R. Shinde opines that Phule felt when the hegemonic tradition in Hinduism was being thrown away, something new must be introduced in its place so that the new entrants might not feel a vacuum in the new reformed religion.²⁰⁰ In fact, the Hindu masses whom he was addressing was illiterate and highly ceremonially-oriented. Some ceremonies and rituals were, therefore, necessary to satisfy

198 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 47.

199 M.K. Gandhi, *Pathway to God*, Navajivan Publishing Houses, Ahmadabad, 1981, pp. 7-9.

200 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.

them. Nevertheless, he introduced such new rituals which were useful for the welfare of the masses and also contrary to the religion of orthodoxy. In this respect, Ramesh B. Jadhav has noted the following things:

- 1) Phule absolutely rejected the mediator-ship of Brahman priests in all rituals. He advised that even the shadow of the (orthodox) Brahman priest should not fall on the bridal couple who holds in the mind that caste of the couple is low. The same desire was expressed by him about the funeral rites of himself in his Will.
- 2) Phule always claimed that the use of simple language was essential for the masses. Thus, he replaced Sanskrit with Marathi in every ritual.
- 3) He also introduced a rationale in the rituals and filled them with social cause. In the *Satyashodhak* marriage ceremony, the bride and the bridegroom had to take oath of loyalty and good conduct for each other as well as for doing social services like imparting of free education among the poor etc.
- 4) In his system of rituals, he allowed the people to have as many variations in the rituals and ceremonies as they wanted or as the local situation, i.e. popular culture, demanded.
- 5) Instead of spending a large amount of money on giving *Dakshina* to the priests, that amount, Phule suggested, should be spent on giving donations to the student aid fund etc. The most important thing was that he completely stopped rituals turning into tools of exploitation.²⁰¹

His poem 'The Hymens of Prime Truth' is another example of his attempts to create alternative rituals and religious practices. In Maharashtra several prayer-songs venerating various deities were sung. This particular poem, venerating 'truth', was composed by Phule in the similar metres and was to replace the conventional ones:

Oh prime truth, may you be victorious.
We shall discover the Creator by virtue of your power. (repeat)...
When the truth rises, the Vedic lore vanishes!

201 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-310.

If you examine *Vedas* in the light of truth, they all appear deceptive.
 Oh truth, upon listening to your greatness, *Puranas* are ashamed
 And hang their heads in shame...
 Always remember the God; follow the tenets of truth.
 Give up the deceptive religion; embrace the virtue of fraternity.
 Do not disregard the depressed; do not be filled with conceit.
 Do not pretend to be chaste and holy; do not be swollen with pride...
 Always speak the truth; give up the shrewd tenets.²⁰²

Despite all the positive aspects of his rituals, Phule, however, appears to have taken a paradoxical stand on the issue of rituals in his *Satyadharma*. On the one hand, he disapproves the concepts of heaven, hell, *Karma* and *Dharma*, on the other; he seems to have believed in the rituals like *Dashpind* etc. This is something inconsistent, and it is very difficult to find out any suitable explanation for going with rituals like *Dashpind* by Phule.²⁰³

In any case, Phule's formulations on *Dharma* are simple and straightforward and create, in a sense, to use the words of G.P. Deshpande, a "republic of equalitarian *Dharma*".²⁰⁴ Deshpande argues that it may sound paradoxical, but his conception of *Satyadharma* is rather secular, as he suggests a 'universal religion of truth' for all irrespective of the faiths the people were already having.²⁰⁵ His religion was open to all. It was subject to change according to time and space. Overall, his focus was on the individual and his relation to the *Nirmik*. The 'universal' was the main theme of his *Satyadharma*. Personally, Phule believed that there should be only one religion in the world, and that is, universal religion of truth. With a profound critique of *Brahmanic* Hinduism and an assertion of equality among all human beings, a fervent monotheism alongwith an ethical orientation was the core of his *Satyadharma*.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, he never

202 Mahatma Jotirao Phule & Madhura Damle, "The Hymens of Prime Truth", in *Indian Literature*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (279), January-February 2014, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, pp. 14-16.

203 *Ibid.*, p. 310.

204 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

205 *Ibid.*

206 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, pp. 176-177.

allowed any sectarian tendency in his idea of religion. He never tolerated any religious fanaticism. To prove his theory of 'one religion' and 'one Creator', he cited many examples. For instance, there is only one sun and one moon in the world that never make any difference between human beings. Similarly, the Creator has created the wind for all to breathe freely. Then why should we think of many gods and many religions?²⁰⁷ In this respect, he clearly advises in one of his poems:

Human beings should never observe any distinction based on religion or polity (political administration), but they should rightly follow the path of truth, for the (glory of) God. All of us should embrace (clap in our hearts) Christians, Mohammedans, Mangs and Brahmans as our own blood-brothers. There is only one Universal Religion of Truth as ordained by our Creator. Why then we do indulge in quarrels for different religions?²⁰⁸

Phule also never wanted that any human being should be forced to accept any religion. The membership of religion should be a matter of willingness and choice on the part of individual himself/herself and it should not be determined by his/her birth. For this reason; he allowed in his ideal of *Satyadharma* that there may be followers of different religions in a single family and it is not necessary that all members in a family should belong to only one religion. He writes:

...all the Sacred Books (Scriptures) compiled by different holy persons do contain some element of Truth, as per their own perceptions and in consonance with the spirit of their times. In that (ideal) family, the lady (of the house) may, if she likes, embrace Buddhism after studying the Buddhist religious scripture; her husband may embrace Christianity, if he likes after studying the *Old* and the *New Testaments* (of the *Bible*): their daughter may embrace Islam if she so chooses after studying the *Quran*; and their son may embrace the Universal Religion of Truth, if he so chooses, after studying *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth* (by Mahatma Phule -1891). And all these members of the family (the

207 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 136-137.

208 Jotirao Phule, *Poetic Selections*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 144.

parents, the daughter and the son) should lead peaceful lives, should never envy or hate the other persons' religion, and all of them should behave towards one another in a spirit of love and understanding, always bearing in their mind that they are the Creator's children, and hence, are the members of the Creator's own family.²⁰⁹

In sum, Jotirao Phule wanted to destroy the old pattern of orthodox religion (i.e., *Brahman Dharma*) among Hindus and equally proposed an alternative model to it, i.e., *Satyadharma*. Like Karl Marx, he believed that man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again.²¹⁰ But unlike Marx, Phule was a religious man and his concept of *Satyadharma* focuses on the emancipation of man, particularly the downtrodden, from the age-old established orders. Accordingly; his religious teachings aim at the upliftment of the disadvantaged lower castes and women. It was Phule's firm belief that only the followers of true faith could help in creating happiness in life of the poor and downtrodden people. All of his thirty-three principles meant for truth-seekers indicate that he was chiefly concerned with the cause of oppressed humanity including peasants, workers, women and the downtrodden. Like a true Mahatma, he was full of compassion for all the oppressed. Most important thing of his ideal of *Satyadharma* was that, to him, the 'truth' and 'religion' are the two sides of the same coin. According to him, truth itself is religion and the precepts of the religion of truth are morality, equality, fraternity, compassion and rationality. That's why; he basically preached the 'righteous conduct' among his followers through his concept of religion throughout his life. As such, we may sum up Phule's religious philosophy, in the words of Dr. Vishram Ghole, as follows:

Worship one God, practice righteous conduct. Everyone should behave like brothers and sisters towards each other. All human beings, men and women, should have equal rights. There should be no caste

209 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 39-40.

210 Karl Marx & Frederick Angles, *Religion*, Progress Publisher, Moscow, 1975, pp. 38-39.

discrimination. The evil customs of today, which are the offshoots of our religion, should be discarded.²¹¹

Similarly, J.V. Naik points out that Phule's understanding of religion shows a "healthy opposition to escapism, devotionism, externalism, hypocrisy, formalism and selfishness in religious matters."²¹² Nonetheless, Phule was entirely a religious man with a unique religious mind. Religiously of Phule's mind could be best explained using the following words of Jiddu Krishnamurti:

Then there is the religious mind. The true religious mind does not belong to any cult, to any group, to any religion, to any organized church. The religious mind is not the Hindu mind, the Christian mind, the Buddhist mind or the Muslim mind. The religious mind does not belong to any group which calls itself 'religious'. The religious is not the mind that goes to churches, temples, mosques. Nor is it a religious mind that holds to certain forms of beliefs, dogmas.... Not being nationalistic, not being conditioned by its environment, such a mind has no horizons, no limits. It is explosive, new, young, fresh and innocent.²¹³

Being an 'explosive, fresh and innocent' religious mind, Phule advanced his framework of socio-religious reform wherein he coined, as noted, his fresh concepts of equality, reform and religion particularly for Hindus who were the victims of 'Brahmanism'. In short, he envisioned a reinvigorated form of 'reformed Hinduism' wherein he dreamt of an egalitarian and moral society based on his conception of the *Satyadharm*. But Phule was not merely a man of letters; in fact, he was basically a man of action. It was for this reason that he also initiated a reform movement in order to materialize his framework of social reform for liberating the oppressed Hindus. The next Chapter deals with that movement.

211 Quoted in Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

212 J. V. Naik, "The Reformer and the Quest for Social Justice", *IHC*, Vol. 67, pp. 34-35.

213 Jiddu Krishnamurti, *On Education*, Orient Long Man, New Delhi, 1974, p. 18.

Initiating a Movement of Social Reform

(1)

Founding of Satyashodhak Samaj: Towards A 'New Moral Community'

Since Jotirao Phule was basically a man of action, he, in addition to proposing his framework of social reform, also launched a reform movement in order to materialize his framework. He was aware of the fact that the age-old *Brahmanical* social order could not be dismantled without a struggle: "We know perfectly well that the (orthodox) Brahman will not descend from his self-raised pedestal and meet his *Coonbee* and low caste brethren on an equal footing without a struggle. Even the educated Brahman...will not condescend to acknowledge the errors of his forefathers and willingly forego the long-cherished false notions of his own superiority."¹ Though he initiated his movement at a very young age of 21 when he opened his first school for girls at Poona in 1848, his organized movement started with the founding of his reformist society *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Society of the Researchers of Truth), which was formed by him in association with his friends and fellows in 1873.

As is apparent from the preceding discussion, Phule's idea of social reform was based upon his '*Baliraja* model'. It was actually his utopian alternative to the religion of orthodoxy in which he envisioned a casteless moral society that believed in *Satyadharma*. He felt the need of founding a society to materialize his utopia. However,

1 P.G. Patil (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule - Reflections*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1991, Vol. I, p. xxxvi.

Phule was not satisfied with proposing a revolutionary theory and framework alone, he also tried his best to execute his theory into practice. His goal was very clear: to fight against Brahmanism and *Brahmanic* domination and to upliftment the downtrodden, i.e., 'Shudras', 'Atishudras' and women. He knew how difficult this task was. So he decided to go ahead with a collective action and through an organized movement.

In fact, Phule always tried to honestly translate his social and moral ideas into actions. In this matter, he was largely different from his contemporary Maharashtrian reformers like Gopal Hari Deshmukh 'Lokahitwadi', Gopal Ganesh Aagarkar, M.G. Ranade etc. For instance, Ranade had a widow sister. Though he always preached for widow remarriage, he could not practice his idealism in the case of his own sister. He was afraid of his father's shock and also of being ex-communicated by his caste-fellows. The second occasion arose when Ranade lost his first wife in October 1873. He decided to remarry at the age of 32 with a girl of 11 years. Being a friend of Ranade, Phule expressed his disapproval through a letter to him for his paradoxical behaviour.² There was no such paradox in his own behaviour.

Phule took a long time to found his society. As told, he began his movement in an unorganized form about twenty-five years earlier. Apart from starting schools for the downtrodden, he wrote books and pamphlets and delivered speeches among the marginalized people to awaken them. He wanted to spread the message of equality, morality, fraternity and rationality among his followers through his writings and speeches. About his earlier activities, his biographer Dhananjay Keer points out:

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

2 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Publication, Bombay, 1964, Third Edition, 2013, p. 136.

inhuman priestcraft and the caste system. He also imbued them with new thoughts, new ideals of human dignity, equality and self-salvation. His writings and speeches also focussed Government attention on the grievances of the peasants and workers caused by the Engineering and Public Works Department of the Government.³

The more Jotiba worked for the downtrodden people, the more he felt that they were not only subjugated, but also oppressed and exploited by a privileged class of the traditional elites. He realized that the toiling castes, which constituted the majority of Hindu society, should not be left to associate with the organisations/societies of the elites, but strike out to form their own society based on the principles of equality, morality, fraternity and 'truth'. For this reason; he alongwith his colleagues, finally decided in 1873 to found such a society. He posited 'Sarvajanik' (universal) as a distinctive characteristic of his society so as to sharply distinguish its *Jagbandhu* (universal brotherhood) character from the *Jatibhandhu* (caste-kinship ties) character of the societies of 'Arya-Bhats'.⁴

On 24 September 1873, Phule convened a meeting of all of his friends, admirers and followers at Poona. About sixty men from many important centres of Maharashtra assembled. In the meeting, he made an introductory speech and impressed upon his fellows the necessity of a central institution for the guidance of the movement for the downtrodden. After several other speeches and much discussion, it was agreed to form the society namely *Satyashodhak Samaj*.⁵ At this occasion, there was great enthusiasm among the lieutenants of Phule and they decided to spread the message of the *Samaj* in an organised manner in their respective regions. It must be mentioned here that Jotirao's high caste friends like Vinayak Bapuji Bhandarkar,

3 *Ibid.* p. 126.

4 Mahesh Gavaskar, "Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule's Critique of Brahman Power" in S.M. Michael (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2007, p. 101.

5 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976; rpt. Manohar, New Delhi, 2011 (hereafter: *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*), pp. 148-149.

Vinayak Bapuji Denge and Sitaram Sakharam Datar also helped him in establishing the society. Phule was elected as first President and Treasurer and Narayanrao Govindrao Kadalkar as first Secretary of the *Samaj*.⁶ The aims and objectives of the *Samaj* were later on defined as under:

1. The *Satyashodak Samaj* is founded by some wise *Shudra* men for the *Shudra* people (to get liberated) from long sustained slavery executed by Brahmans such as *Bhats*, Joshi priests and others.
2. The *Satyashodak Samaj* aims to spread education among the *Shudras* to make them aware of their (human) rights and to get them out of the influence of the sacred books that were made by the (orthodox) Brahmans for their own survival.
3. The ideology of *Satyashodak Samaj*...rejects all kinds of Brahman domination and exploitation on the basis of religion and all religious sources of inequality.
4. ...*Satyashodak Samaj* dreams to establish an ideal society based on ... faith on equality, freedom and brotherhood.⁷

A new member, while entering the *Samaj*, had to take an oath in the name of a popular deity of Maharashtra, i.e., *Khandoba* and declare his allegiance to the British rule. It must be mentioned here that it was not the Phule's association alone which declared its allegiance to the British. The Servants of India Society of G.K. Gokhale had also frankly accepted its British connection and believed that the new colonial regime was "ordained in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence for India's good".⁸ The members of the *Samaj* were expected to obey the following principles:

6 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

7 R. Umapathi, *A Historical Study of the Life and Achievements of Jotbirao Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Periyar University, Salem, 2007, p. 133.

8 G. Bhadrū, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest Movement in 19th Century", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, 2002 (hereafter: "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest", *IHC*, Vol. 63), pp. 845-846.

- i. Faith in one God/Creator (*Nirmik*);
- ii. Rejection of any kind of 'intermediary' (priest) between God and Man;
- iii. Rejection of *Varna Vyavastha* as the basic of Hindu society; and also its other by-products, i.e., caste system and untouchability. Faith in the idea that man's superiority is determined by his qualities, not by his caste/birth; and
- iv. Faith in equality, freedom and brotherhood/fraternity.⁹

A member of the society was required to take the following vows at the time of joining *Satyashodhak Samaj*:

1. I will not worship anything except our Creator.
2. I will not bring into discredit the pure (human) rights that have been given by our Creator by countenancing either those who thorough the arrogant assumptions in their books behave as though others were inferiors, or those who accept such inferiority.
3. I will stop being party to the killing of animals, and will give up alcohol, as far as I can.
4. I will hold firmly to my (faith and) pride in the truth; will help the old, the lame, and the very young in our society; and will strive to give enough education to all our children so that they may understand their rights.¹⁰

The *Samaj* had further drawn its 'Twenty-Eight Rules' after its inauguration. Rosalind O'Hanlon has recapitulated these rules as under:

The first rule stated that the condition of the *Shudra* at present was appalling and that the society had been established to make some amends for the terrible neglect that prevailed concerning the real rights of men, their duties and proper course of action, and the means that must be employed to remedy the miseries of the *Shudras* themselves.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002 (First published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p. 231.

The next rule settled the name of the society, and the third stipulated that (certain) rules had been laid down to ensure the smooth running of the society. The fourth rule forbade all discussions on political issues. The fifth and sixth allowed people of other castes and towns (of India) to join the society, provided that they accepted its rules. The seventh and eighth dealt with details of internal organisation. The ninth, one of the most important, set out the vows that all members of the society were required to take on joining it.... The tenth rule stipulated that each member should give the fruits of one day's work a year for the society's expenses. The next twelve rules dealt with internal organisation: the election of officers and other decisions of the society were to be taken by majority opinion, a managing committee was elected to look after routine business, and a meeting of all members should take place four times a year. The twenty-third rule turned once more to the aims of the society. The remainder of the rules reverted again to details of organisation.¹¹

The question arises, how did the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj* take place in Phule's minds? According to Tukaram Hanumant Pinjan, one of his most intimate colleagues, Phule's friends and colleagues in early 1870s used to come to gather every Sunday at his shop of flowers in Poona. Amongst those who used to attend these meetings was one Mr. Dnyanagiri, a member of *Kabir-Panth* which was a radical *Bhakti* sect of Hindu society. Dnyanagiri used to read to the assembled gathering from the *Bijak*, a book written by Kabir, translating it from its original *Brijbhasha* into Marathi. The book contained much information about the selfish and evil conduct of the priestly order. We know, Phule had long since been convinced that the *Shudra-Atishudras* suffered all sorts of difficulties on account of the *Brahmanic* slavery. Having received further confirmation of his belief in the writings of Kabir, he began to turn over in his mind the practical steps that would liberate the lower and downtrodden castes from the bondage of caste slavery in Hindu society.¹² A researcher of the subject, Ramesh B. Jadhav, has further claimed that the foundation of *Satyashodhak Samaj* was the result of the deep influence

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 231-32.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 230-31.

of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* on Jotirao Phule's mind.¹³ As discussed, Phule believed that 'Brahmanism' was mainly accountable for the deplorable conditions of the downtrodden and, therefore, wanted to replace it by his new concept of *Satyadharma* which was based on his belief in truth. The *Satyashodhak Samaj* was basically an institution to preach and propagate his concept of *Satyadharma*.

Since founding of the *Samaj* was an historical event, it was reported by *Satyadipika*, a Marathi periodical, as under:

A great revolution was at present going in Poona. About 700 families from *Kunbi, Mali, Potter, Carpenter* and other *Shudras* had launched a movement to make themselves independent in religious matters from Brahmans. These families were refusing to call Brahmans to perform the ceremonies which were customary, and were giving to their own caste fellows the food which would otherwise have been offered to the priests.¹⁴

The *Samaj* itself recorded the need and significance of its founding in its first report which also throws some light on the question as to why this action was taken by "some wise gentlemen", i.e., Phule and his colleagues:

Some wise gentlemen founded this *Samaj* on the 24th September, 1873 in order to free the *Shudra* people from slavery to Brahmans, *Bhats, Joshis*, priests and others. For thousands of years, these people have heedlessly despised and exploited the *Shudras* with the aid of their cunningly-devised books. This action was taken, therefore, so that through good advice and the spread of education, the *Shudras* might be good to understand their real rights, and freed both in religious and more general matters from the false and self-interested books of the Brahmans.¹⁵

13 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *Contribution of Phule and Shahu to Caste and Religion*, Ph. D. Thesis, submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 1987, p. 198.

14 *Satyadipika*, October 1873, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

15 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1873 to 24-09-1875)*, Dnyanprakash Press, Pune, 1877, p. 1; quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 230; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.),

To achieve its goals, the *Samaj* soon launched an organised movement which was not simply a social reform movement, but basically a radical reformation movement having the dimensions of socio-religio-economic reforms. From 1873 until his death in 1890, Phule was the central figure of the movement. His immediate associates comprised leaders like Krishnarao Bhalekar, Narayan Lokhande, Ramayya Venkaiah Ayyavaru, Rajanna Lingu, Dr. Vishram Ghole, Dr. Santuji Lad, Ganapatrao Patil, Ramseth Uravane, Narayan Tukaram Nagarkar, Gopalbaba Valangkar etc. Phule was mainly holding the intellectual leadership. Bhalekar, Dr. Ghole, Uravane, Nagarkar, Patil and Nawalkar were chiefly engaged in propagating ideas of the *Samaj* in Poona and its nearby villages. Lokhande, Bhalekar and Dr. Lad spread the ideas and work of the *Samaj* among industrial workers, vegetable sellers and other backward and uneducated sections of the population in Bombay. Gopalbaba Valangkar, a *Mahar* by caste and an impressive public speaker and writer, mainly worked among the Untouchables and made many of them members and workers of the *Samaj*. He was also involved in mobilizing Untouchables independently for their issues. Phule keenly guided and helped him a lot in his activities.¹⁶ On 24 September 1875, on the eve of the second annual conference, Phule handed over his responsibility as the President of *Samaj* to Dr. Vishram Ghole.¹⁷ After the death of Phule in 1890, his wife Savitribai Phule, who earlier headed the women's wing of the *Samaj*, assumed the leadership of the *Samaj* on the request of the *Satyasamajists*. She also presided over the 1893 Saswad session of the *Samaj* and led it from the front during the famine and the plague epidemic of 1896-97.¹⁸

Only first three annual reports of the *Samaj* were published. In the second annual report of the *Samaj*, a list of 67 members has been

Mahatma Phule Rachanawali, Radhakrishna Prakashan, New Delhi, 1996 (first published in 1994), Vol. I, pp. 241.

16 G. Bhadru, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest", *IHC*, Vol. 63, pp. 845-846.

17 R. Umaphathi, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

18 Cynthia Stephen, "The Stuff Legends are Made of" in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *A Forgotten Liberator: The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule*, Mountain Peak, New Delhi, 2008, p. 26.

given which included the names of four doctors, two ‘head-writers’, two ‘writers’, a head clerk, a police inspector, a deputy collector, an overseer, and a Government pensioner. Hanumanrao Bapuji Sahane, Narayan Nagarakar, Nana Karkhanavis, Narayanrao Govindrao Kadalkar, Vinayak Babaji Dengale and Namadev Mahadev Sasturakar returned themselves as ‘writers’, or clerks. Similarly, Muraraji Vithoba Musil was a clerk in a local Government Department. Bapuji Hari Shinde was a head accountant in a Government Department at Buldhana. Rajanna Lingu was a renowned lawyer in Poona. Yashavantrao Raghoba Kamble was a railway inspector. Gyanu Jayakar was a *Jamadar* in the Bombay Native Army. Viththal Tulsiram Hirave was a soldier stationed at Poona. There was also a flock of students in the society.¹⁹

The *Samaj* declared that it was a non-political society seeking to ensure the natural rights of all human beings, particularly the ‘*Shudra-Atishudras*’ and women. Membership of the society was open to all castes of the Hindu society through Brahmans to *Mahars*, *Mangs* and *Chambhars*. In addition, even Christians, Jews and Muslims were also allowed to be its members. The weekly meetings were held on Sundays at the places where branches of the *Samaj* were established. In Poona, meetings were held normally at the house of Sadashiv Ballal Govande in Somawar Peth. The subjects discussed were: necessity of temperance and education, encouragement of *Swadeshi* goods, dislodging the priestly order from the position it held in the religious sphere, performing marriages at minimum expense and without the aid of Brahmans, and freeing men and women from their beliefs in superstitions, astrology, ghosts and demons.²⁰ While its aim was to save the people from the “hypocritical Brahmans and their opportunist scriptures,” the *Samaj* clearly forbade the performance of any religious ceremony by a member of the priestly caste for the

19 *The Reports of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1875 to 24-09-1876)*, pp. 9-10; also see L.G. Meshram ‘Vimalkirti’ (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 241-264

20 Braj Rajan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2005, rpt. 2013, p. 265; also see Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

followers of the *Samaj*. Phule especially activated the intellectuals and leaders of *Samaj* to organise and conduct religious and marriage ceremonies in peoples' languages (i.e., Marathi, Telugu etc.) without the aid of 'Arya-Bhats' priests and their scriptures written in Sanskrit. He argued how could a scripture, which people didn't understand, liberate them?²¹

The dress of a *Satyasamajist* (worker of the *Satyashodhak Samaj*) consisted of a blanket, a turban and a dhoti, and also he had often a drum in his hand. The language of the 'Satyasamajist' was the language of the *Marathi Manus* (common man of Maharashtra) and their places of propaganda were the corn-gathering places. He used to refer to the debts, injunctions and rites/superstitions the peasants were grieved of and told them how the little money they had was drained away by the cunning and selfish orthodoxy (*Bhatjis*), money-lenders (*Shetjis*) and Government officials (*Latjis*).²² His main attack was on the *Brahmanic* hegemony/dominance, *Varna Vyavastha*, caste discrimination, untouchability, idol-worship and all misogynistic customs. His emphasis was also on the principle of the fatherhood of Creator and the brotherhood of human beings.

While establishing his society, Phule followed the footsteps of the founders of the *Brahmo Samaj* and *Prarthana Samaj*, so far as its outer structure was concerned. But ideologically his society was entirely different from those ones. The difference between *Satyashodhak Samaj* and others was very clear. Both *Prarthana Samaj* and *Brahmo Samaj* believed in *Brahmanic* theology. Raja Rammohan Roy started with 'Brahmo', Atmaram Pandurang with 'Bhakti', and later Dayananda Sarasvati with 'Arya'. But Phule started his society with 'truth' and for the purpose of truth-seeking. The issues taken up by other reformers were mainly concerned with the institution

21 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction)*, LeftWord, New Delhi, 2002, rept. 2016, p. 187.

22 G. Bhadru, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest Movement in 19th Century", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, 2002 (hereafter: "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest", *IHC*, Vol. 63), pp. 852-853.

of family, like child marriage, widow remarriage and education of women etc. Again, most of the reforms advocated by them with great enthusiasm were mainly relevant to the upper castes and had little or no relevance to the lower castes. For instance, the issue of widows was chiefly the problem of Brahmans and upper castes only. But, unlike other societies, the *Satyashodhak Samaj* wanted radical reformation in Hinduism. It raised a vigorous voice against 'Brahmanism' and caste-slavery and demanded social equality and justice for all the downtrodden sections of Hindu society including lower castes, women and peasants.²³

Rosalind O'Hanlon has noted that one of the aims of Phule's initiative was to convince the lower caste Hindus that their all social groups fell within the category of the exploited, and, as such, they all shared common social position and common interests. Under such state of affairs, he placed both 'clean' *Shudras* and 'unclean'/untouchable *Shudras* (whom he called *Atishudras*) in the 'community of the oppressed' on account of them being common victims of the orthodoxy. He explained that the disabilities suffered by the Untouchables as well as the exploitation born by the *Kunbi* cultivators were the result of the same system and both shared common interests and a common social position.²⁴ This was done strategically by the ideological construction of a social grouping that would be socially creditable and attractive to the explanation of *Satyashodhak Samaj* of social evils in terms of subjugation/exploitation of all by one (elite) group, and its feeling of hope and striving for change:

This capacity for a common commitment to secular welfare was, however, only to be the outward symbol of a deeper sense of unity and independence among the lower caste communities that the leaders of the society sought to create. Crucial to the realisation of this unity were matters of religious worship and rituals. Phule and others hoped that the society would take the lead in establishing the idea of the *Shudras* as a new moral community, independent of *Brahmanic* Hinduism. The society would express this spirit through the worship of a supreme God that transcended all conventional religious confessions includ-

23 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-131.

24 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

ing Hinduism, and by taking into their own hands the conduct of all ceremonies and other social occasions which required a religious sanctification through the performance of ritual.²⁵

While emphasising his idea of the 'new moral community', Phule was rejecting the system of regressive hierarchy which engineered divisions and schisms among the oppressed Hindus. Further, in rejecting the notion of high and low, pure and polluted, the main thrust of his attack was on inhuman, oppressive and exploitative character of the religion of orthodoxy. The conception of his 'new moral community' was equally informed by the ideas of universal brotherhood. The *Satyashodhak Samaj* was founded to materialize this conception. Phule had hoped that the great rural and the downtrodden communities of Maharashtra would form the natural constituency of the *Samaj*.²⁶

As told, the main objective of the *Samaj* was to achieve human rights of all men and women particularly the 'Shudra-Atishudras'. It sought to restore not only their rights but also to take remedial action for redressing their problems. It rejected the belief that some humans are born superior or inferior. Each member of the society was required to give education to the children of the lower castes. The *Samaj* insisted that education is essential, especially the English/modern education, which could play a vital role not only in transmitting occupational skills but also in paving the way of intellectual emancipation of the downtrodden. For this reason, Phule proposed a full-fledged programme for dispersing the harmonic ideology among the student-folk of the *Samaj* and, thereby, converting them into true actors and agents of the new moral community.²⁷

Soon after the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, the orthodox class, desiring to destroy the movement even in its early stage, started its malleolus propaganda against the *Samaj*. The poor and ignorant villagers and lower caste people, frightened by the priests, came to

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

27 Adi H. Doctor, "Low Caste Protest Movement in 19th and 20th Century Maharashtra: A Study of Jotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar," *Indian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1991, pp. 207-208.

Phule and asked him how their prayers would reach God if they were chanted by them in Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu etc. Phule explained that God read the human mind and could well understand the yearnings and prayers of every human being. For instance, did not the prayers say in Latin, English and French reach God? Did not the prayers of Namdev, Tukaram, Eknath, Chokhamela and Savata Mali reach the ears of God?²⁸ While criticising the evil designs of the orthodoxy behind their scriptures and ritualism, Phule argued:

They further masquerade (pose) themselves as holy saints and robe and exploit (the *Shudras*) unashamedly under the guise of religion (piety) in broad daylight. They have lead luxurious lives – at the cost of exploiting the hard working common populace, and thus condemned them to eternal penury and misery. I shall illustrate my point. Do the birds and beasts ever write religious books about God, like the Aryan Rishis, and do they ever assume airs (pretend to be) as holy sages, and do they, thus, exploit their fellow birds and beasts? (Never!)²⁹

Nevertheless, the orthodox class continued to put pressure on the villagers not to join the *Samaj*. Those who became members were harassed and some of them lost their jobs in Government services as normally, conservatives used to be their supervisors there. Narayanrao Govindrao Kadalkar, the Secretary of the *Samaj*, too, was transferred to Mahabaleshwar from Poona.³⁰

But Mahatma Phule, without caring about his opponents, devoted all of his energies and resources for the propagation and expansion of the *Samaj*. Soon the number of on-roll members of the *Samaj* increased from 76 to 232 in the second year.³¹ According to M.S. Gore, the members came from different professions and there were lawyers, doctors, merchants, contractors, peasants, artisans and agricultural labourers belonging to different castes/communities (like *Mali, Kunbi, Dhangar, Kumbhar, Shimpi, Sonar, Gavali, Lohar, Sutar,*

28 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

29 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 14.

30 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

31 G. Bhadru, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest", *IHC*, Vol. 63, p. 845.

Mahar, Mang, Chambhar, Ramosi, Muslim, Jew and even Brahman) who joined the *Samaj*. Many Government officials also participated in the meetings of the *Samaj*.³²

It is pertinent to note that after founding the *Satyashodhak Samaj*, there arose a question before its members: whether or not they would still remain Hindus? Chiefly, the non-Brahman castes were predominant in the *Samaj*. While the members were reluctant to portray themselves as ordinary Hindus, they were even more anxious to avoid declaring that they had actually left the Hindu community.³³ Phule's caste-fellows, *Malis*, were naturally the leading *Satyasamajists* who were also the main financial supporters. Some Marathi and Telugu *Malis*, who were contractors and professionals, also came forward to support the *Samaj*. In addition to Phule, Krishnarao Bhalekar, Narayan Lokhande, Gyanoba Sasane, Ramayya Venkaiah Ayyavaru and Rajanna Lingu were the prominent members of the *Samaj* belonging to the *Mali* caste.³⁴

Gore suggests that new members of the society, particularly belonging to the *Mali* caste, had found the ideology of the *Samaj* attractive for several reasons; one of them, for instance, was that their low ritual status as *Shudras* remained still unchanged in the Hindu society, despite their increasing affluent position in professional terms.³⁵ Another factor in their attraction towards the *Samaj* was that as contractors and professionals dealing frequently with the local Government offices and institutions, they usually came into close contact with the Brahman officials and administrators who held predominant position in the British administration. This had magnified both their conviction of the economic and social advantages enjoyed by Brahmans, and their feeling of an undue dependence on them. Besides, the *Malis* (as well as other lower castes) seemed woe-

32 M.S. Gore, *Non-Brahman Movement in Maharashtra*, Segment Books, New Delhi, 1989, p. 29.

33 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

34 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1873 to 24-09-1875)*, pp. 2-3; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 242-249.

35 M.S. Gore, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

fully lacking in the ability to secure such advantages/positions. The most likely way for acquiring this ability lay in organization. They were convinced that only a broadly-based social movement would be able to persuade the British Government to extend such advantages to them also.³⁶

Early in 1874, some of the leaders of the Telugu *Mali* community in Bombay had invited Phule to address them. They also formed a branch of *Satyashodhak Samaj* in the city. Ramayya Venkaiah Ayyavaru, Narsimharao Sayabu, Vadhnala Jaya, Rajanna Lingu and Vyanku Balaji Kalevar were the leading activists of the society in Bombay. In the village of Bhilar in Junnar *Taluka* of Satara District, Govindrao Bapuji, the *Patil* of the village, also established a branch of the *Samaj* which, later on, became the centre of a powerful movement of the *Satyasamajists* against the landlords and moneylenders.³⁷ A large number of the rural people from Poona, Satara and Bombay districts were attracted towards the activities of the *Samaj* during 1873 to 1876. Its active membership rose to 232 and 316 in 1874 and 1876 respectively.³⁸

An action plan was devised by the *Samaj* to popularize its ideas and activities among the masses. Following were the main items of its action plan:

1. To contend the *Brahmanic* religion, the *Samaj* opposed the priest as a middleman between man and God, and also all *Brahmanic* scriptures, rituals and ceremonies. It insisted upon simple and less expensive marriages, opposed child marriages and supported widow remarriages and inter-caste marriages, though the frequency of such type of action was very low in the earlier phase. Hence, the *Samaj* devised new innovative means of opposition to the religion of orthodoxy.
2. The *Samaj* opposed the exploitation of the peasant and lower caste masses by *Shetji*, *Bhatji* and *Latji*. Phule in his *Shetakaryacha Asud* had elaborated how the *Shetjis*, *Bhatjis* and *Latjis* had joined hands with one another to exploit the

36 R. Umaphathi, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

37 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-251.

38 G. Bhadru, *op. cit.*, pp. 845-846.

rural masses. This book, alongwith other *Satyashodhak* literature, was widely circulated among the masses in order to awaken them against their exploitation.

3. The *Samaj* opposed caste discrimination and untouchability in a sharper tone and focused on the upliftment of the downtrodden masses, particularly Untouchables. The *Samaj* also supported the cause of women and stressed the need of their upliftment. For the upliftment of the downtrodden and women, the *Samaj* mainly emphasised upon the spread of education among them.³⁹

The movement of the *Samaj* mainly got spread by individual propagandizing efforts. It was mostly taken up in spontaneous ways and attained basis in almost all sections of Maharashtrian society, but it never had an overall controlling body.⁴⁰ On the guidelines of Phule, the *Samaj* rejected the scriptures, mythical traditions, *Varnal* caste system and all sorts of religious base of social inequalities. Since the *Samaj* had a firm belief in rationality, opposition and rejection of *Brahman Dharma* was mainly based on 'rational' arguments. It was intended to make the lower caste masses aware of the trap of the orthodoxy and to make them free from their caste-slavery.⁴¹ One of the major activities of the *Samaj* was proselytization of the lower castes in Poona and its surrounding villages where its reformers occasionally toured giving *Upadesha* (advise) to the villagers. The first report of the *Samaj* provides details of such efforts of Bhalekar and other workers in Bhamubura village (Poona) where they opened a branch of the *Samaj*, and with the help of poetry and music gave *Upadesha* to the villagers and won over many new members. In the village Hadapsar (Poona) also many people became members. Here, the business of imparting advice was proceeding 'satisfactorily'.⁴²

While propagating the *Satyashodhak* ideas in Hindu society, Phule's strategy was to differentiate the popular folk culture of

39 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

40 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 110.

41 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

42 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj, 27-9-1873 to 24-9-1875*; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 241-242.

Maharashtra from the *Brahmanic* elite culture. The major expression of its ideas was, as we know, exhibited in Phule's literature and but it was also evident in the literary works published by his colleagues. Phule's *Gulamagiri*, *Shetakaryacha Asud*, *Trutiya Ratna*, etc.; Tukaram Taty Padaval's *Jatibhed Viveksar*; Baba Padmaji's *Jatibhed Nirinay*; Dadoba Misal's *Jatibhedavar Sambhasham* and some other books were regarded important for making propaganda against the *Brahmanic* religion and culture and for promoting *Satyashodhak* culture.⁴³ As described in Chapter-IV, Phule, after founding his society, also wrote a book entitled *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak* to make the people aware about the spiritual ideas of *Satyashodhak Samaj*. He was interested in preaching his idea of 'religion of truth' and also providing his followers a guidebook for righteous conduct and behaviour. The book is a summary of statement of his theology and his view of what a rational and scientific religious system could be for India and Hindus. He argues passionately for reforming Hinduism into a monotheistic, humane, and benevolent system.⁴⁴ Though his critic Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, a B.G. Tilak's soulmate, dismissed him as a "*Shudra* Religious Teacher", a "*Shudra* World Teacher" and a "*Shudra* Founder of Religion", Phule and his colleagues were not prepared to take things lying down any more and decided to carry on through their propaganda and other activities.⁴⁵ Later, two more devastating books were used for propagating the ideas of the *Samaj* – Dinkarrao Javalkar's *Deshache Dushman (Enemies of the Nation)* and R.N. Lad's *Marathayanche Dasiputra (Maratha's Basterds)*. While the former criticised Chiplunkar and Tilak, the later mounted a frontal attack on the *Peshwa* dynasty that fraudulently wrested all powers from Shivaji's descendants.⁴⁶

A periodical of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, *Din Bandhu*, was also launched in 1877 which carried out an ideological campaign for socio-religious reforms and also countered the reactionary ideas of

43 R. Umaphathi, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

44 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of the True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 225-226.

45 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

46 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71.

their orthodox adversaries. Interestingly, Phule opposed publication of a periodical in the beginning because, to him, the ignorant, illiterate lower caste people were not in a position to purchase a newspaper and read it. Nevertheless, Bhalekar convinced him and edited and published the *Din Bandhu* for three years from 1877 to 1880. After him, Narayana Lokhande continued to edit it from Bombay up to 1897.⁴⁷ Apart from *Din Bandhu*, the *Samaj* propagated its ideas in Hindu society with the aid of periodicals like *Satyadipika*, *Dnyan Prakash*, *Subodh Patrika*, *Vividhadnyan Vistaar* etc. Phule also wrote many articles in *Din Bandhu* and some other periodicals, on a variety of subjects and then the *Satyasamajists* propagated those ideas of their mentor in villages and towns. While assessing the works undertaken by the *Samaj*, *Vividhadnyan Vistaar*, a progressive periodical of Poona, admired its contribution in social and educational spheres.⁴⁸ Hence, an all-out propaganda was done on ideological level.

Apart from the propagandising efforts, a number of socio-religio-economic activities were conducted by the *Samaj*. Purpose of these activities was, as told, to provide an identity to all the lower castes of a new 'moral community of the oppressed' as against their orthodox adversaries. Phule imbued in the terms '*Shudras*' and '*Atishudras*' a radical meaning. The terms no longer connoted socially or religiously based, but now meant for the agents of cultural revolution who had rejected the social categories of conventional beliefs and the religious authority of its guardians.⁴⁹

Here, Gail Omvedt also draws our attention to the language of the *Samaj* which equally shows its positive identification with the social categories considered 'low' in the traditionalist culture. This may be called a kind of equalitarian reversal, almost similar to the 'black is beautiful' movement among the American blacks. Hence,

47 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-158.

48 Nagaraju Vedapalli, "Religious Movements and Human Rights of Weaker Sections in India: A Study of Satyashodhak Samaj and Neo-Buddhism", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 74, 2013 (hereafter: "Religious Movements and Human Rights", *IHC*, Vol. 74), p. 956.

49 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-132 & p. 237.

Phule constantly used the term '*Shudra-Atihudras*' in referring to the common masses of India. Though he was well-aware of the insulting connotations of the word (he at one place noted that it was derived from the word *Kshudra* meaning 'trifling' and 'mean'), but he ignored this and continued to insist on its use. It was, to him, an essential step to attain the goals of 'cultural revolution' against Brahmanism.⁵⁰ It was also a part of Phule's strategy to provide an 'alternative' to the religion of orthodoxy.

While opposing the hegemonic elite/'great' tradition, the *Samaj* glorified, as pointed out, the popular/'little' tradition. It was done in accordance with the '*Baliraja* model' of Phule, in which legendary heroes of popular culture like king Bali, god *Khandoba*, Chatrapathi Shivaji etc. were considered as the 'protectors' of the interests of the people. Further, Phule glorified the ancient past of lower caste 'inhabitants', for, he wanted to integrate the down-trodden castes through a common identity based on common practices, beliefs and symbols and a shared history. In order to inculcate an 'historical' consciousness among the masses, the *Samaj* propagated that '*Shudra-Atishudras*' of the present day are the deprived descendants of the original inhabitants of the land, the ancient *Kshetriyas/Kshatriyas*.⁵¹ It was a strategic step to boost out confidence among them and their aspirations. In asserting an inhabitant *Kshatriya* status for all lower castes, Phule also made a deliberate link of such castes with the traditional Maratha claims to a *Kshatriya* ritual status. For the early supporters of the *Samaj*, Phule's idea that their 'real' identity was that of the dispossessed *Kshatriyas* of ancient India served the social and religious purpose, that would, otherwise, have been met by the claim of a higher ritual status and by a change in social practices towards a *sanskritized* model of behaviour. Lacking the 'genealogical' basis for their argument, the *Satyasamajists* made their claim in the context of the larger argument that the virtues of warrior and cultivator had been the central force in shaping of Maharashtrian popular culture.⁵²

Nevertheless, Phule did not show the least desire to *sanskritize*

50 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 110.

51 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28

52 M.S. Gore, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-251.

the lower caste people in the way almost all educated Hindu leaders belonging to backward castes did by claiming a *Ksatriya* or high *Varna* origin for their caste. Though it is true that he identified *Kshatriyas*/*Kshatriyas* as the original warriors inhabiting in ancient India, but used the word rather as inclusive of all aboriginals, from *Kunbi*-Marathas through *Mahar-Mangs*. Further, he showed no inclination to identify his movement with Maratha tradition; he almost never used the term 'Maratha', and when he did so, he did so very slightly and even reflect sarcastically upon it. In fact, Phule had taken up the issue of *Kshatriya* status because he saw it as, to use the words of Gail Omvedt, one of the 'perennial concerns' of the Maratha-*Kunbi* castes⁵³ and also because it symbolized a longer tradition (emerged with the coronation of Shivaji) of their social and political conflict with the *Brahmanic* religious opinion, as discussed in Chapter-I.

In order to propose a sound alternative to the religion of orthodoxy, Phule also wrote new 'rites and rituals' and also reinforced the prevalent ones in popular culture for the followers of his *Satyadharma* which the ordinary members of *Satyashodhak Samaj* ought to perform.⁵⁴ Rosalind O'Hanlon describes how the new members of the *Samaj* were called on to perform at the time of their entry a ritual associated with the deity *Khandoba* in the popular culture of Maharashtra:

... (Phule gave) new meaning of the figure of *Khandoba*, the guardian deity of western Maharashtra. *Khandoba* had been the title given to the lieutenants of king Bali in pre-Aryan India. The rite of picking up the *tali* in *Khandoba* worship derived from king Bali's practice of throwing down a *vidya* or roll of betel leaves, to be picked up by whoever among his troops dared to take on a particularly difficult enterprise. At the time of taking their vows, new members of *Satyashodhak Samaj* were called on to perform this rite of picking up the *tali*.⁵⁵

53 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 110.

54 Jotirao Phule, *Satyashodhak Samaj Ke Liye Upyukta Mangalagathayen thatha Sabhi Pujavidhi (All the Rites, Ceremonies, and Verses used by the Satyashodhak Samaj)*, in L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 79-91.

55 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

Its significance was that while undergoing through such rituals, the new members not only became one among the most daring of king Bali's supporters, but also severed all of their connections with the religion of orthodoxy. The report of the society for 1873-75 pin-points many other changes made in rituals, and describes that some members of the *Samaj* and their families had given up a number of "foolish religious customs" like celebration of *Ganesh Chaturthi*, and *Rishipanchami*, lighting of the *Holi* fire in *Phalgun*, giving food to the members of priestly class, worshipping their feet and drinking the water touched by them during the worship of ancestors in *Bhadrapad*. It is also significant to note that the *Samaj* began to celebrate the festival of *Bali Pratipada* in place of *Ganesh Chaturthi*⁵⁶ which was a very popular custom in Maharashtra.

As told, one of the important programmes of the *Samaj* was to ceremonially perform marriages, housewarming, religious rites and other ceremonies without the assistance of Brahman priests. Many prominent figures of the *Samaj* followed it and established precedents. For instance, Vyanku Balaji Kalevar earlier used to give food and cloths as *Dakshina* to members of the priestly caste on the eve of *Ganapathi Chaturthi*. But after becoming a member of the *Samaj*, he stopped it and diverted the *Dakshina* to the handicapped and poor people. Similarly, Rajanna Lingu used to offer *Sadratho Bojanam* to the priests on the eve of *Diwali* festival. But when he became a member of the *Samaj*, he stopped this practice and diverted the expenditure of the meal to the students who were wards of members of the *Samaj*. Those who had secured highest marks in matriculation examination were also honoured with gold medals by him.⁵⁷

The most important and revolutionary ceremony introduced by the *Satyashodhak Samaj* was the conduct of marriages without the aid of Brahman priests. For the conduct of such marriages, Phule wrote *Mangalashataka* or wedding songs which, according to Gail Omvedt,

56 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1873 to 24-09-1875)*, p. 4; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 244-245.

57 G. Bhadru, 'Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest', *IHC*, Vol. 63, p. 849.

must had been inspired by his wife Savitribai Phule⁵⁸ and reflect the socio-religious and gendered idealism of the *Samaj*. In one of these songs, the bride asks the groom:

Bride: Even though...your conduct is satisfactory,
All us women are exploited; how will you take me?

We know the experience of freedom and have become self-respecting,
For that will you give rights to women? Take an oath...

Groom: I will fight to win these rights to women, without counting
the cost

I honor all women as sisters and you as the only love.

For fear of my duty I will take care of you: *Shubhamangala Savadhan*.

Bride: I will (also) never break my vow to you and always do my duty,
Laying aside all burdens, let us struggle for the welfare of the people.

Holding your hand, I vow, before all now: *Shubhamangala Savadhan*.⁵⁹

In the report for 1873-75, two *Satyashodhak* marriages in Poona and eleven in the nearby village of Bhilar have been reported with “greatest pride” alongwith a criticism of the extortionate demands of the Brahman priests in marriages of the wards of the lower castes.⁶⁰

The first ‘*Satyashodhak* marriage’ took place on 25 December 1873 between a young widower and the daughter of a woman who was a close friend of Savitribai. Sitaram Jabaji Aalhat was the bridegroom. Radhabai Syanoba Nimbankar, a *Satyasamajist*, worked hard for the conduct of this unique marriage. Though there was some opposition, the marriage went ahead.⁶¹ Another marriage took place on 7 May 1874 at Hadapsar village where Gyanoba Krishnaji Sasane married Kashibai Narayan Shinde. This marriage was conducted with tremendous labour and sufferings. Babaji Ranoji Phule, Rajanna Lingu and Gangaram Bhau Maske along with people of *Mang*,

58 Gail Omvedt, “A Teacher and A Leader”, in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

60 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1873 to 24-09-1875)*, pp. 2-3; also see L.G. Meshram ‘Vimalkirti’ (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 255.

61 Cynthia Stephen, “The Stuff Legends are Made of”, in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Mahar and Muslim communities in Mithaganj Peetha had helped in this marriage. Phule had himself written a long account of this wedding, which was published in *Satyadipika*.⁶² This marriage was conducted under police protection, but the *Samaj* kept a precedent before Hindu society successfully. It is important to note that one of the followers of the *Samaj* from Junnar *Taluka* in Satara district, namely Govindrao Bapuji Patil also followed the *Satyashodhak* practice in the case of conducting marriages. He did not take any kind of help from the *Samaj* for the purpose, and himself spent money. Balaji Kusaji Patil also performed his son's wedding in accordance with the practice of the *Samaj*.⁶³

Though the conservatives did not recognise these marriages, but the *Satyasamajists* never cared for it. As a result, the orthodox Brahmins met in the village of Otur in Poona district and passed a resolution to the effect that performing a marriage without a Brahman priest encroached on their rights. They also decided to file a case against Balaji Kushaji Patil who performed marriage of his son through *Satyashodhak* rites, without the assistance of a Brahman priest. The judge, M.G. Ranade, who was also a well-known reformer of the city, heard their petition. He found it 'wrong' to perform a marriage ceremony without a Brahman priest and ordered that even if the customary priest had not been invited to the wedding, he should be given *Dakshina* (marriage fee). The verdict was, however, challenged in the High Court by Jotirao Phule who stood up for Balaji Patil. The High Court ruled in favour of Patil.⁶⁴

In the annual reports of *Satyashodhak Samaj* one also gets informed about other religious ceremonies/practices performed by the members of the *Samaj*. Like marriages, the *Satyasamajists* also did not employ any '*Arya-Bhat*' priest to perform their other ceremonies. For instance, the ceremonies like *Daspind/Shradha* etc. were performed without the mediatorship of the priest. Further, a heinous religious custom to worship the foot of a Brahman was prevalent in

62 See *Satyadipika*, June 1874.

63 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1873 to 24-09-1975)*, pp. 2-3.

64 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206.

Maharashtra. The toe of his right foot was required to be washed and that water was taken as a *Tirtha* (holy thing) and consumed. The members of the *Samaj* abruptly opposed this barbaric custom.⁶⁵

Dhanjay Keer informs us that not only non-Brahmans, but Brahmans were also benefited by the reforms of the *Samaj*. For instance, when Phule on behalf of the *Samaj* addressed an appeal to *Navis* (barbers) saying that they should not attend the ritual of removing the hairs of widows⁶⁶, many Brahman widows were saved from the cruel and inhuman practice. For the unwanted babies of such women, Phule also opened a home at Poona⁶⁷, as we have noted earlier.

As a result of their initiatives of radical reform, Phule, his colleagues and *Satyasamajists* had to face a tough opposition from the conservative caste Hindus which included the members of *Mali* caste too. For instance, in the case of the marriage of Gyanoba Sasane (who was a *Satyasamajist* and close associate of Phule), the people of his village Hadapsar rose against this 'assault' upon their ancestral religion. One day before his marriage, they gathered outside Sasane's house in the night, shouting abuses and threats. Sasane was shaken by their threats and rushed to Phule to tell him that he had changed his mind. Nevertheless, Phule urged him to take courage and assured him that they were living under the protection of the British Justice. With this assurance, Sasane returned to his village with courage. The opposition within the *Mali* caste continued. The opponents from Poona employed agents to visit *Mali* families of Hadapsar village (whom Sasane belonged) to warn them that if they joined ceremonies of the *Samaj*, they would not continue to be members of *Mali* caste. When Phule realised the extent of the opposition, he wrote to his fellow *Satyasamajist*, Rajanna Lingu, a Telgu *Mali* and well-known lawyer of Poona. Lingu persuaded Gangaram Bhau Mhaske, a prominent public figure in Poona and a well-wisher of the *Samaj*,

65 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj, (27-9-1873 to 24-9-1875)*, pp. 4-5; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 246.

66 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-86.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 83-86.

to arrange police security for Sasane. Thus, under police protection, the marriage went ahead, without any Brahman priest, according to the plan.⁶⁸ As a gesture of 'penance' for the violation of their old religious beliefs, the conservative *Malis* arranged the marriage of a two-year old girl at the same time.⁶⁹

Without caring for the opposition of conservative sections of Hindu society, the *Samaj* continued to perform its activities. Gunaji Babu Patil of Talwane village in Junnar *Taluk* performed a *Satyashodhak* marriage in his own house without a priest. A barber's wedding was similarly performed in Taligaon village. For this act, the barber family was socially boycotted by the Brahmans of the village. The barbers went to Phule for help. Phule advised them to boycott their boycotters too and refuse to serve them. The barbers did so. Resultantly, the Brahmans couldn't respond any further.⁷⁰ The *Samaj* was radical, it was, however, not as radical as Phule would have liked. While reports hailed various weddings performed without '*Arya-Bhats*' priests, they represented only a small proportion of the life ceremonies of its members. Even staunch followers sometimes came under community pressure to give up their radicalism.⁷¹

In any case, prolonging its social reform activities, the *Samaj* also resisted the Bombay Government's decision to open new liquor shops in Poona on the grounds that this would exacerbate the problem of drunkenness in the city. In fact, Poona was not familiar with the sight of liquor shops even earlier. But now, under the British rule, liquor shops were seen even in crowded areas, thus sowing the seeds of decline in public morals. With the opening of liquor shops, alcoholism had gripped the city. For this reason, Phule, as described in Chapter-II, took a serious view of the ubiquitous consumption

68 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1873 to 24-09-1875)*, pp. 3-4; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 243-244.

69 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-243.

70 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *Lekhansangraha*, Shrividya Prakashan, Pune, 1982, pp. 53-54.

71 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2008 (hereafter: *Seeking Begumpura*), pp. 256-257.

of alcohol in the city. On 18 July 1880, he wrote a strongly worded letter to Mr. Plunket, Chairman of the Managing Committee of Poona Municipality drawing his attention to the problem and asking for allowing no more liquor shops in the city. He also suggested that the municipality should impose a tax on liquor shops in proportion to the damage done by the them. This suggestion was not accepted, though his demand for opening no more liquor shops was accepted.⁷²

Notably, Gyanoba Sasane, whom Phule had employed as a superior of labourers at Khadakavasala and Yerwada construction projects undertaken by him, opened a night school of *Satyashodhak Samaj* for the labourers, which was attended by not less than 2,000 men. When the projects completed, he, on behalf of Phule and the *Samaj* gave a feast to all the labourers. During the feast, Sasane said that offering the feast to toiling labourers was of much greater virtue than to give feast to the priests.⁷³ In 1876-77, a severe famine devastated western Maharashtra. A heart-rending account of the famine has been narrated by Savitribai Phule herself in a letter, written from Junnar on 20 April 1877 to Jotirao, which also brings out the activities of the *Satyasamajists*, including of the Phule couple, to help the suffering people:

The year 1876 has gone, but the famine has not – it stays in most horrendous form here. The people are dying. The animals are dying, falling on the ground. There is severe scarcity of food. No fodder for animals. The people are forced to leave their villages. Some are selling their children, their young girls, and leaving the villages.... The sun is scorching – blistering. The people crying for food and water are falling on the ground to die. Some are eating poisonous fruits and drinking their own urine to quench their thirst.... (However,) the moneylenders are viciously exploiting the situation. Bad things are taking place as a result of this famine. Riots are breaking out.... You have started the benevolent and welfare work for the poor and the needy. I also want to carry my share of the responsibility. I assure I will always help you. I wish the godly work will be helped by more people. I do not want to write more.⁷⁴

72 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

73 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

74 Sunil Sardar, "Love Letters unlike Any Other: Savitri's Three Letters

In fact, in the midst of famine, the greedy moneylenders were out to make money out of the poor farmers' need for food and succour. The *Satyashodhak* volunteers were engaged in relief work, doing their utmost to salvage lives out of the ruinous situation. Finding them to be a hindrance, the moneylenders levelled false accusations of rioting against them before the administration. In protest, Savitribai strived to defuse the internal dissension and riots caused by the dirty politics of moneylenders and boldly told the Government officials to do what is urgently required. The Collector accepted her plea, set the *Satyasamajists* free and praised their social work.⁷⁵ Jotirao, alongwith Savitribai and his *Satyasamajists*, also tried best to help the poor and the needy during the whole famine period. Sasane described how during the famine of 1876-77, when Phule was carrying out work of mining for stone at Golhe, he (Phule) and some other *Mali* contractors opened a famine relief camp for the sick, disabled and children. They also opened an orphanage, namely Victoria Balashram at Dhanakavad camp exclusively for children, where two thousand children were fed daily for months.⁷⁶ Phule, alongwith his wife, was also instrumental in starting 52 boarding schools for the welfare of the children orphaned during the famine.⁷⁷ In this noble work, his friends like Shri Ramshet Bapushet Uravane and Shri Hari Raoji Chiplunkar and Mr. Shinappa, the chief officer of the Poona municipality, also helped him.⁷⁸

From 1882 onwards, Phule and his colleagues attempted to extend the activities of the *Samaj* to the rural areas of the Bombay Presidency, especially in the Collectorates of Poona, Ahmednagar and Thana. Also, the welfare activities of the *Samaj* were confined not only to Poona and other parts of Maharashtra; they were extended to other regions. For instance, a sum of Rs. 325 was collected by the

to Jotiba", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁷⁷ Victor Paul, "The Relentless Truthseeker", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *A Forgotten Liberator: The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule*, Mountain Peak, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 85-86.

⁷⁸ Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

members of the *Samaj*, which was sent to the people of Ahmadabad, who had suffered a lot on account of flood in the city.⁷⁹ Such moves brought Phule and his *Satyasamajists* into a more sustained and direct contact with the communities of cultivators and the poor. About a decade after founding the *Satyashodhak Samaj*, they directed their movement more specifically to the issues of mass education and agrestic transformation.

(2)

Initiatives for Mass Education

In no times, the *Satyashodhak Samaj* became popular among the *Shudra-Atishudras* of Maharashtra. The reason was obvious: it aimed at a radical social reconstruction of the Hindu society. Its ideology was clearly change-oriented, demanding to attain goals of equality, fraternity and rationality in society. So the *Samaj* carried forward its action plan with an object to pioneer a radical reformation in the Hindu society and also ameliorating its downtrodden sections. The first two reports of the *Samaj* reveal that right from its inception, it tried its best to achieve these goals. The issue of reformation through education was given priority in its action plan, as Rosalind O'Hanlon also keenly observes:

Education came to be seen as the panacea for almost every social and religious evil. Non-Brahman leaders regarded it as having three purposes. First, it provided the occupational skills, from basic literacy to fluent English, that the lower castes needed if they were to win a share of employment in administration and the professions proportionate to their numbers in the population of Bombay Presidency. Second, a western secular education seemed to offer intellectual emancipation from many of the doctrines of *Brahmanic* Hinduism, from the belief in divine or magical powers active in the natural world, from the idea that any particular individual or religious group possessed the means to control such powers. Finally, education would help to bring about a reformation of popular manners. The idea of such a reformation was

79 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

to take a central place in the programme of every non-Brahman activist and polemicist.⁸⁰

As is apparent from the previous discussion, it was the firm belief of Phule that enlightenment of the lower caste people and women was the only way out to combat the social inequalities and, it was for this reason, he pointed out in the opening lines of his highly thought-provoking treatise *Shetakaryacha Asud*, that lack of *Vidya* (education/knowledge) led to lack of wisdom, which led to lack of morals, which led to lack of progress, which led to lack of money, and which finally led to the oppression and enslavement of *Shudras*.⁸¹ In fact, about 25 years ago, he started his initial social work in the field of mass education. Though prior to him, the Christian missionaries had established some schools open to all sections of society in Poona; but no indigenous school for girls existed at that time and this situation 'induced' Phule to take action for the cause: "I, therefore, was induced in the year 1851 to establish such a school, and in which I and my wife worked together for many years,"⁸² he disclosed later on to a newspaper. As described in Chapter-II, he, first of all, started a school for girls belonging to the Untouchables named 'Low Caste Female School' on 15 May 1848 at Bhidewada in Poona.⁸³ According to Pamela Sardar, Sagunabai, his aunt-mother, was the inspiration behind this step of Phule. She was, in fact, a forerunner of his educational activities and had started a school in the *Maharwara* (colony of Untouchables) in Poona in 1846, which was to be closed down within a few months due to the opposition of the orthodox Brahmans who saw in it a 'conspiracy' of missionaries to convert *Mahars* into Christians. Sensing the sinister designs of the orthodoxy, the young Phule came forward and organised a public meeting in Poona on Christmas, the 25 December of 1846, where

80 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-34.

81 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 117.

82 *Dnyanodaya*, 16 December 1853, quoted in Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

83 Archana Malik-Goure, *Jotirao Phule: A Modern Indian Philosopher*, Suryodaya Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 5.

Phule declared his intention to start school for girls of lower castes in the city. It was also here that Mr. Bhide, a Brahman friend of his, offered his big house to start this school, in the locality of Brahmans because *Mahars* were not ready for it yet.⁸⁴ It was the first school opened by any Indian reformer for the girls belonging to the lower castes.

On 3 July 1851, he started another similar school, exclusively for the Untouchables, in Anna Chiplunkar's mansion at Budhwar Peth where he himself had taught for four hours a day without taking any salary.⁸⁵ In this school, his wife Savitribai Phule had also taught and had become its principal too. Meanwhile, Phule also set up a library for his students, since he felt that libraries are also an important means of imparting education.⁸⁶ He started two more schools, the first one was a mixed school for the lower classes especially *Mahars* and *Mang* founded on 17 September 1851 at Rasta Peth, and another for girls on 15 March 1852 at Vithal Peth in Poona.⁸⁷ On account of such unrepresented initiatives, Phule became one of the famous figures of his Presidency in the field of natives' education.

Sir Erskine Perry, the President of the Educational Board, and Mr. Lumsdain, the then Secretary to Government of Bombay visited to the girls' schools established by Phule and were very much pleased with his initiatives. They also honoured him on behalf of the Bombay Government, as told. Phule set up about 18 schools between 1848 and 1852 in the Presidency, out of which six were in Poona town, six in rural areas of Poona districts, three in Satara and three in other places.⁸⁸ He continued to work in these schools for nearly 9 to 10 years. Later on, his girls' schools were handed over to

84 Pamela Sardar, "The Woman Who Mentored Phules", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

85 *Dnyanodaya*, 15 July 1853, quoted in Dhanajay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

86 N.L. Gupta, *Mahatma Phule: An Educational Philosopher*, Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2008, pp. 61-62.

87 Suresh Mane, *Glimpses of Socio-Cultural Revolts in India*, Samrudh Bharat Publication, Mumbai, 2006, p. 103.

88 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

the Education Department under the management of Mrs. Murray Mitchell.⁸⁹

Though, like Phule, many other social reformers of India had keenly worked to impart education among the people, but the difference between Phule and the others was that he was not in favour of the conventional education, but pleaded for alternative pedagogical methods. As pointed out in previous Chapter, he offered a rigorous critique of the *Brahmanical* pedagogy where he pointed out how it made the '*Shudra-Atishudras*' victims of the caste-slavery. Notably, as per the instructions of the Education Board, his school prescribed Balshastri Jambhekar's translation of Mountstuart Elphinstone's abridged *History of India*. But being critical about the colonial as well nationalist history, Phule was not keen to teach the prescribed syllabus of history and, going beyond the scope of syllabus, instructed his own version of history and historical reality in India. His Brahman colleagues, working as the directors of the school, opposed him by asking him to teach necessary modules like reading, asthmatics etc. than his understanding of history and reality. Phule left the school after this dispute.⁹⁰

Significantly, he also criticised the colonial education system. Actually, the British Government prescribed a syllabus of letters writing, arithmetic and readings of few social science books at primary level. The Government was not imparting knowledge of western physical sciences and skill-oriented technical education. The instruction of pedagogy was memory-based, uncritical and bookish. And the preponderance of Brahman teachers made it more problematic. In fact, the Government schools were, Phule found, filled with such incompetent orthodox teachers:

...Whose worth is less than that of the potter working in the mud or clay, who have no knowledge on which side to grip the farmer's plough, wordy administrators merely, dependent entirely on the farmer, how will these teachers, whose demeaned the farmer to the lowest of the

89 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285.

90 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 69.

states, and proud that they are the best of human beings, be able to teach the farmers' children any useful knowledge and discipline?⁹¹

In his short balled on *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department* (1869), Phule demonstrates how the state-policy and the conventional pedagogical practices “are intrinsically interlinked.” He comments, at length, on the differential treatment by the orthodox teachers towards the children of lower castes to such an extent as to make them to drop out their education, and also on collusion of interests of the Bombay Government school-inspectors and teachers.⁹² He remarks in one of his writings:

The (heartless) Brahman teachers persecute the Shudra children attending their schools, and ridicule them openly in the class rooms (in the presence of other pupils). The casteist Brahman teachers openly flaunt and parade their caste-superiority and (unashamedly) declare their caste ascendancy.⁹³

He also accused the British Government of taking no interest in the education of lower castes.⁹⁴ In such circumstances, colonial education was also not useful in meeting the needs of toiling classes and castes. That's why, Phule criticised the colonial education system.

Needless to say, as noted in Chapter-I, the colonial system of education was designed to upkeep the stability and continuity of the British Empire and was particularly aimed to establish hegemony of the Raj. The British introduced a system of 'class education' in India where emphasis was to ensure supply of the educated elite for running the British administrative machinery. As such, the Government, through its educational policy, deliberately reinforced the traditional

91 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 163.

92 *Sharmila Rege*, “Education as ‘Trutiya Ratna’: Towards Phule-Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogical Practice”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, No. 44-45, 30 October 2010, p. 93.

93 Jotirao Phule, *Abhangas about the Brahman Priestcraft*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol.-II, p. 142.

94 Jotirao Phule, *Vidyakhatil BrahmanPantoji* in *Christian Journal of Satyadipika*, Bombay, June 1869, pp. 83-87.

monopoly of the few high castes over education and knowledge and ensured their ascendancy in the arena of class elevation. In fact, nobody, including the upper caste reformers (including stalwarts like Raja Rammohan Roy etc.) and the Government policy makers, was in favour of allowing education to the deprived castes/classes. Suresh Mane has reproduced the views of Lord Ellenborough, the President of the Board of Control, on the issue, who in 1835 endorsed Lord T.B. Macaulay's ill-famed 'trickle-down theory' on the basis of some prejudices and apprehensions of the British colonial masters:

Education and civilization may descend from the higher to the inferior classes, and so communicated, may impart new vigour to the community, but they will never ascend from the lower classes to those above them; they can only, if imparted solely, to lead to general convulsion of which foreigners would be the first victims.⁹⁵

Such biases affected several aspects of the education system in India, including paucity of funds, lack of infrastructure, narrowing of the scope of pedagogy and content of primary education. The British policy was, thus, averse to mass education. That's why, Phule frankly accused the Government of ignoring the education of lower classes and raised serious questions on trickle-down/filtration theory advanced by stalwarts like Macaulay, Ellenborough and many others. The Government squandered the taxes, he said, collected from the poor farmers, on educating upper classes/castes. He asked the Government to bring to light that from the local funds collected from the farmers, how many farmers had got education and became employees, and if the Government had publish such a gazetteer, it "will have their eyes opened."⁹⁶

However, despite all its limitations, Phule preferred colonial education for its commitment to the values of humanism, scientific temper and secularism. He, therefore, suggested radical revamping and reform in the approach, content and pedagogy of the colonial education. In almost all of his writings, he suggested that schools

95 Quoted in Suresh Mane, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

96 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

should not be run solely by the orthodox Brahman teachers because they used to be contemptuous of the students they taught (Phule was, perhaps, remembering his own experience of an orthodox Brahman advising his father not to educate him as well due to the everyday experience of the lower caste students being discriminated at the hands of orthodox teachers in their schools), but preferably by the teachers drawn from the non-Brahmans, including the lower castes.⁹⁷

Phule wanted mass education. He believed that the “only sure remedy” for the nauseating wrong done to the downtrodden classes was that they should take “proper education”.⁹⁸ His wife Savitribai had written the same thing and in one of her poems, said, “now, under the British rule, the *Shudra-Atishudras* have the right to education and through the English education, casteism can be destroyed and *Brahmanical* teaching can be hurled away.”⁹⁹ Needless to say that when Phule founded *Satyashodhak Samaj*, he genuinely took special initiatives through his society, for the education of masses. According to a report of the *Samaj*, on the call of the leaders of the *Samaj*, some members came forward for starting more schools in Poona so that “young *Shudra* students could come to Poona to study.”¹⁰⁰ Krishnarao Bhalekar decided to start a night school in his village of Bhamburade. The *Samaj* had opened a school in the nearby village of Hadapsar and agreed to contribute Rs. 4 towards its running costs, while the villagers were to make up the remaining Rs. 6 themselves. The report further read that the *Samaj* decided to pay a servant Rs. 5 a month to collect up the children of the lower castes from the streets of Poona and shepherd them to school in order to encourage a taste for learning among them. Phule conducted examinations amongst the children of the lower castes at different Marathi schools in Poona

97 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 164.

98 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 46.

99 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 270.

100 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1875 to 24-09-1876)*, pp. 2-4; also see L.G. Meshram ‘Vimalkirti’ (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 241-242.

and distributed prizes and sweets among the pupils who passed out from the school.¹⁰¹

A Sub-Committee was also appointed to look into the possibility of opening a boarding house in Poona and as per its recommendations, the house was opened in 1876 at Poona.¹⁰² It is also pertinent to note that various elocution competitions were conducted by the *Samaj* for awakening and encouraging the students belonging to lower castes. 'What are the Merits and Demerits of the Caste System' and 'Idol worship' were, for instance, the subjects for the elocution competitions for the year 1876. 'A Lack of Education among the People was a Root Cause for Their Sufferings' was the subject for next year's competition. The subject for the 1878 competition was to explain why it was that:

Some people of the *Shudra* caste, into which were born the hero Chatrapati Maharaja Shivaji, and the great rulers of states (like) Shinde, Holkar, Gaikawad and others, do not feel it a humiliation when they perform tasks such as looking after the shoes of Brahmans. When, however, some of the Brahman caste go from house to house begging alms, they would scorn even to touch the shawls of *Shudra Rajas* and princes, let alone shoes.¹⁰³

The report presented at the third annual general convention of the *Satyashodhak Samaj* (1876) also throws some light on the variety of activities the *Samaj* had undertaken after its founding. The *Samaj* granted scholarships to 10 students for higher studies. Also a high school was started for the lower caste students. The *Samaj* encouraged boys and girls who showed some merit in their studies, through financial assistance and community persuasion. The report further indicates that the *Samaj* was taking special measures/affirmative action for the spread of secondary/higher education among the *Shudra-Atishudras*. For instance, the representatives of the *Samaj* succeeded in getting two or three poor students admitted without payment of fees to the Engineering College in Poona. The *Samaj*

101 *Ibid.*, pp. 241-259.

102 Suresh Mane, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

103 *Dnyanodaya*, 28 February 1878, quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

had further succeeded in securing freeships up to 5 per cent for the non-Brahman students in Government schools and colleges.¹⁰⁴

Though Phule and his *Satyasamajist* associates started a spirited campaign for mass education, but their individual as well as collective efforts were not enough to achieve the goal. So Phule wanted that the Government should spend public funds – collected through taxes – for developing an infrastructure for universal education. He repeatedly asked, advised and warned the Government to shoulder more responsibility in this regard. As told, he accused the Provincial Government of Bombay of ignoring the education of the non-ignorable by toeing a trickle-down theory which still dominated their education policy despite the clear cut directives of the Government of India to promote the education of the masses, which were issued in compliance with the recommendations of Charles Wood's Dispatch of 1854.

One of the biggest initiatives of Phule for mass education after the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj* was his 'memorial address' which he submitted to the Hunter Commission on Education in India on 19 October 1882.¹⁰⁵ This Commission was appointed by Lord Ripon, the then viceroy of India. It was the first initiative of the British Government of its kind. The evidence submitted by Phule to the Commission was, no doubt, a document of immense importance in the history of educational reforms in India because it was probably the first document of its type that talked of creating a taste of education among the lower classes of the country and making it accessible to all. Though he submitted the address in his individual capacity but since he was the leader of the *Satyashodhak Samaj* from its inception, and it was also on account of this position that he

104 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1875 to 24-09-1876)*, pp. 2-4; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 255-260.

105 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission, 19 October 1882*, in William Hunter, *Report of the Indian Education Commission*, Vol. II. Superintendent of Government Printing, India, Calcutta, 1884, pp. 140-145.

was heard by the Commission, his submission naturally included the educational demands of his society and the people it represented.

It is pertinent to note that several learned and well-known figures of India testified before the Commission, but almost all of them showed their concern only for the education of upper classes of society. Nonetheless, Phule was the only exception. In his representation, he described himself as a farmer, a merchant and a Municipal Corporater.¹⁰⁶ He gave, at the outset, a detailed account of his work in the field of education, the schools established by him, the number of years he worked as a teacher and his experiences regarding education. He began by quoting some passages from his book, *Gulamagiri*. He said that a taste of education had been created by the Government only in the higher and wealthy classes. Commenting on the 'trickle-down' philosophy underlying the educational policy of the Government, Phule wrote in his address to the Commission: "We have never heard of a philosophy more benevolent and more utopian. It is proposed by men who witness wondrous changes brought about in the west, purely by agency of popular knowledge, to redress the defects of hundred million of India by giving superior education to superior classes and to them only. (But) we ask the friends to favour with us a single example of the truth of their theory from the instance which have already fallen in the scope of their experience."¹⁰⁷ He then said that they had so far educated only children of wealthy men and had promoted their worldly prospects alone.¹⁰⁸ However, the children of the elite, who availed education and achieved material success on its strength, did nothing to assist the upliftment of their "underprivileged countrymen":

The Government is under the illusion that people from the upper castes will spread education among the lower castes. Clinging to this pipe-dream, the Government squanders the taxes that it earns from poor farmers on educating the upper classes. Educational institutions educate children of the rich and help them achieve material success.

106 N.L. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

107 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 104.

108 *Ibid.*

But those who come out of these institutions have not done anything to assist in the upliftment of their underprivileged countrymen. The young men (are coming) armed with degrees from universities. What have they done for the common masses? What change have they brought about in society, at home and elsewhere to educate their unfortunate and ignorant brethren? Then, how can it be claimed that it is essential to educate the upper castes to raise the moral and intellectual level of the people? Appointing natives as deans and proctors does not prove that it is all in the interests of the nation.¹⁰⁹

Phule complained, “one of the most glaring tendencies of Government system of high class education has been the virtual monopoly of all the higher offices under them by Brahmins.”¹¹⁰ He pointed out that because of the introduction of class education in India, the highest castes enjoyed monopoly everywhere in the colonial administration. It should be immediately braked through changing the educational policy. He heavily criticised the British colonial masters who had spent through its Education Department, a huge amount collected from the taxes levied upon the ‘*Shudra* peasants’ on educating the high castes alone:

The Shudras pay the local fund (to the tune of one Anna per rupee) alongwith the land assessment (every year) to the Government (for their children’s education). But, unfortunately, the cunning Brahmins gobble it all up in the Education Department. Kindly show us how many *Shudra* children they have taught so far, and how many *Shudra* officers they have trained so far. The white (English) officers have solicitude for the *Shudras* in their hearts, but unfortunately, they appoint the Brahmins to all responsible (important) posts. The generous *Shudras* are now fed up with paying the local fund to the Government and also with maintaining the Brahmins.¹¹¹

We know that the real motto of Phule was to annihilate the caste-ridden social order. Hence, he strongly opposed the ‘downward

109 Quoted in N.L. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

110 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 104.

111 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 140.

filtration theory' in his address which was furthering caste inequalities in Indian society. Needless to say that he was for mass education and his insights as well as earlier initiatives prove this. He suggested:

If the welfare of the *Ryot* is at heart, it is the duty of Government to... narrow this monopoly day-by-day so as to allow a sprinkling of the other castes to get into the public services. Perhaps, some might be inclined to say that it is not feasible in the present state of education. Our only reply is that if Government look a little less after the higher class which is able to take care of itself and more towards the education of the masses, there would be no difficulty in training up a body of men everyway qualified and, perhaps, far better in morals and manners.¹¹²

Phule found the Government policy unjust on economic grounds too. The greater portion of the revenues of the Indian Empire came from the agriculturists, "from the *Ryots'* labour", "from the sweat of his brow". It did not come from the surplus profits, nor from luxuries but from the necessities of the poorest. It was the product of 'sin' and 'tears'. Hence, it was a great injustice to neglect the education of the masses and spend disproportionately on the education of the higher castes or on higher education. He agreed with Sir George Campbell, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, that this policy of giving priority to the education of the higher classes was "highly mischievous and pernicious to the interest of the Government" too.¹¹³ Hence, he suggested the Government to "look a little less after" the education of higher classes and more the education of masses and "take the glory into their own hands of emancipating my Shudra brethren from the trammels of (*Brahmanical*) bondage".¹¹⁴ The reason behind this suggestion, as stated, was that the British education policy ensured nothing but the "monopoly of education by the Brahmans."

Phule argued further that in the case of the upper classes, a gradual withdrawal of state aids might be possible. But in the case

112 *Ibid.*, p. 120-121.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

114 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 105.

of lower castes, among whom “education has made no perceptible progress”, such a withdrawal would be a hardship, because in such an eventuality, their boys/girls would have no option but to recourse to insufficient or sectarian schools, much against their wish, and, as a result, the cause of education would suffer. It was for this reason, he preferred that the entire educational machinery must be in the hands of the Government for a long time to come.¹¹⁵

Phule was particularly dissatisfied with the condition of primary education in the country. The reasons for his dissatisfaction were:

- (i) Existing indigenous pattern of schools was defective;
- (ii) Number of Government and aided schools was highly inadequate;
- (iii) The course-curricula were defective;
- (iv) Almost all the teachers were Brahmans who were, in most cases, highly conservative;
- (v) The teachers were neither learned in the sense not adequately trained; and
- (vi) The supervising agency over the primary schools was also very defective and inadequate.¹¹⁶

He, therefore, firstly demanded that the number of primary schools should be increased. For this purpose, schools with qualified teachers should be given grants. Half the tax levied on farmers should be spent on primary education. The Provincial Government should allocate enough funds for primary education. The Government should run all schools of the cities through municipalities and for this purpose, arrange grants from the provincial or central funds for the municipalities so that they could run schools in their territories on their own money. Nonetheless, the municipalities should not be entrusted with the job of administering schools. The Education Department should control the affairs of primary education and the Government should also pass a suitable law for the purpose.¹¹⁷

115 Suresh Mane, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

116 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II., pp. 122-124.

117 Umesh Bagade, “Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of

In view of the towering problems of the lower castes and “present sorry state of education” among them, Phule further suggested that if the Government was serious about doing something for them, primary education should be made “compulsory”:

The Government takes tax from farmers for the purpose of education but the money raised is not used for the intended purpose. There is not provision for primary education in villages of this district (Poona), that is, for nearly ten lakh children. Farmers’ poverty their lack of self-reliance, their dependence on the educated classes, all are a result of the present sorry state of education. Farmers and people from the lower castes are unable to avail themselves of education. Very few of their children are to be found in primary and secondary schools. They do not continue for very long in school owing to their parents’ poverty and the pressing needs to work. The Government has not provided (special) scholarships or prizes to induce these children to continue their education. So I feel that primary education should be made compulsory.¹¹⁸

Phule also demanded for appointment of trained teachers, preferably belonging to the farmers’ castes, and also to increase the salaries of teachers:

The teachers now employed in the primary schools are almost all Brahmans; a few of them are from normal training colleges, the rest being all untrained men. Their salaries are very low I think teachers of primary schools should be drawn, as far as possible, out of the cultivating classes, who will be able to mix freely with them (students) and understand their wants and wishes much better than a Brahman teacher, who generally holds himself aloof under religious prejudices. These would, moreover, exercise a more beneficial influence over the masses (and) will not feel ashamed to hold the handle of a plough or carpenter’s adze when required, and who will be able to mix themselves with the lower orders of society.... To secure a better class of teachers and to improve their position, better salaries should (also) be given.

Knowledge: Phule’s Path of Alternative Education”, in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No 1-4, S.P.P. University, Pune, January-December 2015 (hereafter: “Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge”, *IPQ*, Vol. 42), p. 66.

118 N.L. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

Their salaries should not be less than Rs. 12 and in large villages should be at least Rs. 15 or 20.¹¹⁹

It is pointed out that while demanding for compulsory mass education, Phule was especially concerned about the education of Untouchables who had been deprived of school education “owing to the caste prejudices” in Hindu society. Hence, he demanded separate schools exclusively for them:

...The *Mahars*, *Mangs* and other lower classes are practically excluded from all schools owing to the caste prejudices as they are not allowed to sit by the children of higher castes. Consequently, separate schools for these have been opened by the Government. But these exist only in large towns. In the whole of Poona, and for a population exceeding five thousand people, there is only one school (for them), in which the attendance is under thirty children. This state of matters is not at all creditable to the educational authorities.... I beg to urge that the *Mahars*, *Mangs* and other lower classes, where their number is large enough, should have separate schools for them..¹²⁰

Phule also criticized the Government system of granting scholarships as it gave “undue encouragement” to only those who already had acquired a taste for education. He suggested an alternative system reserving certain number of scholarships to such classes amongst whom education had made no progress. The prevalent method of granting scholarships through competition, he felt, had tended to obstruct spread of education among the lower classes and women. He wrote:

The system of the Government scholarships at present followed in the Government schools, is also defective, 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 whose education has made no progress....In conclusion, I (also) beg to request the Education Commission to be kind enough to sanc-

119 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 123.

120 *Ibid.* p. 122.

tion measures for the spread of female primary education on a more liberal scale.¹²¹

Here, it also significant to note that Phule was, perhaps, the only one who emphasised on female education before the Hunter Commission.¹²² His suggestion of making primary education compulsory for both boys and girls was also in consonance with his prime concerns for the diffusion of knowledge among both sexes.

Phule was also critical of the nature of courses and syllabi of education from the point of view of its utility in practical life, and not merely in public services. It is because of this that all those educated only intended to seek Government jobs. This increased unemployment: "Due to lack of technical or practical education, educated people who do not get Government jobs are not inclined to take up work that demands physical labour. The number of educated people is very small at present, but the day is not far when this number will increase hundredfold. Let us hope that this will encourage all to take up useful trades and not run after Government jobs,"¹²³ he remarked. As a matter of fact, the conventional education totally abhorred physical labour, while the colonial education, indulged in producing clerical staff, and infused apathy towards physical labour. Phule was against this tendency of putting inferiority on labour and, therefore, warned against it. He suggested that schools should align with industries and agriculture in view to impart professional and technical education. It will especially empower the '*Shudra-Atishudra*' students to tackle predicament of practical life.¹²⁴ For this purpose, suitable changes shall be made in the course of studies so as to make the education capable of preparing students for independent carriers. He also suggested:

The studies in village schools might be fewer than be those in large villages and towns but not less practical. In connection with lessons in

121 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

122 Suresh Mane, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

123 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 128.

124 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 70.

agriculture, a model farm, where practical instruction to the pupils can be given, would be productive for the greatest good of the country. The text books used both in primary and Anglo-vernacular schools require revision and recasting as much as they are not practical or progressive in their scope. Lessons on technical education and morality, sanitation and agriculture and some useful arts should also be interspersed among them in a progressive series.¹²⁵

While emphasizing the need of technical education, particularly for the traditional artisans of the country, Phule further demanded for opening some special schools for them because it would put them on equal footing with the “Europeans and American artisans:” For this purpose, the Government should spend some amount of the taxes for opening such schools. The children of the artisans then would particularly be able to produce standard agricultural implements – for ploughing, sowing, turning the soil, weeding, reaping and harvesting etc. – for the use of the agriculturists in our country.¹²⁶ He remarked:

In addition to the schools for the children of the cultivators in this land of king Bali, the benevolent English Government should open separate schools for the children of the artisans in our country – such as tin-smiths, iron-smiths, carpenters, shoe-makers, goldsmiths, tinkers, weavers, tailors – and expend money on providing instruction to them regarding their own trades and related skills.¹²⁷

Thus, Phule made a number of useful suggestions for the improvement of the primary education in the rural areas as well as in the towns/cities which shows his tremendous insight and deep understanding of school education in India. The number of primary schools, Phule summed up, could be increased:

125 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 124.

126 Umesh Bagade, “Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge”, *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 70.

127 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 24.

- (i) By utilising such of the indigenous schools as shall be or are conducted by trained and certificated teachers, by giving them liberal grants-in-aid;
- (ii) By allocating over one half of the local cess fund for primary education alone;
- (iii) By compelling, under a statutory enactment, municipalities to maintain all the primary schools within their respective limits; and
- (iv) By an adequate grant from the provincial or imperial funds.¹²⁸

Regarding the state of secondary education, Phule was, as we know, critical, and demanded that it should also be accessible not to a limited class, but to all:

Secondary education at present is impractical and unsuitable for the common man. Its only utility is to churn out clerks and teachers. Teachers and students are unduly obsessed with passing the matriculation examination. It does not equip them to face the future.... Education should be accessible to all.¹²⁹

Though Phule favoured primary education as against higher education, but it does not mean that he was against higher education. He was also for making higher education accessible to the masses; and for this purpose, he recommended the introduction of a system of private studies, in addition to the regular studies. According to him, this would have two merits: firstly, it would defuse knowledge widely particularly among the people of the rural areas who could not afford to study at college; secondly it would not cause any additional burden to the public purse. Referring to Bombay University for its efforts in the field of private studies in secondary education, Phule welcomed such efforts as a 'blessing' to the people and desired that the "same blessing will be extended to higher education" which indicates his vision of the future educational reforms in India:

128 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 124.

129 N.L. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

It is a boon to people that the Bombay University recognise private studies in the case for those presenting for the entrance examination. I hope the University authorities will be pleased to extended the same boon to higher examinations. If the private students were recognised by the University in granting the degrees of B.A. and M.A., many young people will devote their time to study to private studies. Their doing so will still further tend to the diffusion of knowledge. It is found in many instances quite impossible to prosecute studies at the colleges for various reasons. If private studies be recognised by the University, much good will be effected to the country at large, and a great deal of the drain of the public purse on account of higher examinations will be lessened.¹³⁰

Significantly, Phule wanted the Hunter Commission to meet the poor and unlettered people, and then frame an appropriate policy aimed at universal education. But this was not done and an embittered Phule was left to remark later on in his book *Cultivator's Whipcord*: "The Hunter Commission did not interview farmers. It relied solely on the discussions it had with *Parsis*, Christians and Brahmins and (generally) accepted their words as final. On this account, the report of this Commission will not benefit the illiterate and the poor."¹³¹ Nevertheless, he continued to demand for educational advancement of the lower and downtrodden classes. He demanded the Government to open more and more schools for *Mirasdars*, *Balutedars* and *Alutedars*.¹³² On behalf of the Depressed Classes, Phule, later on, demanded the Government to take special steps for their education because they on account of their socio-economic difficulties were not in a position to send their children to schools:

We must now try to find out the reasons as to why the children of *Mahars* and *Mangs* do not attend the (primary) schools even though the Government provides them education free of cost. When the

130 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 127-128.

131 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 140.

132 *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 140 & 179.

Atishudra children are about 5 or 6 years old, we (their parents) force them to do some menial (or manual) work. We are not in a position to allow them to laze about freely, or to be able to send them to the school, as we cannot manage even to feed them properly.¹³³

Gopal Guru claims that Phule even proposed a form of ‘affirmative action’ for educational upliftment of the lower castes and believed that it would break the monopoly of the elite group/communities over education as well as administration.¹³⁴ This claim is not baseless as in *Asprashyacha Kafiyat*, Phule, on behalf of the Untouchables, demanded the British Government take some appropriate steps to “provide jobs for us”:

It is a fact that we have not got the economic competence to acquire the minimum (academic) qualification needed for being eligible for securing Government service. If we are thus ineligible for securing Government service, then how can the Government provide jobs for us, and how should we expect to get them? We are willing to send our ward to the school, (but) his schooling is full of difficulties. His class teacher as also his class mates harass him jointly. The class teacher makes him sit apart from other students in the class...and impart education to him from a distance and this too most indifferently... Even half-baked pupils can secure Government service. But they cannot expect to serve there on permanent basis as their superiors (high caste officers) detest, despise and torment the *Mahars* and *Mangs*.¹³⁵

Phule’s repeated exhortation to the British to democratise education was based on an apprehension that the traditional educational disabilities of the downtrodden might be confirmed and reinforced under the colonial regime. Hence, he warned the British Raj: “The

133 Jotirao Phule, *The Untouchables Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 91.

134 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, “Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance” (Report on a Seminar organised by Centre for Social Studies, Surat on 9-10 January 1991), in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 21, May 25, 1991 (hereafter: “Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance”, *EPW*, Vol. 25, No. 21), p. 1327.

135 Jotirao Phule, *Untouchables’ Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 91-92.

Shudras are the life and sinews of the country, and it is to them alone, and not to the Brahmans, the Government must ever look to tide over their difficulties, financial as well as political.”¹³⁶

Phule could see the gradual formation of a class of the English educated elite in British India, which was trying its best to continue the traditional policy of exclusion of the lower castes by convincing the colonial masters that these people had no liking and aptitude for learning. It is noted that Mr. V.S. Apte, Supervisor of New English School, Poona,¹³⁷ in his witness before Hunter Commission demanded that the responsibility for primary and middle school education should be left with the private agencies. Here, we can understand the significance of Phule’s representation, who, in contrary, apprehended that this would mean passing of education directly under high class control which would affect the advance of education among the lower castes. In this regard Mr. Kunte’s remarks were also interesting. Mr. Kunte submitted before the Commission that the demand for admission of *Mahars* etc. into the schools was not voiced by the *Mahars* themselves. It was the outcome of a movement created by some “emotional British officers” and “impractical native reformers” and, therefore, was contrary to the practice and impracticable.¹³⁸ Such statements by the eminent educationists of the time justify the apprehension repeatedly expressed by Jotirao that most of the Brahmans did not want the ‘*Shudra-Atishudras*’ to avail of education and that they would not honestly perform the duty when entrusted with the responsibility of imparting education among the lower classes.

The high expectation he had from the modern mass education was not unrealistic. In fact, the schools run by him were transforming his students into active agents of social revolution. The ‘potential explosiveness’ of his education was evident when Muktabai Salave,

136 Suresh Mane, *op. cit.*, p. 104, also see: Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 105.

137 The school was founded in January 1880 by the Deccan Education Society, an association of the Poona nationalists like Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar, B.G. Tilak and G.G. Agarkar.

138 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

a 14 years old girl belonging to the untouchable Mang caste studying in Phule's school, wrote an essay '*Mang-Maharacha Dukka Visaiyi*' ('About the Grief of *Mangs* and *Mahars*') which she read in a school programme in 1855. This was reported in the *Dnyanodaya*, an Ahmednagar journal of repute, which actually published a letter from a Christian who had visited the school.¹³⁹ She described in minute details the sufferings of the Untouchables under the Peshwa rule as she had "heard it from her parents."¹⁴⁰ By entering in historical trajectory, she placed her argument locating the oppression of the *Mang-Mahars* in *Brahmanic* Hinduism and particularly under the medieval state of *Peshwai* and expressed her desire to come out of the caste-slavery. She rejected the caste order and placed the untouchable *Mang-Mahars*' claim in the arena of human rights.¹⁴¹ Analysing her poignant essay, Uma Chakravarty remarks that Muktabai was the "best example of Phule's belief" that the modern education would make it possible for the downtrodden classes to question the "most sacred person in the social hierarchy" and reject his authority:

Muktabai presented the best example of Phule's belief that a special vision, the *Trutiya Ratna*, would be outcome of education and would have the means to strip the falsity of *Brahmanic* ideology.... (Her) essay ends abruptly, "O God! What agony is this? I will burst into tears if I write more about this injustice." Even so, the anguished Muktabai understands and rejects the existing social order and provides a scathing critique of *Brahmanical* power in the nineteenth century Maharashtra. The newly acquired skill of literacy for this untouchable woman had made it possible to question, in print, the most 'sacred' person in the social hierarchy, and reject unequivocally his 'knowledge' and his 'authority'.¹⁴²

139 Hari Narke (ed.), *Mahatma Phule: Gaurav Grantha* (Marathi), Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule Anni Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj Charita Sadhane Prakashan Samiti, Mumbai, 2006, pp. 247-248.

140 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

141 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 69.

142 Uma Chakravarty, *Rewriting History: The Life and Limes of Pandita Ramabai*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1998, pp. 74-75.

Now doubt, the new education imparted at the Phule's schools not only enabled Muktabai to see through the oppressive nature of *Brahmanic* Hinduism, but also to envision a possible way-out of the liberation of the downtrodden through the "medicine of knowledge":

If the Vedas belong only to Brahmans, then it is an open secret that we do not have the Book. We are without the Book – we are without any religion.... Teach us, O God, your true religion so that we can lead our lives according to it. Let that religion, where only one person is privileged and the rest is deprived, vanish from the earth.... Oh, the *Mang-Mahars*, you are poor and sick. Only the medicine of knowledge will cure and heal you. It will take you from wild beliefs and superstitions. You will become righteous and moral. It will stop your exploitation. People who treat you like animals, will not dare to treat you like that anymore. So please work hard and study.¹⁴³

It is pertinent to note that Phule was critical towards *Sarvajanik Sabha* (founded in 1870) and Indian National Congress (founded in 1885) and his society *Satyashodhak Samaj* opposed them on account of the dominance of the 'Arya-Bhats' in these organizations and also their negligence of issues of lower caste people. The *Sarvajanik Sabha* targeted itself to be the main channel of communication between the Government and the people. It also took lead in organising a *Swadeshi* movement in Deccan and urged for "unity of all Hindus."¹⁴⁴ Phule countered the *Sabha* by pointing out its predominantly *Brahmanic* composition and its tactics for the maintenance of political hegemony of the traditional elite.¹⁴⁵ Hence, he expressed his scepticism of upper caste, especially *Brahmanic* reformation. Denouncing the *Sabha*, Krishnarao Bhalekar, an office bearer of the *Satyashodhak Samaj*, launched a parallel society *Deenbandhu Sarvajanik Sabha* in May 1884 which raised the demands and issues of 'Shudra-Atishudras' masses. Harish Chandra Navalkar was its secretary. The *Deenbandhu Sarvajanik Sabha* held its first meeting in November 1884. In addition to socio-religious issues, it concentrated on educational

143 Braj Ranjan Mani, "The Revolt of A Dalit Girl", in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 72-75.

144 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

145 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in See G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 79.

and other practical reforms. Phule and Bhalekar met every Sunday to discuss social problems. Apart from them, other non-Brahman leaders and reformers addressed its meetings at the residence of Dr. Sadoba Gavadi.¹⁴⁶ The *Sabha* was active throughout 1880's. In a meeting organised by the *Sabha* in 1884, Ganapatrao Patil and Haris Chandra Navalkar, who were also active members of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, emphasized on free and compulsory education. A petition signed by one lakh people was also sent to the British Parliament by the *Sabha* to this effect. The *Sabha* focused on education and "practical reform", forbidding debates about religion among its members.¹⁴⁷

The *Satyashodhak Samaj* also opposed the Congress on the following grounds:

- (i) If 99 out of every 100 people in the population have never heard of the National Congress, it cannot be (called) a 'National Congress', meaning chosen by the 'nation' and respected by the 'nation';
- (ii) The nation has not elected this National Congress and does not regard it as such, therefore, its decisions cannot be said to have been approved by the country at large;
- (iii) The National Congress is just composed of a handful of upper caste and educated people. Therefore, its decisions should not represent as the decisions of the whole nation; and
- (iv) The Government should begin to introduce compulsory education for all....¹⁴⁸

Due to the efforts of Jotirao Phule and *Satyashodhak Samaj* for the spread of education among the downtrodden, some energetic and intelligent men came forward from among them who took training to write and speak under Phule. One of such men trained by him was Baba Gopal Krishan Valangkar (1840-1900), popularly known as 'Gopalbawa.' He was an Untouchable (*Mahar*) by caste. On his

146 Nagaraju Vedapalli, "Religious Movements and Human Rights", *IHC*, Vol. 74, p. 956.

147 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-285.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 285.

return from military service, he started social work to awaken his caste fellows about their pitiable conditions. He wrote articles in *Din Bandhu*. Phule motivated him and also made provisions for his tours etc. It is pertinent to note that Valangkar participated in the Indian Social Conference of 1895, where he made a stirring appeal to the caste Hindus to throw open schools, public places, water courses, traveller's bungalows and all trades to their co-religionists whom they had condemned as Untouchables.¹⁴⁹ He also sent a petition through his *Anarya Dosh-Parihar Mandali* (Society for the Removal of Evils among Non-Aryans) to the Government of Great Britain to resume the recruitment of *Mahars*, *Mangs* and *Chambhars* in the British armies which was halted by Lord Kitchener in 1890s in favour of the so-called "martial races."¹⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, Valangkar was the pioneer of Dalit movement in Maharashtra who, in a way, could be called forerunner of Dr. Ambedkar.¹⁵¹

Phule did not let go of any opportunity to promote the cause of mass education. In 1889, the Prince of Wales was greeted on his visit to Poona by the boys and girls of his school with a jingle:

Tell *Grandma* we are a happy nation,
But 19 crores are without education!¹⁵²

As such, Phule and his *Samaj* gave sole importance to the educational upliftment of the downtrodden masses. His urge for mass education has been admired by the renowned historians Narullah and Naik in their outstanding book entitled *A History of Education in India* in the following words:

His greatest contribution to education, however, is his advocacy of the education of the masses. He was one of the earliest thinkers to speak of compulsory education in India. When everyone was talking of the downward filtration theory, Mahatma Phule raised his voice against the domination of the upper castes among the Hindus and pleaded for

149 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-22.

150 N.D. Kamble, *Deprived Castes and Their Struggle for Equality*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 129-132.

151 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222.

152 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

the compulsory education of the lower castes in order to regenerate the life of the country.¹⁵³

(3)

Initiatives for Agrestic Transformation

As noted in Chapter-IV, even before founding the *Satyashodhak Samaj*, Jotiba Phule, through his writings and speeches voiced the problems of agriculturists, particularly the problems related to their exploitation and pauperization and depicted the conditions of different cultivating communities e.g., *Kunbi, Mali, Dhanghar* etc. He had also started analysing the peasant predicament and the causes and remedies of their problem.¹⁵⁴ Himself being a horticulturist, his orientation was naturally towards the peasant and the agrarian problems. This was heightened by his identification of the peasant as *Baliraja*, the popular Marathi way of calling the peasant as “lord of the land.”¹⁵⁵ Though he did not see the peasant proprietor or *Mirasdar* alone as *Baliraja*; his orientation was towards the whole village and all villagers and he was for vital agrestic transformation.

In fact, during the period of Phule, much more than that of today, India was predominantly an agrarian society. Hence, it was quite natural for a reformer like him, who wanted to pioneer a total transformation in the old established orders, to take deep interest in rural and agrarian problems. Indeed, the question of agriculture and cultivators was at the centre of his thoughts and concerns. It was for this reason that about a decade after the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, he diverted his movement to the propaganda and initiatives aimed at the well-being of cultivators and villagers. Before we discuss the initiatives of Phule (and his *Samaj*) for cultivators and their issues, let us firstly understand the context of peasant problems (particularly that of land, land tenure/ assessment and the related problems) in Maharashtra during our period of study, which turned his attention

153 Sayed Nurullah & J.P. Naik, *History of Education in India during the British Period*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., New Delhi, 1951, p. 200.

154 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 84-87.

155 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 112.

from the issue of social reforms to that of agrarian reforms and agrestic transformation.

As a matter of fact, vast changes in the field of agriculture, especially in land tenure/ revenue system were effected in India during the colonial era. The British introduced chiefly three major systems of land tenure in the country: Permanent Settlement, *Ryotwari* Settlement and *Mahalwari* Settlement. The Permanent Settlement, also known as *Zamindari* Settlement, prevailed in Bengal, Bihar and some other parts of India. The *Mahalwari* Settlement was introduced in Punjab, parts of United Provinces and some other regions. The *Ryotwari* Settlement, after being introduced firstly in Madras Presidency in 1820 by Sir Thomas Munro, was subsequently extended to the provinces of Bombay, Sind, Berar, Assam and some other regions, which, in sum, constituted about 5 per cent of the British Indian territory. Basis of these changes was the 'Ricardian theory' that the state was the supreme landlord, which could alter the whole land system and claim share of the profit etc. at will and according to expediency.¹⁵⁶ As a result, the colonial state became the supreme landlord in India, whom *Zamindars* and *Ryots* derived their rights of holding or occupancy. Such rights were also liable to rejection in case of failure of payment of state demands. The *Ryotwari* tenure, according R.C. Dutt, was a system mainly characterized by the following four features:

- (i) State ownership of all lands including the waste lands;
- (ii) The holder of land was a mere occupant-on-rent, i.e., the *Ryot*;
- (iii) The land revenue was regarded as 'rent' and not as tax, as a tax would imply private ownership of land; and
- (iv) Every landholder was individually responsible for the payment of land revenue.¹⁵⁷

As such, under the *Ryotwari* system, the responsibility for the

156 Ravinder Kumar, "The Deccan Riots of 1875", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, August 1965, p. 620.

157 R.C. Dutt, *Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, Forgotten Books, London, 1908, rpt. 2012, pp. 57-58.

payment of the 'rent' or revenue was imposed on the cultivators or *Ryots*. It was a new settlement which caused disruption of the cohesion of the village community. In Bombay Presidency, this was first introduced in Indapur *Taluka* of Poona district in early nineteenth century and had since been gradually extended to the greater parts of the Presidency. The chief concern of the East India Company administrators at that time was to ensure a steady flow of large revenue from the land. So they increased the demand on land revenue at each successive assessment.¹⁵⁸ The policy of the Government, along-with the new legal system and the judicial procedure with its bias in favour of the moneylending business community and the urban elites, caused untold miseries on cultivators and other classes living in the village. The changes in the land tenurial system and the overall economic, administrative and judicial policies of the British created a new alignment of power in the rural Maharashtra. The merchant moneylenders (*Shetjis*) and '*Arya-Bhat*' and other high caste officials in the British bureaucracy (*Bhatjis/Latjis*) – which in Phule's understanding included both urban as well as rural (like *Kulkarnis* etc.) elites and were the chief exploiters of the primary producers¹⁵⁹ – joined hands together to exploit the poor and illiterate cultivators. The result was complete disruption of agriculture and growing indebtedness of the cultivators.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a major depression in agriculture occurred on account of famines and a leading undercurrent agrarian unrest, particularly in western Maharashtra. Soon, the impoverished peasants in the districts of Poona, Ahmednagar, Satara and Sholapur rose in revolt in 1875 against the moneylenders and landlords. In fact, this peasant revolt, officially called as 'Deccan riots' was a violent reaction against the *Shetji-Bhatji-Latji* nexus. The revolt of the Deccan peasants covered about thirty villages (and 'threatened' more) in adjoining *Talukas* of the districts of Poona and Ahmednagar and involved little more

158 J.R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 121-122.

159 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, Vol. 25, No. 21, p. 1325.

violence, but it actually frightened the British Government to the point of provoking a full-scale enquiry.¹⁶⁰ Notably, in this revolt (and also in many other uprisings against moneylenders during nineteenth century) participation of all farming as well as downtrodden classes/castes was witnessed, which indicates that the *Mirasdars* and *Balutedars* did not find it difficult to get united across caste lines in their struggle against their common exploiters and oppressors.

Again during 1876-78, the region of west Maharashtra faced a devastating draught, which held back progress of the region for about ten years; and another one coupled with plague in the succeeding years. But there was no state or community-level support for the famine-stricken peasants and villagers. It is imperative to point out that the effects of famine of 1876-77 were felt through the Deccan to Maratha countryside. Due to such state of affairs, the peasants in Maharashtra remained agitated during the period under study. An Anglo-Vernacular weekly *Indu Prakash*, describing this agrarian unrest, said that “the condition of our agricultural population is such as to cause utmost anxiety to all thinking people.”¹⁶¹ In this context, it would be worthwhile to quote the *Census Report* of 1901 which sketches the developments going through Bombay Presidency during the last decades of nineteenth century as follows:

The spectacle of misery...presented by a population that has lost in a period of ten years no less than 30,00,000 souls (in the Bombay Presidency) is one which is impossible to be contemplated.... In the fertile planes of Deccan, sturdy Marathas have clung their ancestral holdings, laying baked and sterile in the pitiless glare of cloudless sky, until their debilitated frames were weakened beyond any hope of reconstruction.¹⁶²

It is amazing to note that the liberal organizations of Maharashtra had shown utter disregard to the unfortunate conditions of the peasantry, with the exception of *Sarvajanik Sabha*. In 1873 the *Sabha*

160 *Nasik District Gazetteer*, 1883, p. 189.

161 *Indu Prakash*, 22 July 1884, quoted in Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 209.

162 Quoted in R.D. Choksey, *Economic Life in Bombay Deccan 1818-1839*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p. 39.

appointed one Sub-Committee to study the agrarian problems and gave representation to the Government on the question of Deccan Riots. However, the class approach of its support structure, particularly the high caste/class elites, guided its objectives. They wanted to get the Permanent Settlement of land revenue extended over as many territories as possible of the Bombay Presidency, so as to facilitate the emergence of a class of landlords (like Bengali *Bhadralok*, i.e., a class of absentee landlords) recruited from the professional and higher classes, i.e., “the able Brahmans of the Deccan”:

They (Brahmans) are socially and religiously on the front rank, they possess intelligence and power of combination. The majority (of the rural people) are unlettered, improvident, ignorant, disunited, thriftless and poor in means. No political manipulation can hold the balance between two classes ... Democracy must be allowed to take generation for the peasantry to rise to equality with Brahmans and *Banias* if the natural process was not allowed to work without interference.¹⁶³

Phule criticised *Sarvajanik Sabha* for its stand favouring high class ‘Brahmans and *Banias*’ and overlooking the conditions and interests of farmers.¹⁶⁴ He was, in fact, the first social activist of Maharashtra who honestly made peasant pauperization, agriculture and the production conditions therein among the main subjects of his concern. He had a deep knowledge of the countless and complex problems of agriculture and the peasants. He understood the fact that the British Government on the one hand provided security and safeguards to the rights of the merchants, moneylenders and landlords, i.e., *Shetji-Bhats*, while on the other hand the working millions were not guarded against their exploitation. Exposing the exploitation of cultivators by the moneylenders, landlords and Government officials and the “insensible” and indifferent attitude of British Government, Phule bluntly remarked in *Gulamagiri*:

163 *The Quarterly Journal of Poona Sarvajanik Sabha*, April 1879, pp. 18-19.

164 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 130.

Almost all Government Departments are so crowded with *Bhats* who oppress the *Shudras* so much that the stories of their black deeds will certainly put the oppressive British indigo plantation owners in Calcutta to shame. Today it is the *Bhats* again who rule though under the name of the British. They are not only harming the interests of the *Shudras* but also of the British themselves; and nobody can say that they won't do so in future as well. It is not that the sensible British Government is not aware of this fact! Yet they deliberately turn a blind eye towards them and function in accordance with their interests.¹⁶⁵

Phule further questioned the validity of British claims of introducing 'law and order' and 'rule of law' in India and said that they were simply a matter of decorum and a mere formality without any content of justice.¹⁶⁶ In this context, Ravinder Kumar's thesis of the 'rise of the rich peasants' holds that the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra represented the interests of this particular class.¹⁶⁷ Almost all other scholars have tended to concur by this thesis. Eleanor Zelliott, historian of the Mahar movement, has argued that on account of this, the Untouchables and the non-Brahmans drew apart.¹⁶⁸ However, Gail Omvedt has countered Kumar's thesis. She argues that the *Satara District Gazetteers* of 1880s describe in detail demography and maps of the larger villages and towns of the district, showing that especially in the south, there were significant groups of moneylenders and traders including '*Arya-Bhat*' and '*Marwari-Gujar*' moneylenders. Particularly the Brahmins in the district were characterised as having a propensity to invest in land, and it is simul-

165 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 67.

166 M.H. Jadhav, "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra: Review of Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra by J. R. Shinde", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 17, 26 April, 1986 (hereafter: "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra", *EPW*, 26 April 1986), p. 740.

167 Ravinder Kumar, *Western India in Nineteenth Century: A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968, p. 254.

168 Eleanor Zelliott, *Dr. Babasabeb Ambedkar and the Untouchable Movement*, Bluemoon Books, New Delhi, 2004, (First published in 1970 under the title *Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement*), pp 14-15.

taneously said that the bulk of the agricultural and unskilled labour in the district was done by the poorer *Kunbis*, *Dhangars*, *Waddars*, *Ramoshis* and *Mahars*.¹⁶⁹

Having personally been very sensitive over the issue of cultivators, Phule took a very critical view of the situation that arose after Deccan riots. During the peasant upsurge of 1875 and in the wake of the 1877 famine, he openly came forward in solidarity with the peasantry. In these times of crisis, he (and his *Samaj*) had openly identified with the *Shudra-Atishudras* who were employed mostly in agriculture either as owners of small landholdings or as landless peasants and labourers.¹⁷⁰

Phule's engagement with rural life intensified further after 1880. His writings and speeches from 1880 onwards are chiefly concerned with the issues of peasantry. Himself a witness of the crisis, he remained very agitated after the Deccan riots, and it was on this account that the focus of his movement gradually shifted to the issues of land, agriculture and peasant predicament. In order to awaken the peasants and rural masses, he wrote some speeches which he delivered in Junnar *Taluka* and the adjoining rural areas of Poona during 1882-83 in the meetings of peasants/tenants, who were getting agitated against the local *Kulkarni* landlords (as we shall come to know later). He compiled these speeches in the form of a book entitled *Shetakaryacha Asud (Cultivator's Whipcord)* and sent a copy of the book to British Viceroy Lord Duffrin.¹⁷¹ His purpose was double ended – to awaken the cultivators and also to draw the attention of the British Government towards the urgency of agrarian reforms. This book is full of deep insights of Phule vis-a-vis peasant problem in India. In this masterpiece, he speaks from the standpoint of the '*Shudra*' peasant. Interestingly, he echoes much of nationalists' economic critique of the British rule.

As a matter of fact, Phule, much before the nationalists, came forward with a marvelous critique of the colonial policies, so far as the

169 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 189.

170 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-81.

171 The original manuscript of *Shetakaryacha Asud* is available in National Library, Kolkata, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

peasant problem was concerned. Unlike some of the later non-Brahman leaders who maintained an unqualified loyalty to the British Raj, he seems to have viewed colonialism as destructive in economic terms – it was only on cultural grounds that he saw it providing a foundation for the liberation of lower and downtrodden castes. For this reason, despite believing that the British rule had ‘liberated’ the lower castes from the thralldom of *Brahmanic* rule, he never tolerated any injustice with the peasantry etc. on the part of the British rulers and their high caste civil servants. The insights of Phule, as reflect in *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, are an eye-opener for his critics, who under the wrong impression, believed that he was a blind lover of the British rule. In fact, he appears to be fully aware of the exploitative character of the colonial rule, which is evident from the fact that even before Dadabhai Nauraji, he came out with a ‘drain-theory’ regarding colonial exploitation of villagers.¹⁷² He also linked the rural poverty to the ruin of Indian handicrafts caused by competition with the British goods. While Nauraji and other nationalists criticised the ‘drain’ of income from India to England, Phule directed his attention to the ‘drain’ from peasantry to both the colonial state as well as the urbanised bureaucratic elite.¹⁷³ It was, however, impossible to do away with the problem of peasant predicament unless, according to Phule, an all-out attack was put in operation on the old established order of Hindu society. He believed that the Maharashtrian Hindu society was made of the two groups, the *Shetji_Bhatji* (exploiters) and the *Shudra-Atishudras* (the exploited peasants, artisans and the downtrodden) and the historical tensions (having deep socio-economic base) between the two must also have to be addressed by the genuine reformers.¹⁷⁴

Phule wrote another booklet in 1885 entitled *Ishara (A Warning)*

172 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, tr. by Asha Mundlay (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Vol. III, Mumbai, 2002, Mahatma Phule Source Material Publication Committee, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2002, pp. 52-53.

173 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 122.

174 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 113.

to highlight the plight of the toiling people, particularly peasants, who were living in a hand-to-mouth condition in the caste-feudal order patronised by the colonial rulers and whose exploitation got reinforced due to the emergence of intermediary classes like moneylenders, *Kulkarnis* etc. under colonial state as more powerful prior to the earlier days.¹⁷⁵ He exposed the exploitative nature of the state and excessive taxation, and in many cases, takeover of farmers' lands reducing peasants into paupers. He also criticised the export policy of the Government very bitterly and said that "food grains, cotton and leather are exported to Britain indiscriminately without taking the local demand into consideration; the result is that the indigenous industries starve for want of raw materials and population strives for want of food grains."¹⁷⁶

Hence, Phule outrightly comes out as a critic of the British agrarian policies. To him, the key exploited class/group was the peasantry, the key exploiters were bureaucracy and traditional elite which the Brahmans dominated even under the colonial rule. Taxes, cesses and state takeover of peasant lands were the crucial mechanisms of the elite of extracting surplus supplemented by moneylending and extortion for religious programmes. According to Gail Omvedt, Phule's graphic descriptions of the peasant's poverty, his sensitivity to the issues of drought and land alignment, and to what today is called 'watershed development', and his condemnation of the forest bureaucracy make him strikingly a "modern economic critic" in many ways.¹⁷⁷

According to Phule, the pressure on land increased under the British rule for the reasons like non-availability of employment opportunities in other fields, which was mainly caused by the destruction of indigenous cottage industries on account of the policy of free trade and Government control of waste land and forests etc. He has described in his speeches (delivered among peasants of Junnar) that

175 Jotirao Phule, *A Warning*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 55-60.

176 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-218.

177 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of An Indian Identity*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 1995, p. 21.

the Forest Department had become a huge land-grabber. Similarly, the Irrigation Department had given huge loans to foreign ‘money-lenders’, but, on the other hand, failed to provide water on time for farming. Describing the adverse effects of the process of colonialization on peasants, artisans and village economy, Phule sensitively observes:

Now our poor and handicapped farmers’ sheep and goats have no place to feed even on air in the forest. Now if they want to fill their bellies, they have to work in the factories as weavers, iron-smiths or carpenters or as casual labourers (The English are) selling things here – tasteful bottles of alcohol, breads, biscuits, sweets, pickles, needles big and small, knives, scissors, sewing machines, heaters, colourful mirror and glass-ware, thread, cloth, shawls, hand-gloves, stockings, caps, sticks, umbrellas, brass, copper, iron sheets, locks and keys, coal, various vehicles and carriages, harnesses etc. and finally, carpets – all made with machines, and selling them cheaper here. The goods produced here have lost their market, and many weavers and *Julahas* and *Momins* are so poor that they are forced to (live) near starvation and have to manage, in secret, on coarse wheat or rice powder, and many on the piths of mango.¹⁷⁸

While assessing his *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, Gail Omvedt keenly notes that the book appears to be a “colourful elaboration of the colonial exploitation” which offered a “rather mocking version the drain theory”:

Though *Asud* began with a detailed description of the *Brahmanic* exploitation through festivals, rituals and religion, it went on an elaboration of the colonial exploitation. The loss of service under native rulers, the loss of livelihood by weavers, and other artisans was described in colourful detail, with reference to (competition by) ... “bellows, stoves, brightly coloured glass goods, thread, rope, cloth, shawls, gloves, socks, pants, hats, sticks, umbrellas, brass, copper, iron plates, keys.” Finally, Phule offered a rather mocking version the ‘drain theory’.¹⁷⁹

Phule not only criticised the policies of “our cunning

178 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, G. P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 132.

179 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 170.

Government”, but also found them accountable for farmer’s starvation. In past, due to small population and lesser fragmentation of holdings, the fields of farmers used to be big and economically viable. But under the new colonial regime, on account of increase in population and fragmentation of land holdings, the fields had become smaller and accordingly could not be given rest, resultantly they were losing their fertility year-by-year and thus making the farmers poorer:

Moreover, our cunning Government, through its Brahman employees, has carried out surveys every thirty years and have established levies and taxes as they willed; and the farmer, losing his courage, has not properly tilled his lands, and, therefore, millions of farmers have not been able to feed themselves or cover themselves. As the farmers weakened further because of this, they started dying in thousands in epidemics. There was drought (too) to add to the misery and thousands of farmers died of starvation. But in spite of all this, their number did increase, and that led to the tilling of the same lands in increasing proportion, and the lands could not be rested. So the yield of the lands decreased.¹⁸⁰

As such, Phule criticised heavily the British land revenue policy and described its devastating effects on the life of the farmer. He informs us that at each assessment, the revenue increased indiscriminately, and as a result, “the sword of the taxes to be paid is constantly hanging on” the farmer.¹⁸¹ The Government assessment was out of proportion and could not be justified rationally. The laziness of the British officers in the Revenue Department on the one hand and the bias of the high caste bureaucrats against the ‘*Shudra*’ cultivator and also their greed of money on the other were the chief reasons for wrong and heavy assessments.¹⁸² The white officers avoided their duty and indulged in “lassitudinous luxury” relying solely upon the advice of their high caste “black employees” who in most cases were corrupt and partial. But the Government was blindly going on to

180 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 167.

181 *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

182 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 171.

spend the money collected from the peasants upon the salaries and pensions of its white and black bureaucrats:

Both these white and black employees have so completely denuded the farmer, behind the Government's back, in order to enjoy themselves day and night, that the Governor feels ashamed to invite him to his court. O, cannot the farmer be invited to the Governor's court, the farmer, on whose labours the Government depends for its army, its ammunition, and the inordinate salaries of its black employees, and the lassitudious luxury of the white ones, and their pensions? O, should be the condition of one who is the foundation of all nation? He does not get enough food to feed his belly, not enough clothe to cover himself ...and (even) the hunting dogs of the lords do not even sniff at him.¹⁸³

Throwing light on the miserable conditions of farmers, Phule further wrote in *Ishara* that the farmers, who supplied food grains and vegetables to the city habitants, were not in a condition to fulfill their basic needs. They strived to meet their basic needs and had to satisfy with "un-nutritive and unpalatable food":

One can imagine what un-nutritive and unpalatable food they must be eating. They are forced to eat dry *jowar*, *nachni* or *bajra* bread, leavened with salt or chilies or onions. His vegetables are cooked but he cannot afford the luxury of a bit of oil or salt or chilly-powder to garnish them at all the times. Sometimes he is forced to eat a porridge (gruel) prepared from the roughly ground floor of *jawar* or *nachni*. Sometimes he has to eat just boiled vegetables. Sometimes he has to make do with the jungle-berried. Worst of all, he has occasionally to drink plenty of water (in lieu of food), strap his stomach with a length of cord and do manual labour (on an empty stomach) the whole day on the farm.¹⁸⁴

Phule further explained that the pressure by the Revenue Department on farmers for payment of revenues was such that the poor farmer had to rush to the usurious village moneylenders who were generally 'Marwaris', 'Gujars' or Brahmans. The moneylenders invariably took the land in lease as a security for the loans advanced. Knowing the need of the cultivator, they charged heavy rates of inter-

183 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

184 Jotirao Phule, *A Warning*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol.-II, p. 56.

est on the loans. The rates charged were so heavy and the documents prepared so false that the poor peasants could never repay the whole amount in one instalment. At every payment, fresh documents were prepared. This cycle of false documents continued and the peasant was never absolved of the debt completely. Ultimately a suit was filed by the moneylender against the peasant in the Court. In this situation, the village *Kulkarni* created for himself a source of exploitation and making money.¹⁸⁵ In fact, a land once leased was never returned to the cultivator, for, firstly, the judicial procedure and the legal system weighed heavily against the cultivator; and secondly, the moneylending community had a powerful lobby in the courts as well as in all of the administrative apparatus.

In this context, Phule assessed critically the functioning of the British Courts of Law. All the courts were predominantly staffed with Brahmans right from the lower clerks upto judges. Most of the pleaders were also of the same caste. The moneylenders of the caste too had easy access to their caste-mates working in the courts. Also the *Marwari* and *Gujar* moneylenders had friendly or business-type relations with the officials, pleaders and judges in the court.¹⁸⁶ The officials in the court helped the moneylenders by manipulating the witness papers and other documents in the court. The pleaders too humiliated their poor clients and exploited them by demanding more money for minor things. In the court, the illiterate '*Shudra*' witnesses were harassed and humiliated by the pleaders. The court clerks also helped the moneylenders by avoiding recording some parts of the statement of the witnesses or by writing in a confusing manner. Sometimes, they even replaced the original witness papers by false ones to satisfy the party paying a bribe.¹⁸⁷ At the village level, the witnesses favouring the cultivator were threatened by the *Kulkarni* who also helped the moneylenders in preparing false witnesses. Despite all this, if any witness presented himself in the court, the pleaders put him to inconvenience by seeking postponement of the dates of

185 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

186 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 158.

187 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

hearing on false grounds, thus causing unbearable monetary loss to the cultivator and his witness. Even some Brahman judges, according to Phule, humiliated the illiterate cultivator in the courts using disgraceful language. Commenting upon the unfair and humiliating behaviour of such “murderous judges”, towards the poor and helpless farmer, Phule abruptly remarks:

Sometimes, if these hypocritical justices fail to understand the meaning of the arguments between the plaintiff and the defendant, then these pious people begin barking like dogs and bite them with their sharp words, in this manner: “You are mannerless, we should whip you twenty times and count them as one, you are very cunning”; and if someone makes even a minimal response, the cases are cancelled. As if this were not enough, if these murderous justices are displeased with something, is it not possible that they take all the statements home, omit crucial items, make fresh statements and deliver such judgements as they feel like?¹⁸⁸

Hence, according to Phule, it was quite possible that such biased and partial judges usually gave arbitrary decisions. He criticised the tribunal system also. Such tribunals generally consisted of retired judges who did not have any source of income except pensions, and were, therefore, prone to accept bribes from the parties. So no wonder that tribunal decisions were generally given in favour of the rich moneylenders as against the poor cultivators. In this context, Phule also urged the Government that social integrity and sense of justice must form an important criterion for appointing the persons to such high posts as judges, collectors or revenue officers.¹⁸⁹

Phule concluded that the heavy assessments by the Government on the one hand and the usurious moneylenders supported by the corrupt high caste officials of the Government Departments and Law Courts on the other were accountable for the prolonged indebtedness of the rural masses. Commenting on the reports by some of the British officers and Indian intellectuals and *Sabhas* regarding the ‘causes’ of rural indebtedness which according to them was the result of ‘lack of thriftiness’, ‘love of extravagance’ of the cultivators etc.,

188 *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

189 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

Phule said that this was based upon “wrong and mischievous witness” of the upper caste elites and was contrary to the facts.¹⁹⁰ Questioning particularly the report of the *Sarvajanik Sabha*, he remarked:

...(If) the leaders of the *Sarvajanik Sabha*, like Joshibava, removed their scale of pride in caste in Hindu *Dharma* and looked at the conditions of farmers, they would not have been to call this poor farmer, exploited by the prohibitions of *Ekpakshiya Dharma* (partial religion), ignorant; and if they had truthfully informed our English Government of the atrocities on the farmers caused by the religion, then perhaps the milk of kindness might have flowed from the Government....¹⁹¹

The above and such other interventions on the part of the reformers/observers like Phule, definitely made impact on the British officials. The British bureaucrats had started realizing that it was the heavy revenue demand which chiefly caused the peasant's indebtedness and also rural unrest. For instance, in 1879 William Wilson Hunter wrote that in Bombay Presidency land revenue did not leave the cultivators even sufficient food to support his family for a year.¹⁹² Such officers were also mindful of the pernicious role the moneylenders were playing in the rural economy. The Government agencies and other objective observers of the period recorded the increase in the number of civil suits against cultivators and their facts were exactly the same as were described by Phule in *Shetakaryacha Asud* (See Table 5.1).

190 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 164-169.

191 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

192 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

TABLE 5.1
 NUMBER OF CIVIL SUITS FILED AGAINST FARMERS IN POONA AND
 AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICTS, 1851-1865¹⁹³

District	Year		
	1851	1861	1865
Ahmednagar	98	318	689
Poona	75	282	632

Such developments were accelerating the process of land alienation in Maharashtra causing huge transfer of land from the peasants to merchants, usurers, moneylenders and others. As a result, the British Government had to realize that their legal system was defective, which helped the moneylending class to exploit the peasantry. Mr. Taylor, Collector of Ahmednagar, stated in his report that the aid given by the British courts was always on the side of the *Marwari* who alone knew how to turn that aid to his advantage. He further noted that the position of the litigation was not simply of debtor and creditor; it was the fraudulent moneylender backed by civil courts versus the helpless *Ryot* signing on bond without even a true knowledge of its contents and powerless to oppose any decree that might be passed.¹⁹⁴ Similarly A.O. Hume, Secretary to the Imperial Government of India, noted:

Our system of civil justice is such that no poor man has much chance in the long run. The earthen pot is broken by the golden one... (We) have realized the pernicious effect of the Brahman domination in almost all branches of the bureaucracy.¹⁹⁵

Finally, the Government had to admit the fact that “the law does not provide protection to the poor and illiterate peasants”, and sought to protect the cultivator from the moneylenders. Accordingly, the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act (1879) was passed. The object of

193 L. Natrajan, *Peasant Uprisings in India 1850-1900*, Peoples Publishing House, Bombay, 1953, p. 59, quoted in R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

194 *Ibid.*, p. 55, quoted in R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

195 Quoted in J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

this Act was to restrain the moneylenders from ejecting the peasants from their lands. But the Act provided no effective protection against undue enhancement and security against excessive assessments. Hence, Phule criticised the Act as a “futile measure and useless”, for, he pointed out, such measures could neither prevent indebtedness nor land alienation.¹⁹⁶ He pointed out that the moneylenders had now started demanding a complete ‘sale deed’ of land as a security for the loan instead of the ‘lease of land’ and this made the alienation of land more certain. He knew the farmer’s poverty was actually caused by the heavy revenue demands. So he demanded the Government to cut-down its expenditure by stopping construction of posh buildings in cities and payment of heavy salaries and pensions to the British officers as concrete steps and then to reduce the burden of “tolls and taxes” imposed on the farmer. He explicitly stated:

... There will be terrible consequences of this exploitation unless our foreign Government, which worships the formless transcendent God, stops trusting the rosy writings of newspapers or of the associations formed by cunning Brahmans and reduces for sure the salaries of all its white and black employees, educates the ignorant, suffering and weak *Shudra* farmer and reduces all the tolls and taxes which have been slapped on him.¹⁹⁷

Phule commented that the Indian *Ryot* was exploited and degraded by “the Brahman, the *Zamindar*, the Government and the moneylender all combined” and could not be ‘defrauded’ unless he (*Ryot*) was made educated and taught of his rights:

The poor *Ryots*, the agriculturists, from whose labour by far the greatest proportion of the revenue was derived, were left uncared in their native ignorance. One’s heart, if bewailed, bled at the contemplation of the fate of the Indian *Ryots*. The Brahman, the *Zamindar*, the Government and the moneylenders all combined to degrade them. The ignorant peasantry is their slave. Nothing could prevent the poor labourer and peasant from being defrauded, unless popular education penetrated in

196 M.H. Jadhav, “Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra”, *EPW*, 26 April 1986, p. 740.

197 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator’s Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 156.

the village and its inhabitants were taught of their rights. No amount of material prosperity elevated a man who was a slave of ignorance and superstition.¹⁹⁸

A popular maxim equates ignorance with bliss. This was especially true in the case of the poor *Ryots* of the region who were left “uncared in their native ignorance”. The exploitative and discriminatory colonial and indigenous orders fully endorsed and justified the application of ‘ignorance as bliss’ in the most diabolic manner.¹⁹⁹

Phule tried to explain how capitalism and feudalism in colonial India (though he did not use these terms, since they were not available to him at that time) were fused into a caste-class mode of *Brahmanic* system. Brahmanism and colonialism fed on and fattened each other, and without fighting the former, he argued, the anti-imperialist nationalism could never waken the oppressive and retrogressive forces of Indian society. Having this argument in their heart, the *Satyasamajists* had built an effigy of a poor and emaciated peasant near the venue of the third session of the Congress in Bombay to display the exploited and wretched conditions of the Indian peasant.²⁰⁰

As told, Jotiba Phule alongwith his *Satyasamajists*, extensively toured the rural areas addressing large gathering of peasants, and helped in organizing the poor tenants and giving call of boycotts of the exploiting moneylenders and landlords in Poona during 1882-83. The peasants and tenants of Junnar *Taluk* were agitated due to their exploitation by the *Kulkarni* landlords. Actually, before the British era, the *Kumbis* of *Taluka* had land rights which were now seized by the local revenue collector *Kulkarnis*, who now made them tenants and started their exploitation. The landlords and moneylenders extracted the heaviest rent and interest from these tenants. In fact, the situation of tenant peasants in the entire Konkan was very critical. Here the land was grabbed by *Khots* (petty landlords) whose

198 *The Bombay Guardian*, dated 8 October 1852, quoted in Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

199 Victor Paul, “The Relentless Truthseeker”, in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

200 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

rights had not till then been finally determined by the Government. These *Khots* possessed vast land tracks. Actual cultivators of all these lands were reduced to tenants. They were called *Ardheli*. Some tenants were regarded superior to those and were called *Dharakeri*. Conditions of both of these were, however, not much different. The *Khots* came in the fields at the time of harvest and took away a major portion of the produce and did not leave enough even for the minimum requirements of the tenants. They extracted from each of them one-day *Begar* (forced labour/free service) per week. Many of the *Ardheli* tenants were only “little better than slaves.”²⁰¹

In such state of affairs, Phule stood by the tenant sharecroppers and voiced against the *Khots* for their exploitation. Notably the nationalist leaders like Lokmanya Tilak had supported the *Khots*.²⁰² But Phule helped in organizing the poor tenants. On his advice, the tenants got organised under the leadership of Bhauji Kondaji Patil.²⁰³ Patil joined *Satyashodhak Samaj* and made many villagers the members of the *Samaj*. Phule consistently stood by the side of the tenants. He himself undertook the responsibility to represent their case before the Government. As a result of his representation, the Government put a ceiling on the amount of rent to be collected from the tenants.²⁰⁴ But the problem remained still unresolved and no change was witnessed in the conditions of tenants who were reduced to bonded labours.

In 1884-85 tenants and peasants in Junnar again got highly agitated against the landlords and moneylenders and demanded low rate of land revenue and minimum rate of interest. A letter was published in the *Dynanodaya* on 24 July 1884 which described the *Satyashodhak* campaign for the tenants. It was also noted that some years back, the priestly caste of Junnar had increased their rates for performing religious ceremonies. In May 1884, Phule, Narayanarao Lokhande (editor of the *Din Bandhu*), Bhauji Kondaji Patil and other

201 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133.

202 M.H. Jadhav, “Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra”, *EPW*, 26 April 1986, p. 740.

203 Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

204 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

Satyasamajists organised a number of mass meetings in the town of Junnar and its surrounding villages. These meetings called forth a widespread boycott of the 'Bhatjis' as well as moneylenders and landlords. Their boycott was accompanied by calls for rightful share of education and Government jobs for the cultivators and lower castes. Several thousand *Kunbi*-Marathas, *Malis*, *Sonars*, *Shimpis* and other lower caste Hindus gathered to listen in the meeting. As a result, a sharp tension was witnessed between the villagers and the high caste landlords and moneylenders.²⁰⁵

Kondaji Patil's younger brother, Govind Bhau Patil, locally led the Junnar campaigns. Under Phule's guidance and Patil's leadership, all cultivators of the *Taluka* joined together and resolved to continue their boycott. The *Satyasamajists* gave a call that tenants/labourers should leave the fields of the landlords, and the *Malis* should withhold supplies of fruits and vegetables. Similar action should be taken against tyrannical moneylenders. The villagers continued their boycott refusing to till the fields of landlords for not less than a period of three years. The moneylenders' fields lay untilled. The inhabitants of about forty villages in Junnar had also agreed to have matrimonial and other religious ceremonies performed without the aid of 'Arya-Bhat' priests. About three hundred *Satyashodhak* marriages were performed in the *Taluka*. As a result, the priests, who had previously charged up to Rs. 20/- now got prepared to conduct the ceremonies just for a few *Annas*. The landlord also brought down their rent rates to the level they were just sufficient to pay the land tax.²⁰⁶

In protest to this successful movement guided by *Satyashodhak Samaj*, some Brahman teachers refused to teach the village children. So Patil and Phule petitioned to the Director of Public Institution to appoint non-Brahman teachers in every school. Patil also set up a school for the children of cultivators in his native town of Otur which was entirely staffed with non-Brahmans. Some Brahman offi-

205 *Dnyanodaya*, 24 July 1884, quoted in R. Umaphathi, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

206 *Din Bandhu*, 25 May 1884, also see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-279.

cials made up a court case against him, and succeeded in getting him imprisoned for a month, though the case was quashed later on.²⁰⁷

The Junnar movement reached its climax when a farmer of Otur, Balaji Keshavji Patil, conducted marriage of his daughter according to *Satyashodhak* rites and without aid of Brahman priest. Therefore, the reactionary priests filed a writ against Patil. Phule helped him in his case on behalf of *Satyashodhak Samaj* and presented in his defence to the High Court a declaration by the *Samaj* which read as under:

All the followers of the Hindu religion, especially Marathas, *Malis*, *Kunbis*, *Kolis*, *Dhangars* and other castes are informed by this letter that the Brahmans take and squander money from our people at weddings, religious ceremonies and at the time of other auspicious and inauspicious rites. For these reasons and because the Hindu *Shastras* allow full authority for each man to perform his own rituals in religion, people of the above castes in several areas have (decided) for some time (to) carrying out their own ceremonies without the aid of Brahmans.²⁰⁸

The arguments in the declaration submitted by the *Samaj* were notable. It contended that "Hindu *Shastras* allow full authority" for "all the followers of the Hindu religion, especially Marathas, *Malis*, *Kunbis*, *Kolis*, *Dhangars*, and other castes" which indicates that the *Samaj* was tactfully taking a position in the court like other Hindu reformist organisations, though, ideologically, Phule never took a position within the 'great' tradition of Hinduism, as told earlier. In 1888 the verdict of the High Court came in favour of Patil and followers of the *Satyashodhak Samaj*. Accordingly, people from non-Brahman castes started to gather in large numbers under the *Satyashodhak* banner. Phule was hopeful that his movement would reach the various corners of Maharashtra and India. Hence, the *Samaj* started a process of uniting the various agriculturist castes like *Malis*, *Kunbis* etc. and asked them to enhance their fight against landlords and moneylenders through boycotts. This movement also popularised Phule's idea of '*Bahujan Samaj*' (majoritarian society)²⁰⁹ which further became the basis of the rise of non-Brahman move-

207 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-289.

208 Quoted in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-280.

209 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 178-179.

ments not only in Maharashtra, but also in other parts of south India like Madras, Mysore and Telangana. It was guided by the ideology of revolt given by the leaders of the *Satyashodhak Samaj*. This was how the Junnar revolt and later on Satara rebellion were seen afterwards by the leaders of Quit India Movement in 1942:

Soon a revolution went on the lower classes; a power of thought was created among them; the current of thought was available. Who can say that those who gave the power of thought and wave of progress of the majority class did not have a mass movement? Those who kindled among the innumerable lower class majority the light, and experience of who and what is causing us injustice, what are our rights, how we must through away this injustice – these were the *Satyasamajists*.²¹⁰

In 1884, Phule met Sayajirao Gaikwad who had recently ascended the throne of the princely state of Baroda and was highly impressed by the works and ideas of the former. Phule was also inclined towards the concerns of the young ruler. On the invitation of the Gaikwad, he had given lectures on social reform at some places in Baroda state. He had also read chapters from his book *Cultivator's Whipcord* before the ruler. His insights had a great impact on Gaikwad. In 1885, Gaikwad stayed in Poona for two months. Phule organised a big function in his honour in which speeches were delivered by M.G. Ranade, R.G. Bhandarkar and Jotirao Phule himself.²¹¹ Highlighting the sufferings of the farmers, Phule gave a call to the cultivators and downtrodden to stay united. On 11 May 1888, the honorific title of 'Mahatma' was conferred on Phule at a huge public function at Koliwada in Bombay in recognition of his services to the underclass.²¹²

In sum, Phule had deep concerns for the development of agriculture, village, peasants and the tenant cultivators. In a primarily

210 Uttamrao Patil & Appusaheb Lad, *Krantiveer Nana Patil*, Usha Prakashan, Audh, 1947, p.24, quoted in Gail Omvedt, "The Satyashodhak Samaj and Peasant Agitation", in Satish Deshpande (ed.), *The Problem of Caste*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2014, p. 193.

211 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *National Biography: Jotirao Phule*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 50-54.

212 P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. xx-xxi.

agricultural country like India, he felt, the remedy for mass poverty lay in direct solution of the agrarian problems. To this end, he urged extensive action by the Government for the improvement of agriculture. This was consistent with his general opposition to trickle-down theories of development, as he was not convinced that economic or educational benefits to a small section would eventually result in overall social progress.²¹³ He gave pointed and explicit suggestions for initiating extensive agrarian reforms as well as agrestic transformation in Maharashtra in particular and India in general. G.P. Deshpande and also R. Umapathi have provided useful accounts of his blueprint of such reforms and transformation to effect improvement in agriculture and the lot of the cultivators as well as other villagers wherein he suggested:

1. To teach new methods of cultivation and the use of machines and chemical fertilizers for that purpose;
2. To stop killing healthy cows and bullocks in order to avoid shortage of livestock of the cultivators which also affected the supply of natural fertilizers;
3. To improve good species of animals like sheep and goat and develop them for the use of farmers;
4. To construct buntings on each farm to stop erosion as also to allow the water to run down the earth and from there to percolate into the soil. This would also check the phenomena of momentary floods damaging fields and dry rivers throughout the year;
5. To encourage the farmers/villagers to dig wells by giving prizes etc. for such works;
6. To construct dams across small streams and rivers so that the constant flow of water would be guaranteed;
7. To locate underground water and then to show these spots in the maps of the villages to help the farmers dig wells at proper places;
8. To allow the farmers/villagers to use Government acquired forests as pastoral lands freely yet to prohibit cutting trees for firewood;

213 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 123.

9. To assign the duty of guarding and protecting the farms either to the police or to military, if the Government is afraid to allow the cultivators/villagers to keep arms;
10. To send the children of the cultivators to attend agricultural schools and technical courses and to pass minor examination pertaining to agricultural works and technology of black-smithy, carpentry, tanning etc.;
11. To reduce the salaries of higher officers and increase those of the lower and unskilled labourers gradually;
12. To make the office of *Patil* competitive and non-hereditary. It should be given to those of the *Shudras* who have passed minimum educational qualifications. The educated *Patil* could check the disruptive role of the *Kulkarni* in the village life. This, in turn, would reduce the number of false suits against peasants in courts of law; and
13. To keep strict watch on weights and measures as well as adulteration etc.²¹⁴

In short, Phule gave concrete suggestions for transmitting a productive partnership between the village community and the state in order to pioneer groundlaying agrarian reforms. Despite several shortcomings of the Government, he wanted it to play a proactive role in agrestic transformation. Nonetheless, his rural reconstruction programme rested, more than anything else, on educating the people. Cultivators and artisans must acquire some scientific education about agricultural and industrial production and operations. But the greater emphasis, he insisted, should be given to their children's education in knowledge based on modern scientific ideas and techniques which was, to him, the only 'remedial whipcord' for 'nauseating wrong' done to the lower and downtrodden castes in the past.

214 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14; also see R. Umaphathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-175.

Epilogue

Prior to the period of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, several heterodox movements had been emerging in Maharashtra which were challenging the cultural dominance of the *Brahman Dharma* and *Varna Vyavasth*. The *Mahanubhava* cult was one among them (others being Buddhists, Jains, *Lingayats* and *Nathas*) which was radically opposed to the orthodoxy and caste and had a strong base of support, particularly among the lower castes and Untouchables.¹ Nevertheless, the *Varkari* sect was in the same tradition and had been the most influential in Maharashtra until the eighteenth century. The prominent preachers of the *Varkari* sect were *Bhakti* saints like Namdev, Dnyaneshwar, Eknath and Tukaram. The morality, religious equality and brotherhood which this sect preached and the pride in Marathi language and culture which it generated among the people had reduced the caste barriers and created something similar to a 'national' consciousness among the people of Maharashtra. Resultantly, it prepared the background for the rise of Maratha power in the seventeenth century.²

Chhatrapati Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha state, occupies the most significant place in the history of Maharashtra. After the fall of Mughal empire in early eighteenth century, the political

1 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society: Non-Brahman Movement in Western India 1873-1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976; rpt. Manohar, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 37-38.

2 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number: Caste and Class in India*, Feb. 1989, Vol. XIV, No. 7/8 (hereafter: "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb 1989), p. 426.

vacuum in Deccan was soon filled up by Shivaji, a local chieftain. Interestingly, there have been conflicting cultural themes/traditions associated with him in the history of Maharashtra. His movement for independence against the Muslim overlords was identified by the *Brahmanical* elite as a resurgence of the 'Hindu nationalism' on the one hand, his efforts to abolish/minimize the powers of traditional feudatories (*Watandars* or *Zamindars* such as *Deshmukhs*, *Deshpandes*, *Kulkarnis* and *Patils*) on the other became part of a continuing tradition of Shivaji as a "common man's king."³ During his reign, a balance of power was maintained amongst the different elite caste groups at the court and in the administration. But after the appointment of Balaji Wishvanath, a Chitpavan Brahman, as *Peshwa* (Prime Minister) by Shahuji Maharaj, the grandson of Shivaji, the balance of power was disturbed. Within a few years, the *Peshwas* usurped all political power from the successors of Shivaji.⁴

The rule of *Peshwas* was accompanied by a gradual fragmentation and decline of the power of Marathas which led to their ultimate defeat at the hands of the British in 1818. The quality of their Government, especially that of the last *Peshwa* Bajirao-II, has always been a sensitive issue. From the time of Balajirao, his castemen found favour in administrative as well as military services. The Brahmans were now mostly appointed as army commanders and bureaucrats and *Jabgirs* and *Inams* were bestowed upon them. There was a certain ideological traditionalistic reason behind the *Peshwas'* support to caste-ridden social order which sometimes was also indicated by their concept of *Dharma*.⁵ The state functioned as a regulator of societal norms and ritual codes and in these matters, the local officials like *Kotwals* employed mechanisms such as comprehensive system of policing and information gathering and administrating of fines to

3 Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, Longmans, Green & Company, London, 1929, p. 379.

4 Ramabai Ranade (comp.), *The Miscellaneous Writings of Late Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.G. Ranade*, Published by Mrs. Ramabai Ranade, Bombay, 1915, p. 536.

5 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "State and Caste System (Jati) in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom", *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, Vol. IX, No. 1, June 1968, p. 44.

punish the citizens for any infractions of caste-based moral and societal codes.⁶ In fact, the state had no higher function than to protect the cow and the Brahman. The hegemony of the priestly caste people eventually led to disparities between them and non-Brahmans in all walks of life. Hence, the antagonism bred by the narrow sectarian policy of *Peshwas* led to conflict between Brahmans and non-Brahmans.⁷ This prepared a ground for the emergence of non-Brahman movement in colonial Maharashtra.

During the times of Jotirao Phule, the dominant community in rural Maharashtra was that of the peasant proprietors called *Kunbis* or Marathas. Besides the *Mirasdars* (peasant proprietors) belonging to *Kunbi*, *Mali* and *Dhangar* communities, the village population also included artisans and workers such as blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, weavers, washermen, oilmen, barbers, cobblers and others. They were called *Balutedars* and worked almost exclusively for satisfying the needs of the village community. The *Balutedari* system was a peculiar form of the *Jajmani* system in pre-colonial Maharashtra. According to the Maratha records (*Mahajars*), there were *Bara Balutas* or 'twelve groups of village servants' (though, not always twelve) who held some rent-free land in village and in lieu served the local officials and the village community (excluding Untouchables) in sphere of economic and social needs.⁸

The social structure of rural Maharashtra prior to British rule was basically a variant of an all-India institution, i.e., caste. In this context, it has been common for both historians as well as anthropo-

6 See: N.K. Wagle, "The Government, the Jati and the Individual: Rights, Discipline and Control in Pune Kotwal Papers 1766-94," in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2000 (hereafter: "Pune Kotwal Papers 1766-94," *CIH*, 2000), pp. 321-360.

7 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb 1989, p. 427.

8 Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th Century Maharashtrian Village— Demiurgic or Jajmani System?", *Hitotusubashi Journal of Economics*, Faculty of Economics, Hitotusubashi University, Vol. II, No. 2, Tokyo, Feb. 1972, pp. 35-36.

logists/sociologists to refer to India as a 'caste-society.'⁹ Since 1970s, however, there emerged a tendency among the scholars, of accusing the earlier specialists of massively overstating the importance of caste. An anthropologist, Nicholas Dirks, has gone so far as to even question the very existence of an ancient pan-Indian caste system.¹⁰ Such positions, however, puzzle the newcomers in the field especially when they come across many reformers including Mahatma Phule as well as Mahatma Gandhi, for whom caste was a real force in Indian life. Originating with the orientalist's works in nineteenth century, the racial theory has been an important interpretation of caste. However, referring to the intermixing of Aryans, Dravidians, Mongolians and Scythians, B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), a stalwart Dalit leader of modern Maharashtra and a great scholar of the subject, concludes that "caste is a division of the people of same race."¹¹ One of the striking outcomes of caste was untouchability which was, again in the words of Ambedkar, a 'by-product' of caste.¹² For time immemorial, the institution of caste has been the basis of superstructure of south Asian societies including that of Maharashtra which, during our period of study, was totally a caste-ridden society and governed by the ideology of caste.

When Maharashtra came under the British control, a new colonial administration was set up in the region. Through their land revenue administration based on the *Ryotwari* Settlement, the British brought to almost an end, the mediatory role of the officials like *Patil* between farmers and the Government.¹³ However, the influence of some other traditional officials (like *Kulkarni* etc.) as well as the high caste elite was not disturbed. Actually, the introduction of private

9 Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 225-232.

10 Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001, pp. 196-197.

11 *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vasant Moon (ed.), Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1989, Vol. I, pp. 6-7.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 87-96.

13 *Maharashtra State Gazetteer* (ed. A. S. Pathak), p. 276.

ownership over land in the village economy and gradual penetration of monetary economy in rural areas enhanced the power and prestige of the literate *Joshis*, the village accountant (*Kulkarni*) and also the moneylenders; who all found themselves in a position of power that would enable them to grab the land of cultivators.¹⁴ The Governors like Mountstuart Elphinstone also tried best to appease and accommodate the high caste elite in their new administration. As such, the Brahmans were able, despite the disintegration of *Peshwai*, to make a smooth transition to the new order in their favour. It was here that the non-Brahman leaders like Jotirao Phule perceived their caste-fellows to be disadvantaged.

The newly emerged educated middle class (which was chiefly consisted of the high castes) was though very small in size; but was united by their caste bonds and economic interests. The first generation of upper caste/class intellectuals soon desired to initiate 'renaissance' in India and they started their projects of socio-religious reform.¹⁵ The approach of first generation of reformers (like Bal Shastri Jambhekar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh 'Lokhitwadi' etc.) towards the issue of social reform was though progressive, but not very radical. This led to the rise of more progressive/radical reformers who soon appeared on the platform with the formation of *Paramahansa Mandali* (Society of the Super Being) in 1849 at Bombay. Its learned Brahman leaders like Baba Padamji were trying to broaden their traditions.¹⁶ However, the progressive movement launched by the *Mandali* collapsed in 1860s due to the reactionary aspirations of the dominant caste to maintain status quo, which was one of the painful experiences witnessed by Jotirao Phule. Though Padamji founded another society called *Satyashodhak Sabha* (The Truth Seeker Society), he, however, con-

14 Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, rpt. 2013, pp. 255-257.

15 R.C. Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I, Firm K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1963, p. 291.

16 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2008, (hereafter: *Seeking Begumpura*), p. 160.

verted to Christianity soon afterwards.¹⁷ And the term ‘*Satyashodhak*’ was eventually used by Mahatma Phule in 1873 when he founded his own society, i.e., *Satyashodhak Samaj*.

In 1872, *Prarthana Samaj*, a society of the Hindu revivalist reformers, also launched various reform activities in Maharashtra. The *Samaj* demanded that the age of consent for intercourse be increased, widow remarriage be allowed, and female education be encouraged. But abolition of caste inequalities could not even be put on the agenda of its social reforms.¹⁸ Naturally, the *Samaj* became a target of criticism of the contemporary radicals like Phule on account of its compromising attitude towards social reforms. An organic intellectual and religious radical from the core, Phule was, in fact, not satisfied with any of the social, religious or political organisation of his time because he found almost all of them influenced more or less by *Brahmanical*/orthodox ideas which would never be acceptable to him. For this reason, he decided to go his own way, i.e., the way of radical social reform.

The above mentioned historical background is enough to explain as to why a radical lower caste reformer like Mahatma Phule emerged in Maharashtra during the nineteenth century. As we attempt to understand the making of Phule, some events appertaining to his early childhood and school-days, draw our attention. We come to know that the motherless little Joti was brought up in the home of a missionary, Mr. John, by his aunt-mother Shagunabai where he had first developed the spirit of service to the needy and the suffering.¹⁹ We also know that he had studied in Scottish Mission School, Poona until 1847 and left it having completed his secondary education. Thus, making of his mind and his exposures to new intellectual currents especially took place after coming in contact with the Christian missionaries in his early formative years. We also come to know

17 Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

18 Nalini Pandit, “Caste and Class in Maharashtra”, *EPW*, Feb. 1989, p. 429.

19 Pamela Sardar, “The Woman Who Mentored Phules”, in Braj Ranjan Mani & Pamela Sardar (eds.), *A Forgotten Liberator: The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule*, Mountain Peak, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 32-34.

about some incidents of caste discrimination by Brahmans during his early life. For instance, while he was studying in a local Marathi school, his education was suddenly stopped in 1838 on the advice of a Brahman clerk in his father's produce shop, though luckily, on the persuasion of Shagunabai, two friends of his father (a learned Muslim and a British administrator) had convinced him to revert his decision.²⁰ Similarly, his presence in the marriage procession of one of his Brahman classmates was not tolerated by the Brahmans and he was insulted by them.²¹ Such events of childhood might have had an effect on the course of his life.

During his school days, Jotirao read the life histories of Shivaji Bhonsle, George Washington, Tukaram, Martin Luther and Napoleon Bonaparte. He also studied the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, Buddhist Literature, *Smritis* and the literature of radical *Bhakti* saints. His other readings included Johan Wilson's *India: Three Thousand Years Ago or the Social State of Aryans on the Banks of the Indus in the Times of Vedas* (1858), Friedrich Max Muller, *Rig-Veda Samhita: A Collection of Ancient Hindu Hymns constituting the Second Ashtaka or Book of the Rig-Veda* (1854), etc. Phule's favourite western thinker was, however, Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a religious radical from U.S.A., whose famous treatises like *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason* had a marvellous impact on his mind.²² Himself being a radical thinker to the core, he was naturally attracted towards religious radicals like Paine who condemned Christian fundamentalism in an altogether hard-hitting tone. He was particularly impressed with the idea of liberation advocated by Paine for the Blacks from American slave-system.²³

Though Phule was no doubt an admirer of the western thinkers and emerging liberal democracies of the west, but he actually developed his thoughts on the ideological and cultural bedrock of the

20 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *National Biography: Jotirao Phule*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 6-7.

21 Dhanajay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phule: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Publication, Bombay, 1964, Third Edition, 2013, p. 17.

22 P.C. Roy & J. Kishore, *The Great Warriors of Human Rights Movement from India*, Wisdom Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 51-53.

23 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

Shramanic and radical *Bhakti* traditions of India. He was significantly inspired by the egalitarian philosophy of Gautama Buddha whom he hailed as the “saviour of masses.”²⁴ Similarly, among *Bhakti* saints, he as well as his associates felt a deep bond with Kabir who presented a radical critique of Brahmanism through his poems. *Bīpramati* – a part of Kabir’s *Bijagranth* – was the crucial source of inspiration for him. He was also said to be fond of Tukaram’s famous dictum ‘*satya-asatyashi man kele gwahi*’ – means, know truth and untruth through the voice of conscience.²⁵ Further, he was also influenced by *Vijrasuchi* or *Vajrasuchik-Upnishad*, a fiercely anti-Brahmanic tract ascribed to Ashva Ghosh, perhaps a Buddhist monk.²⁶

Since Phule hailed from the lower strata of Hindu society, he naturally comes out as, to apply Antonio Gramsci’s phrase, an organic intellectual. As such, apart from his experiences and inspirations, his ‘social location’ largely helped him to develop his perspective – which was a ‘perspective from below’ or that of the downtrodden sections of Hindu society and was based on a revolutionary, but religious worldview. He authored many polemical writings, plays and poetry. Most of his works are written in Marathi, the language of the common man of Maharashtra. Foremost of his writings include a ballad on Shivaji, and four books: *Gulamagiri*, which mainly focuses on ‘Brahmanism’ and caste discrimination; *Shetakaryacha Asud*, describing the exploitation of the peasants; *Sarvajanik Satyadharm Pustak*, an effort to outline a new, theist and egalitarian religion and *Asprashyacha Kaifiyat*, an account of the miserable conditions of Untouchables depicted from their ‘own’ perspective. Since Phule was primarily a social activist, his writings appear to be unsystematic, sporadic, pictorial and hard-hitting. On this account, his orthodox critics like Vishnushastri Chiplunkar had attacked him heavily and even made a fun of his language (which was, actually, the language of the *Marathi-Manus*).²⁷ Though his writings are not systematic,

24 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phoolley: Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular, Bombay, 2013 (First published in 1964), p. 119.

25 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

26 Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

27 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

but they contain a basic logic and reflect the dilemmas of the Indian masses of his times. One of the main objectives of his writings (as well as his movement) was to critique the foundations of *Brahmanic* Hinduism, its social structure and its socio-economic and politico-cultural orders as well as to propose his framework of Hindu social reform as an alternative blueprint of the 'reformed Hinduism'.

Most of the people believe that Phule considered the institution of caste mainly accountable for the deteriorating state of affairs in Hindu religion and society. To him, however, it was 'Brahmanism'/ *Brahman Dharma* (religion of orthodoxy) which was responsible for the creation of the unjust Hindu social order based on *Varna Vyavastha*. He saw 'Brahmanism' as the ideological and institutional system of monopolizing knowledge, power and privileges and, hence, there was nothing sacred or divine about it. It was historical, constructed over time and was totally based on unjust religious and social ideas. But since it presented itself as divinely ordained, it was necessary to oppose this system in its entirety.²⁸ Phule's analysis reminds us the Foucaultian theory of hegemony and his power/knowledge paradigm, and indicates the strength of his understanding of the hegemonic system in India. Since he was an organic intellectual, his method of analysis was not classical but critical and appropriate to establish truth to his readers.²⁹ Being a staunch rationalist, Phule was saved from a good deal of unnecessary arguments, compromises and logical inconsistencies. He did not, for instance, waste his time in arguing over the relative 'merits' of different parts of the *Brahmanic* scriptures and religious dogmas and ideas enshrined therein. He was clearly of the view that the so-called holy books are not the creation of the divine power, but they are man-made and, hence, cannot be acceptable *in toto*.

Phule notes in *Gulamagiri* that that nearly all old forms of slavery have come to an end, but the caste-slavery is still in existence in

28 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule (with Annotations and Introduction)*, Left Word Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 6-7.

29 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *Contribution of Phule and Shahu to Caste and Religion*, Ph. D. Thesis, submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 1987, p. 289.

India. To him, it was the institution of *Varna* which gave apex position to the Brahmans in Hindu society with many religious, political and economic privileges. And, such a position further gave birth to the subordination of the non-Brahmans, particularly the lower caste *Shudra-Atishudras*, who became the victims of caste-slavery in the religion of orthodoxy.³⁰ He was equally aware that the belief of many lower castes was also in *Brahmanic* Hinduism and the myths fabricated by the '*Arya-Bhats*'. In such a state of affairs, he felt the need to re-interpret the history, myths, scriptures and theories of Hindu religion and society from a 'perspective from below'. He stressed on the factors of violence, conquest, ideology and culture in history: the 'Aryan conquest' was simply the first of a series of invasions and conquests of the subcontinent. The invasion of Aryans was, to him, worse, not for 'racial' reasons, but for the fact that the '*Arya-Bhats*' solidified their power using a hierarchical and in-egalitarian socio-religious ideology. The '*Bhatsbahi*' was a regime that oftentimes used religion and also state power (e.g., in the case of *Peshwas*) to maintain its hegemony and exploitation.³¹ Though the racial theory seems to be an artificial one as the so-called Aryans were actually a linguistic group and not a race, but it was initially advanced not by Phule but first by the Orientalists/Europeans and then by the Brahman and other high caste scholars. What is significant about him is that he actually turned the racial theory upside down on its head in a way to formulate a theory of the rise of caste-society and *Brahmanic* exploitation.³²

In *Gulamagiri*, Phule constructed an altogether different utopia or 'golden age' (as against the 'golden age' of Aryan/Vedic past emphasised by the high caste elite) in pre-Aryan India under the kingdom of *Baliraja* or king Bali. He described that the non-Aryans

30 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

31 Bheema Ranganathrao Raskar, *The Study of Economic Ideas of Mahatma Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwara University, Aurangabad, 2015, p. 120.

32 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of An Indian Identity*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 1995 (hereafter: *Dalit Visions*), p. 19.

inhabited almost the whole of India from Indus in the northwest to the Deccan or Maharashtra or even further in the deep south. They were 'highly civilized people' who cultivated the great lands and lived happily in villages and towns. They were called *Kshetriya/Kshetrapati/Kshatriya* (i.e., inhabitants/aboriginal warriors). Ancient India was called '*Balistan*.' When the Aryans invaded *Balistan*, they degraded the 'original' *Kshatriyas* as *Shudras*.³³ Thus, in order to counter Brahmanism, Phule stressed upon his basic argument of the dichotomy between 'Brahmans' and 'non-Brahmans'. In fact, there was only a two-fold division of society in Deccan and south India, i.e., the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans, during the period of our study.³⁴ In view of this dichotomy, Phule might have re-interpreted the racial theory of caste in order to explore possibilities of a social revolution against the Hindu social order based on *Varna Vyavastha*.

Phule also felt the need to expose the religious literature, myths and stories and dogmas which directly or indirectly strengthened the *Brahmanic* religion and caste slavery. He emphasised that at the root of all calamities in Hinduism was the blind faith propounded by the orthodox Brahmans that their religious books were created or inspired by God. This blind faith had to be abolished in the first instance. He, therefore, argued that each religious book was a product of its time and the 'truths' it contained had no permanent and universal validity.³⁵ Over the centuries, the ignorant masses had been mentally 'enslaved' in *Brahmanic* Hinduism through religious scriptures and myths, particularly the *Itihas-Purana*, which also got integrated in the popular culture and oral traditions.³⁶ In view of this, Phule came up with his reinterpretations of *Brahmanic* myths, stories and theories. But in the process of reinterpretation, he insisted upon robust rationality that made the supernatural elements ridic-

33 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 57-63.

34 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-20.

35 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

36 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance" (Report on a Seminar organised by Centre for Social Studies, Surat on 9-10 January 1991), in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 21, 25 May 1991 (hereafter: "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, 25 May 1991, p. 1325).

ulous. He argued that most of the religious myths represented the 'real' history of ancient India which was deliberately garbled by the later *Arya-Bhats* writers in order to conceal their misdeeds and consolidate their hegemonic power over the lower classes. Umesh Bagade is right in suggesting that like Giambattista Vico, who argued that myths were 'true and severe narrations' and the mythical heroes were the 'class representatives' of society, Phule presented the *Brahmanic* myths as historical accounts and portrayed the gods and demons as the representatives of the *Aryans* and *Shudra-Atishudras* respectively.³⁷ In *Gulamagiri*, he constructed a sequential of one incarnation to the next and attempted to 'historically' interpret and expose them as leaders of *Aryans* and tormentors of original inhabitants of the land.³⁸ Though we cannot accept all of Phule's facts, details and conclusions bases on myths, we cannot say that he was 'mythologizing history', as some his critics missuggest.³⁹ In fact, he was historicizing mythology for deriving insurgent subject position of the downtrodden.⁴⁰ Though, exposition and rejection of the *Pauranic* history was his main object, but his aim was also to re-write a history which could give self-respect, consciousness and freedom to *Stree-Shudra-Atishudras*.

With this purpose, Phule exposed the myths of *Matsya-Shankhasur*, *Kaccha-Kasyap*, *Varaha-Hirnyaksh*, *Narshimha-Hirnyakshyap*, *Vipra-Pralhad*, *Vaman-Bali*, and *Vaman-Banasur* to explain conflicts between the *Arya-Bhats* and the aboriginal *Kshetriyas/Kshatriyas*. Particularly, the myth of dispossession of *Baliraja* by *Vaman* was

37 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge: Phule's Path of Alternative Education", in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No 1-4, S.P.P. University, Pune, January-December 2015 (hereafter: "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42), p. 66.

38 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

39 Aparna Devare, *History and the Making of a Modern Indian Self*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New Delhi, 2011, p. 83.

40 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 56.

given high heed and read politically by Phule as the destruction of egalitarian and agrarian community of the original inhabitants.⁴¹

While almost all of his contemporary social reformers supported the Vedic tradition, Phule did not agree with the opinion that *Vedas* are the holy books. On the contrary, he stressed that they are 'unethical' and 'political'.⁴² He argued that the *Arya Bhats* always tried to conceal the *Vedas* from the lower castes otherwise they could have come across in *Vedas* the story of the Aryan encroachment in India and also how they harassed the original inhabitants and named them '*Dasyu*', '*Ahir*', '*Asur*', '*Pisacha*', '*Maha-Ari*' etc.⁴³ While countering the scriptures, Phule also criticised the great ancient epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and opined that these epics were used in a popular manner by the '*Arya-Bhats*' to exploit the masses.⁴⁴ Though Phule took his inspiration from the *Bhakti* saints like Kabir and Tukaram, he also rejected the literature written by *Brahmanic* saints in Maharashtra. He criticised the *Bhagwat Dharma* and pointed out that the books like *Viveksindhu* and *Dnyaneshawari* were tactfully written by such saints in the language of the people, so that they could spoil the minds of the farmers.⁴⁵

Phule also denounced the fundamental religious theories which the *Brahmanic* Hinduism was based upon. He argued that the toiling masses, being trapped in the notions of *Daiva* (fate), *Sanchit* (accumulated demerits of previous births) and *Prarabdha* (predestination), had lost the sense of their dialectical relationship with the world and had been *Dasa* (slaves) to the 'external' forces.⁴⁶ He also questioned the theory of *Dharma* (religiously ordained duty),

41 Mahesh Gavaskar, "Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule's Critique of Brahman Power" in S.M. Michael (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2007, p. 102.

42 Braj Ranjan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

43 John Wilson, *India Three Thousand Ago*, Indological Book House, Varnanasi, 1858, p. 20.

44 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

45 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.

46 Mahesh Gavaskar, "Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule's Critique of Brahman Power" in S.M. Michael (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

which was also, and oftentimes, interpreted by the orthodoxy to justify caste and caste-bound duties through the terms like *Varna Dharma*, *Varnashrama Dharma* etc.⁴⁷ Further, he equally denounced the theory of *Karma*, which at a certain point, gets mixed with the theory of caste as it has been believed that the people belonging to high castes did 'good *Karma*' (deeds) in their last birth (life) whereas the lower caste people did 'bad *Karma*' in their last life. He opined that a turn of fortune was basically dependent upon man's desires, abilities and deeds and his wheel of fortune could turn according to his will.⁴⁸ He did not believe in heaven/paradise. To him, the concept of *Moksha* made the people 'other worldly' and led them to shrink social responsibility.⁴⁹

Having greatly differed from other social reformers in his anti-clericalism, Phule regarded Hindu religion of his times as a worldview of a particular social group. Though other castes/groups might accept it, but the *Brahmanic* religion could represent for them only a false consciousness and an unknowing servitude to the interests of the members of the particular group themselves.⁵⁰ To Phule, religious dogmas, superstitions and *Karmakands* were deliberately promoted in the name of Hindu religion by them in order to exploit the masses. He at length attempted to ruthlessly expose their exploitation strategies.

Phule found that under the colonial rule, the key exploited class in Maharashtra were that of peasants who had psychologically accepted the *Brahmanic* slavery and let the orthodox class rule and exploit. He opined that the institution of temple was a major tool of exploitation of the farmers. With the help of the temple, the orthodoxy could create various rituals and make the farmers observe them and accordingly get exploited.⁵¹ He gives an evidence in one of his

47 Jotirao Phule, *The Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

48 Ramesh B. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-286.

49 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 230.

50 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

51 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 120-127.

polemical tracts; the play entitled *The Third Eye* (1855). It shows that in those days, the farmer's earning for a month was only Rs.4; and if calculated for a year, it would be Rs. 48. Whereas, the farmer had to spend Rs. 14 (with interest) to perform a single religious ritual. As such, for only one ritual, he had to spend about 30 per cent of his income of a year. Due to such a state of affairs, the poor farmer and his family were cursed to sink in poverty.⁵² In fact, with the help of religion, according to Phule, the *Brahmanical* elite created a 'vicious cycle.' Common man was the centre-point of this circle which he couldn't come out of. He described how the entire code of socio-religio-economic conduct in the religion of orthodoxy was designed to exploit the poor peasant from the cradle to the grave. On the persuasion of the priests, the farmers even took loans from the moneylenders and visited the temples of *Chardham* etc. In addition to *Chardham*, Pandharpur, Alandi, Jejuri, Nasik etc. were local pilgrimages and the farmers were further enticed to go to take *darshan* of gods and to listen to the *Puranas*. This pushed them into the trap of loan, and after few days, they had to wash their hands off their land.⁵³

Phule elaborated further, many other forms of religious exploitation in his writings. For marriage, around Rs. 20 was charged as the marriage fees which were approximately 50 per cent of farmer's annual income. Similarly, when a farmer got his house built, he had to perform *Vastushanti* ritual.⁵⁴ Even after the death of the farmer, the exploitation was not stopped. His soul was 'forcibly kept' at his home for not less than ten days. After ten days, *Shraddhal Pinda* ritual was performed at the bank of a river. At this occasion a big amount was charged and the farmer's son was made to donate a ladder of gold. For every year, this ritual had to be performed by the

52 Bheema Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

53 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127 & p 168.

54 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in Asha Mundlay (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Vol. III, Mahatma Phule Source Material Publication Committee, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2002, p. 39.

farmer's family.⁵⁵ It is hereditarily transferred from one generation to another and the "vicious circle" of extortion worked continuously and unconstrainedly.

Phule has also described in his writings, the role of orthodox Brahmins as clerks, accountants, administrators, judges and teachers, drawing together numerous aspects of the *Brahmanic* exploitation, and showing that they constituted parts of the same phenomenon. The most powerful groups among them were the *Kulakarnis* (village accountants). Comparing the *Kulakarnis* with the *Mulanis* (butchers), he writes in *Slavery* that they had even left the *Mulanis* far behind.⁵⁶ In this way, Phule countered the *Brahmanic* Hinduism in its all premises and exposed its hegemonic and exploitation strategies. Then he came out with his blueprint of reformed Hinduism as an alternative model to it.

While discussing Phule's framework of social reform, the most important thing which comes to our mind is that he represented a very different set of interests and a very different outlook of the Indian renaissance. The upper caste elite and its intellectuals expressed an ideology of the renaissance (and also nationalism) based on bourgeois class aspirations and the 'great' tradition. Phule, however, represented the idea of a renaissance and reformation with an outlook based on lower class/caste aspirations and the 'little' tradition. In other words, his framework of social reform represented the desires of lower castes for social transformation along revolutionary lines.⁵⁷ Other reformers, despite their sincerity to the cause they represented, had not got rid of the ideology of 'Brahmanism' altogether. They just wanted to 'repair' the old orthodox religion, and, actually, wanted to revive it. Phule was dismissive of this brand of renaissance/nationalism, seeking in it, subtle elite attempts to preserve traditional socio-religious hierarchies.⁵⁸ As a matter of fact, he represented the

55 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

56 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 77.

57 Gail Omvedt, "Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 September 1971, p. 1969.

58 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

true reformation in India as he expressed most strongly the values of equality, fraternity and humanism, the use of rationality and the notion of progress.

Notably, there was a problem in Hinduism which every reformer including Phule had to face. There has been in almost all other religions a difference between the religious institutions and social institutions. But in the case of Hinduism, we come across the fact that here it is relatively difficult to distinguish between the two. In fact, roots of nearly all social problems of Hindu society lay in Hindu religion. For instance, the roots of problem of social hierarchies and inequalities could be traced to the idea of *Varnashrama Dharma* and also it was enshrined in the religious doctrines of *Dharma*, *Karma*, rebirth etc. Therefore, for reforming its caste-ridden society, one must have to reform the Hindu religion itself, and for that purpose, a dynamically radical approach becomes a necessity for any genuine reformer. Phule was the first Hindu reformer who understood this problem and accordingly devised his strategies of social reform. It is also pertinent to note that there was a risk of becoming anti-religious for reformers in such a case, but, admirably, Phule, despite of his all radicalism, never became anti-religious or anti-Hindu. In fact, as G.P. Deshpande informs us, Phule hardly used the term Hindu or Hinduism for denouncing social evils. He referred to 'Brahmanism' instead.⁵⁹ This was one of the unique strengths of his framework of reform that he never lose his position as a Hindu reformer, even while not taking a position from within a 'great' or valued tradition of Hinduism and also denouncing almost everything orthodox within the Hindu system.

In Hindu society where caste-slavery rested upon *Brahman Dharma*, Phule, who aimed at complete destruction of caste hierarchies and inequalities, devised such a framework of reform that was fundamentally in opposition to the established religious and social orders. As such, his non-Brahmanism was not simply a result of the British policy of 'divide-and-rule', as could be argued from a nationalist point of view, but it traced its origins to his idea of radical reform and emerged as the first expression of Hindu reformation

59 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

movement in modern India. Needless to say that his was not an attack on Brahmins, but essentially it was an attack on the ideology of *Brahmanic* dominance (*Brahmanache Varchaswa or Brahman Varchaswavad*).⁶⁰

It appears that the main emphasis of Phule was to demonstrate the basis on which all the oppressed could come together and unite, rather than on the infinite divisions which split them. This, however, does not mean that he did not specially recognize the problem of Untouchables. In fact, he had more passionately raised the issue of their oppression in the *Brahmanic* Hinduism who were reduced to highly disadvantaged and oppressed state as a result of the 'religious bigotry and tyranny' practiced by the orthodoxy.⁶¹ Admittedly, while recognizing their problem, he equally emphasized that the Untouchables were the part and parcel of the larger 'community of the oppressed'. Phule thus advanced a common discourse of the lower castes, based on the concept of 'non-Aryan' unity of the '*Mulnivasis*', which later came to be known as '*Dalit-Bahujan* discourse' and also gave birth to the idea of *Bahujan Samaj* as a basis of the rise of different non-Brahman and Dalit movements throughout the country.

Significantly, Phule's approach/framework was not solely based on caste; he was also the first to think of Indian/Hindu society in terms of class. He argued that all those who produced society's wealth were the '*Shudra-Atishudras*'. They were suffering in the name of caste and untouchability at the hands of the high caste elites – the *Shetji-Bhatji-Latji* – whom Phule regarded bloodsucking consumers of society's resources. He made every effort to bring together all laboring classes – *Kunbis, Malis, Dhangars, Patidars, Wadars, Ramoshis, Bhils, Kolis, Mahars, Mangs* and *Chambhars* – under one umbrella, to wage a morality-driven and knowledge-based struggle against the *Brahmanic* falsehood.⁶² Though in a brilliant display of insight, he linked the present oppression of the downtrodden with

60 *Ibid.*

61 Jotirao Phule, *The Untouchables' Apologia*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule - Reflections*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1991, Vol. II, pp. 86-93.

62 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

'past atrocities', it cannot be said, as G.P. Deshpande⁶³ and Gail Omvedt⁶⁴ claim, that Phule portrayed Indian history as an endless 'class struggle' between the Brahmans and the lower castes. In fact, unlike Karl Marx, he did not declare the class (or caste) struggle to be a perpetual or prolonged one until the occurrence of a peoples' revolution. As a matter of fact, his ultimate aim was not revolution but the restoration of equality, brotherhood and love in Hindu society. Hence, while rejecting the *Brahmanic* notions of 'high' and 'low', 'pure' and 'polluted' and 'sacred' and 'unsacred', Phule, in his alternative model, preached the idea of universal brotherhood which transcends all artificial divisions/distinctions based on caste, class, gender, community, status, position, privilege, physical condition, faith, opinion, political ideology, food habits or the mode of apparel, etc.⁶⁵

To Phule, a more essential and continuing way to change the existing power structure and power relations in Hindu society was through the means of mass education. He laid maximum emphasis on the spread of education and wanted to use knowledge as a weapon to bring about an attitudinal change. It would lead, to use the words of Gail Omvedt, to a 'cultural revolution' and also scientific/rational thinking in Hindu society. For him, the acquisition of education/knowledge by the oppressed was emancipatory and his pedagogy was informed by a clear understanding of knowledge and power. Significantly, the 'truth seeking' was seen by him as a quest guided by the individual's own reason, not by the dictates of any religious Guru or authoritative text, ultimate purpose was the 'emancipation' of the *Shudra-Atishudras*.⁶⁶

Definitely, Phule's mission was not to 'modernize' the *Brahmanical* beliefs, cultural symbols and distinguishing markers by making them accessible to some upwardly mobile castes (like Marathas etc.),

63 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

64 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, p. 20.

65 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 33-37.

66 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 105.

but to construct an alternative culture based on morality, equality and reason. Here, the critics could point out a contradiction in his framework. He used the term '*Kshatriya*' for the '*Shudra-Atishudras*' of ancient times. However, in arguing that all lower castes could rightfully call themselves 'ancient *Kshatriyas*', an existing process of upward social mobility among Marathas etc. was, perhaps, in his mind. Further, he did so in a very unconventional and radical way: that of suggesting a permanent paradox between orthodox class and all other classes in Hindu society. In any case, Phule was originally for *de-sanskritization* of Hindu society and his criticism of *Brahmanic* religion and its all dogmas, customs and traditions was an evidence of this. His alternative model was, in actual terms, a sort of *de-brahmanized* Hinduism.⁶⁷ This was one of the unique contributions of Phule to Hindu social reform.

As a matter of fact, Phule constructed his alternative around his '*Baliraja* model' based upon a utopia of casteless moral society. His model had a strong resonance with popular culture, for, in Maharashtra (and also in other parts of India, e.g., Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu etc.) Bali was indeed seen as a popular mythical hero among the lower castes and also a 'peasant king'.⁶⁸ In his utopia of '*Bali-Raj*' (kingdom of Bali), economy was agriculture-oriented where exploitation was not allowed at all. He sketched in his utopia a happy moral community of 'inhabitant *Kshetriyas/Kshatriyas*' which lived in India before the advent of *Aryans*. In this utopia, liberty, equality and fraternity prevailed; patriotism, democracy and republicanism were integral to its polity; art, science and knowledge prospered; and all the subjects were living a happy and prosperous life.⁶⁹ He portrayed that lower castes were protected by the legendary king Bali in ancient times and Shivaji in modern times. In short, Phule endorsed the Dravidian theory to construct his *Bali-Raj* utopia of equality and justice in opposition to the *Brahmanic* utopia

67 Thom Wolf, "*India Progress-Prone: 21st Century India and the Baliraja Proposal of Mahatma Phule*", Oakes Worldviews Bulletin, Vol. 7. Issue-2, Lucknow, 2007, p. 12.

68 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

based on the *Vedic Varnashrama Dharma*. This was his alternative model of socio-spiritual liberation.⁷⁰

Phule envisions a dynamic idea of equality which appears to have many dimensions. Of course, social equality occupies the most significant place in it. He believed, a nation cannot be formed without restoration of social equality. For nation-building, equality, harmony and emotional integrity among all nationals is highly desirable. He expects elimination of all social hierarchies and privileges/ disabilities based on birth, and also many more things, for founding a nation in his framework. In fact, Phule had his own conception of 'Indian nation' which itself was based upon his socio-religious philosophy and wherein he stressed upon the restoration of 'emotional integrity' among all nationals of the land.⁷¹

Apart from social equality, Phule advocates religious equality and freedom and thinks about it in very rational and secular as well as in spiritual terms. He envisions of an ideal family in which the lady embraced Buddhism, her husband Christianity, their daughter Islam and son Universal Religion of Truth.⁷² According to him, religion does not create any restrictions or barriers, and it can be accepted after reading the fundamental principles of a particular religion by the individuals. By following the *Satyadharma* (religion of truth and righteous conduct), Phule hopes, people would be the "blessed citizens of our Creator's kingdom."⁷³

Phule also keenly advocates gender equality. Though he does not directly talk of patriarchy, yet he emerges as a radical supporter of women's equality. To him, the issue was the formation of a new equalitarian husband-wife relationship and the goal was breaking down of the old authoritarian/patriarchic structure within the family. In fact, he saw the subjugation of women, alongwith that of the lower castes, as a part the larger hegemonic design inherent in the ideology of Brahmanism. He wanted that the traditional society and family/

70 Bhima Rangnathrao Raskar, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-270.

71 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 29-30.

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

marriage system should be changed in the light of reason and gender justice. In his idea of reform, he suggests new marriage rites laying stress on man-woman equality.⁷⁴ Thus, his was the first systematic understanding of the gender question by a modern reformer/thinker in India. He gave his unpresented support to Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde, the two great feminist activists of his days⁷⁵, even without caring for the opposition of stalwarts like Vivekananda (in the case Ramabai) and his own co-workers like Krishnarao Bhalekar (in the case Tarabai Shinde). His interventions made him one of very few icons of Indian history who deserves the respect of all, especially women. No doubt, through his movement he prepared a ground for the rise of the women's liberation/feminist movement in India. For this reason; Indian feminist movement today is indebted to him (as well as Savitribai Phule), which makes us realize the significance of his historic role.

In Phule's idea of equality, educational equality also occupies a very significant place. During his movement, he visualized three purposes of education: (i) a share of lower classes in employment, (ii) intellectual emancipation from the *Brahmanic* religion, and (iii) facilitating a process of reform from below.⁷⁶ When he studied the causes of the sorrowful conditions of '*Stree-Shudra-Atishudras*' in Hindu society, he found that they were oppressed and enslaved and highly backward in all respects – mentally, religiously, socially, morally and politically. The main cause of their backwardness was illiteracy and denial of access to knowledge. Accordingly, he not only emphasises the issue of educating the oppressed classes in his principles, but also declares education as "remedial whipcord" for nauseating wrong done to them in the past.⁷⁷ His play *Trutiya Ratna* (1855) reimagines education as 'third eye' that has potentials to enable the oppressed

74 Jotirao Phule, *The Book of the True Faith*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 227-236.

75 Jotirao Phule, *Satsar*, Number 2, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 217-228.

76 Satyakam Joshi & K.S. Raman, "Jotirao Phule: An Incomplete Renaissance", *EPW*, 25 May 1991, p. 1327.

77 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 46.

to understand and transform the relation between knowledge and power.⁷⁸

In his idea of equality, Phule also insists on equal opportunity for everyone. During his times, opportunities were confined to certain caste groups. Menial vocations were imposed upon the lower castes, and it was called their '*Dharma*' (religiously ordained duty) to be engaged in such vocations. As a result, they had no opportunity to do a work of their choice. In view of this, Phule suggested that there should be equal opportunity for everyone to exercise his right to do work as per his choice and skills. Vocation and the ordained duty must be differentiated. No person in society should be deprived of his opportunity on the basis of his birth, caste, community or gender. Phule also stood for breaking down the monopoly of the elite groups, particularly Brahmins, over certain opportunities, e.g., education, civil services, religious services etc.⁷⁹

In addition to visualizing a dynamic idea of all-round equality, Phule also came out with an idea of *Satyadharm*a in his alternative model to the *Brahman Dharma*. Even a revolutionary culture requires an ethico-moral foundation. For this reason, in his model, he did not reject the idea of *Dharma* but rather attempted to establish a true and moral religion, as, to him, the basis of society had to be centered on truth and morality. Phule did not suggest his people to embrace other religions. He equally made it clear that he did not believe in the idea of 'revealed truth' or 'divine sanction', and, as such, he had nothing to do with the fundamentalism of any creed or faith.⁸⁰ Thus, despite all of his criticism of the old orthodox religion, this couldn't be said that Phule was speaking as an alien to Hindu religion. In fact, his stand was against the hegemonic religio-cultural system of Hindus. All of his writings as well as actions show a clear

78 Sharmila Rege, "Education as 'Trutiya Ratna': Towards Phule-Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogical Practice", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, No. 44-45, 30 October 2010 (hereafter: "Education as Trutiya Ratna", *EPW*, 30 Oct. 2010), p. 93.

79 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol.-II, p. 15.

80 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 264-265.

identification with the common Hindu masses and their popular culture and traditions.⁸¹ We also know that he lived and died a Hindu. But, to him, only *'Aryan Bhats'* alone did not constitute the Hindus, but "*Shudras, Atishudras, Bhils and Kolis* – all were Hindus", though unfortunately those Hindus were "put to great deprivations and hardships" by the orthodoxy.⁸² He, therefore, devised strategies for their liberation and amelioration. His idea of *Satyadharma* – the 'religion of truth' – was one of those strategies.

As a matter of fact, despite being a fierce critic of *Brahmanic* religion, Phule was a religious man from the core of his heart and believed in the institution of religion and its true spiritual values. Like most of the leaders and spokesmen of the lower caste Hindus, he also felt the need to establish a religious alternative based upon the philosophy of egalitarian theism. He suggested an alternative of orthodox religion not only to Hindus, particularly the non-Brahmans, but he also came out with a concept of *Sarvajanik Satyadharma* (universal religion of truth) to all people of the world, irrespective of their different faiths or organized religions. His religion was not confined only to the individual but to the whole society as well. In other words, the nature of his religion was more social, more public, and more universal than individualist.⁸³ Interestingly, all the ideas and principles of Phule's 'universal religion' appears to be flexible and rational even to the extent that except 'truth', he does not suggest anything which looks untruth. "Those who are followers of truth are happy human-beings" – this was Phule's major contribution to the religious thought. He used the fundamental spiritual axiom '*Satyameva Jayate*' (Truth alone triumphs) and displayed it on his letter-heads. Significantly, great sages of India had also stressed this message which has been the mainspring of Hindu/Indian culture and tradition.⁸⁴

81 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, p. 108.

82 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 28.

83 J.R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

84 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

To understand Phule's deep concern for truth, we can take his concept of 'Creator'. He believed that the terms hitherto coined for 'God' had grown out of the practices/observance of prayer or worship, which only created social rift amongst human beings. For this reason; he avoided terms such as *Ishwar*, *Allah*, *Brahma*, and even 'God' and came out with his concept of *Nirmik* (Creator). In his spiritual treatise *Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak*, he visualized of the restoration of '*Nirmik's* kingdom of truth' on earth.⁸⁵ He also did not like the methods of worshipping God prevalent in the old Hindu religion (and, of course, other religions). He did not believe in offering any flower or *Naivedya* (food offered at the time of worship) to *Nirmik*. Since *Nirmik* has created flowers and sweets and scented things for the use of man, it is useless and meaningless to dedicate these things to *Nirmik*. Similarly, *Nirmik* can't be pleased by meditation. Repeating in mind countless times the name of God is not the proper way to worship. In fact, the 'righteous conduct' is the true remembrance of *Nirmik*. That means, instead of offering food or sweets etc. to God, we should offer it to the poor, handicapped and needy people.⁸⁶ He argued that no 'intermediary' priest was necessary between man and *Nirmik*, and what orthodox Brahmans did attempt to interpose themselves, alongwith their rituals, were in search only of money and power, and not for the spiritual well-being of Hindus.⁸⁷

As we cast a glance on *Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak* or any of his other major writings, it suddenly appears that Phule always pleaded for 'human rights' of all individuals. His basic argument in this respect was that since our Creator has created all of us as free human beings, the human rights are bestowed to all of us as natural rights.⁸⁸ As such, he comes forward as the first champion of human rights in modern India. While defining the basic principles of his

85 Jotira Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 56.

86 *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

87 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

88 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 22.

Satyadharna, he opines that the natural rights are inherent to all human beings regardless of all artificial divisions/distinctions based on caste, gender, community, class etc.⁸⁹ As a matter of fact, his concept of *Satyadharna* mainly focuses on the emancipation of man, particularly the downtrodden, from the age-old established orders. All of his thirty-three principles meant for truth-seekers indicate that he was chiefly concerned with the cause of the oppressed including peasants, workers, women and Dalits. Like a true Mahatma, he was full of compassion for all the oppressed.⁹⁰

A true champion of human rights, Phule had deep sympathies for the Depressed Classes. He always preached for the upliftment of Untouchables. He objected all kinds of degradation of one human being by the other. To him, all those who observed the practice of untouchability or caste discrimination were the followers of 'untruth'. He emphasized the issue of educating the lower classes in the fundamental principles of his religion of truth. He even predicted that when the downtrodden would be educated and learn the tenets of the true knowledge, one day a person of 'saintly character' will arise from among them.⁹¹ Definitely, this was the prediction by a true Mahatma, a follower of truth, which later on came true in the rise of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the champion of the weaker sections in India, from the ranks of the Untouchables.

Phule's major thrust in his book of religion appears to be mainly upon the universal values of morality, equality, fraternity and rationality and, therefore, these values could be identified as the precepts of his *Satyadharna*. His religion was open to all. Personally, he never wanted that any human being should be forced to accept any religion. The membership of any religion should be a matter of willingness and choice on the part of individual himself/herself and it should not be determined by his/her birth. For this reason; he allowed in his ideal of *Satyadharna* that there may be followers of different religions in a single family.⁹²

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 33-37.

90 T. Laxmanshastri Joshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

92 Jotirao Phule, *A Book of the Universal Religion of Truth*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 39-40.

Since Phule was basically a man of action, he also pioneered a radical reform movement in order to materialize his framework of social reform for liberating the oppressed Hindus. Though he initiated his movement at a very young age of 21 when he started his first school for girls at Poona in 1848, his organized movement began with the founding of his reformist society '*Satyashodhak Samaj*' (Society of the Researchers/Seekers of Truth) which was formed by him in association with his friends and followers on 24 September 1873 at Poona.⁹³ As is clear, Phule took a long time to prepare for founding his society. Finally, he realized that the toiling castes, that constituted the majority of Hindu society, should not be left to associate with the elite organisations/societies but strike out to form their own society. Hence, he decided to found the *Satyashodhak Samaj*. He posited '*Sarvajanik*' (universal) as a distinctive characteristic of his society so as to sharply distinguish its *Jagbandhu* (universal brotherhood) character from the *Jatibhandhu* (caste-kinship ties) character of the societies of '*Arya-Bhats*'.⁹⁴

The *Satyashodhak Samaj* declared itself a non-political society seeking to ensure the natural rights of all human beings, especially the '*Shudra-Atishudras*' and women. Membership of the *Samaj* was open to all castes of Hindu society through Brahmans to *Mahars* and *Mangs*. In addition, even Christians, Jews and Muslims were also allowed to be its members.⁹⁵ The *Satyashodhak Samaj* was basically an association to preach and propagate Phule's concept of *Satyadharm*. To achieve its goals, it soon launched an organised movement which was not simply a social reform movement, but basically it was a dynamically radical socio-religio-economic reform movement.

The language of the '*Satyasamajists*' was the language of the *Marathi-Manus* (common man of Maharashtra) and their places of propaganda were the corn-gathering places. The *Samaj* used to refer to the debts, injunctions and rites/superstitions the peasants

93 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

94 Mahesh Gavaskar, "Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule's Critique of Brahman Power" in S.M. Michael (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

95 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 265; also see Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

were suffering from and told them how the little money they had was drained away by the cunning and selfish orthodox Brahmans (*Bhatjis*), moneylenders (*Shetjis*) and Government officials (*Latjis*).⁹⁶ Its main attack was on *Varna Vyavastha*, caste discrimination, untouchability, idol-worship and all misogynistic customs. Unlike other societies, the *Samaj* wanted radical reformation in Hinduism. It raised a vigorous voice against *Brahman Dharma* and caste-slavery and demanded social equality and justice for all the downtrodden sections of Hindu society including the '*Shudra-Atishudras*', women and peasants.⁹⁷

Mahatma Phule devoted all of his energies and resources for the propagation and expansion of his society. The members of the *Samaj* came from different professions; there were lawyers, doctors, merchants, contractors, peasants and agricultural labourers belonging to different castes/communities.⁹⁸ After founding of the *Samaj*, there arose a question before its members: whether or not they were still Hindus? While the members were reluctant to portray themselves as ordinary Hindus, they were even more anxious to avoid declaring that they had actually left the Hindu community.⁹⁹

While propagating the *Satyashodhak* ideas in Hindu society, Phule's strategy was to differentiate the popular culture of Maharashtra from the *Brahmanic* culture. For this reason; the *Samaj* opposed the hegemonic 'great'/elite tradition and glorified the native 'little'/popular tradition. But it was done in accordance with the '*Baliraja* model', in which heroes of popular culture like king Bali, god Khandoba, Chatrapathi Shivaji etc. were projected as the 'protectors' of the interests of the lower castes. The major expression of its ideas was exhibited in Phule's literature and but it was also evident in the literary works published by his colleagues or the like-minded

96 G. Bhadru, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest Movement in 19th Century", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, 2002 (hereafter: "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest", *IHC*, Vol. 63), pp. 852-853.

97 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-131.

98 M.S. Gore, *Non Brahman Movement in Maharashtra*, Segment Books, New Delhi, 1989, p. 29.

99 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

persons like Tukaram Taty Padaval, Baba Padamji, Dadoba Misal, R.N. Lad etc. Such ‘*Satyashodhak* literature’ was regarded important for promoting ‘*Satyashodhak* culture’ in Hindu society.¹⁰⁰ A periodical of the *Samaj*, *Din Bandhu*, was also launched in 1877 which carried out an ideological campaign for socio-religious reforms, and also countered the reactionary ideas of their orthodox adversaries like Vishnushastri Chiplunkar and B.G. Tilak.¹⁰¹ Apart from *Din Bandhu*, the *Samaj* propagated its ideas in Hindu society through/with aid of the periodicals like *Satyadipika*, *Dnyan Prakash*, *Subodh Patrika*, *Vividhadnyan Vistar* etc. Phule himself wrote many articles in *Din Bandhu* and some other periodicals on a variety of subjects and then the *Satyasamajists* propagated those ideas of their mentor in villages and towns.¹⁰²

In order to propose a sound alternative to the *Brahman Dharma*, Phule also wrote new ‘rites and rituals’ and also reinforced the prevalent ones in the popular culture of Maharashtra for the followers of his *Satyadharma* which the ordinary members of *Satyashodhak Samaj* ought to perform. He, however, introduced such rituals which were useful for the welfare of the poor, the needy and the down-trodden. One of the important programmes of the *Samaj* was to ceremonially perform marriages, housewarming, religious rites like *Daspind/Shradha* and other ceremonies without the assistance of any ‘*Arya-Bhat*’ priests. In the reports of the *Samaj* for first two years, two such marriages in Poona and eleven in the nearby village of Bhilar have been described with “greatest pride.”¹⁰³ Though the conservatives did not recognise these marriages, but the *Satyasamajists* never

100 R. Umaphathi, *A Historical Study of the Life and Achievements of Johirao Phule*, Ph.D. Thesis, submitted to Periyar University, Salem, 2007, p. 141.

101 *Ibid.*

102 Nagaraju Vedapalli, “Religious Movements and Human Rights of Weaker Sections in India: A Study of Satyashodhak Samaj and Neo-Buddhism”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 74, 2013, p. 956.

103 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1873 to 24-09-1975)*, pp. 2-3; also see L.G. Meshram ‘Vimalkirti’ (ed.), *Mahatma Phule Rachanaawali*, Radhakrishna Prakashan, New Delhi, 1996 (first published in 1994), Vol. I, p. 255.

cared for it. As a result, the orthodox Brahmans decided to file a case against Balaji Kushaji Patil, a member of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, who performed marriage of his son through *Satyashodhak* rites and without the assistance of Brahman priest. The judge, M.G. Ranade, who was also a well-known reformer of the city, heard their petition. He found it 'wrong' to perform a marriage ceremony without a Brahman priest, and ordered that even if the customary priest had not been invited to the wedding, he should be given his *Dakshina* (marriage fee). The verdict was, however, challenged by Jotirao Phule in the High Court which ruled in favour of Patil.¹⁰⁴

As a result of its initiatives of radical reform, Phule, his colleagues and *Satyasamajists* had to face a tough opposition from the conservative people of Hindu society which included the members of *Mali* caste too. For instance, in the case of the marriage of Gyanoba Sasane (who was a *Satyasamajist* and close associate of Phule) the people of his village Hadapsar rose against this 'assault' upon their ancestral religion. Though his marriage went ahead though under police protection, the conservative *Malis* arranged the marriage of a two-year old girl at the same time as a gesture of 'penance' for the violation of their old religious beliefs.¹⁰⁵ In any case, the *Samaj* prolonged its social reform activities.

About a decade after the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, Phule and his colleagues directed their movement more specifically to the issues of mass education and agrestic transformation. About 25 years ago, Phule started his initial social work in the field of education and set up about 18 schools between 1848 and 1852 in Maharashtra, out of which six were in Poona town, six in rural areas of Poona districts, three in Satara and three in other places.¹⁰⁶

Though, like Phule, many other social reformers of India had keenly worked to impart education among the people, but the difference between Phule and the others was that he was not in favour of the conventional education, but pleaded for alternative pedagogical methods. The alternative education proposed by Phule was based

104 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206.

105 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-243.

106 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

on the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, industriousness, philanthropy, rationality, self-criticism/self-reflection etc. He rejected the conventional teacher-student relationship prescribing commanding position to teacher and obedience to student. He introduced a problem-posing dialogue-pedagogy which brought teacher and student on same the level of active engagement. The pedagogic technique of raising questions and finding solutions made students critical thinkers in his schools. Not only did it enable his students to approach the reality in critical, creative ways but also encouraged them to take up the struggles to transform the reality.¹⁰⁷ Needless to say that Phule offered a rigorous critique of the *Brahmanic* education and pedagogy where he pointed out how it made the lower castes victims of the caste-slavery. He equally criticised the colonial education system which, being based on trickle-down theory, was not much in favour of allowing education to the deprived castes/classes.¹⁰⁸

When Phule founded *Satyashodhak Samaj*, he genuinely took special initiatives through his society for the education of masses. According to the reports of the *Samaj*, some members came forward to start more schools as well as opening a boarding house in Poona for the poor and backward students coming from the remote villages and towns.¹⁰⁹ A report further reads that the *Samaj* granted scholarships to 10 students for higher studies. Also a high school was started for the lower castes. The *Samaj* encouraged the boys and girls who showed some merit in their studies through financial assistance and community persuasion. The report further indicates that the *Samaj* was taking special measures/affirmative action for the spread of higher secondary/higher education among the non-Brahmans.¹¹⁰ Such efforts were, however, not enough to achieve the goal of mass education. So Phule wanted that the Government should spend pub-

107 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, pp. 71-72.

108 *Sharmila Rege*, "Education as Trutiya Ratna", *EPW*, 30 October 2010, p. 93.

109 *The Report of the Poona Satyashodhak Samaj (24-09-1875 to 24-09-1876)*, Dnyanprakash Press, Pune, 1877, pp. 2-4; also see L.G. Meshram 'Vimalkirti' (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 241-242.

110 *Ibid.*

lic funds – collected through taxes – for developing an infrastructure for universal education. He submitted a ‘memorial address’ to the Hunter Commission on Education in India on 19 October 1882 which was one of his biggest initiatives for mass education after the founding of *Satyashodhak Samaj*.¹¹¹ This evidence was a document of immense importance in the history of educational reforms in India because it was probably the first document of its type that talked of creating a taste of education among the lower classes of the country and making it accessible to all.

Commenting on the ‘trickle-down’ philosophy underlying the educational policy of the British Government, Phule wrote in his address that the Government had so far educated only children of wealthy men and had promoted their worldly prospects alone. He complained that the children of the elite, who availed education and achieved material success on its strength, did nothing to assist the uplift of their underprivileged countrymen.¹¹² He felt the Government policy was unjust on economic grounds also. The greater portion of its revenues did not come from the surplus profits, nor from luxuries but from the necessities of the poorest. The Government, therefore, must take care of their educational needs.¹¹³

Phule demanded that the number of primary schools should be increased. For this purpose, half the tax levied on farmers should be spent on primary education. The Provincial Government should allocate funds to the municipalities for primary education and the Government should run schools in cities through municipalities. However, the Education Department should control the affairs of primary education and the Government should also pass a suitable law for that purpose. The primary education should be made compulsory up to the age of 12.¹¹⁴ He also suggested to reserve certain

111 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission, 19 October 1882*, in William Hunter, *Report of the Indian Education Commission*, Vol. II. Superintendent of Government Printing, India, Calcutta, 1883, pp. 140-145.

112 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.

113 *Ibid.*

114 N.L. Gupta, *Mahatma Phule: An Educational Philosopher*, Anmol

number of scholarships to the downtrodden sections of Hindu society, amongst whom education had until made no progress. He suggested further that school should align with industries and agriculture in view to impart professional and technical education. It will empower the lower castes students to tackle predicament of practical life.¹¹⁵ Most important to note is that Phule was the only one who emphasised on female education before Hunter Commission.¹¹⁶

Though Phule favoured primary education as against higher education, but it does not mean that he was against higher education. He was also for making higher education accessible to the masses; and for this purpose, he recommended the introduction of a system of private studies in addition to the regular studies. Referring the Bombay University for its efforts in the field of private studies in secondary education, Phule welcomed such efforts as a 'blessing' to the people and desired that the same blessing be extended to higher education,¹¹⁷ which indicates his vision vis-à-vis educational reforms ahead in India.

Phule also wanted the Commission to meet the poor and unlettered, and then frame an appropriate policy aimed at universal education. But this was not done, and an embittered Phule was left to remark in his book *Cultivator's Whipcord* that since the Commission did not interview farmers, its report "will not benefit the illiterate and the poor."¹¹⁸ Here, it is pertinent to note that Mr. V.S. Apte, Supervisor of New English School, Poona, in his testimony before Hunter Commission, demanded that the responsibility for primary and middle school education should be left with the private agencies. Similarly, Mr. Kunte submitted before the Commission that the demand for admission of *Mahars* etc. into the schools was not voiced

Publication Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2008, p. 67.

115 Umesh Bagade, "Contesting Brahmanical Hegemony of Knowledge", *IPQ*, Vol. 42, p. 70.

116 Suresh Mane, *Glimpses of Socio-Cultural Revolts in India*, Samrudh Bharat Publication, Mumbai, 2006, p. 104.

117 Jotirao Phule, *Memorial Address to the Education Commission*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 127-128.

118 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 140.

by the *Mahars* themselves, but it was the outcome of a movement created by some “impractical native reformers.”¹¹⁹ Such statements by the eminent upper caste educationists of the period justify the apprehension expressed by Phule. However, the educationists of India in due course realized the importance of Phule’s initiatives and concerns for mass education, and we can see in the twentieth century a growing consensus among reformers, politicians and intellectuals of the country over the importance of mass education. Here lies the historical significance of the role played by Phule in this area.

Phule’s initiatives for amelioration of the conditions of down-trodden, particularly his experiments and contributions for the spread of modern mass education among them made a significant effect on their psyche. It became evident when Muktabai Salave, a Dalit girl studying in Phule’s school, wrote an essay in which she described the sufferings of Untouchables under the Peshwa rule.¹²⁰ Her was the first sign of a peaceful Dalit revolution which was slowly taking place in Maharashtra as a result of the initiatives and movement of Phule and *Satyashodhak Samaj* for Dalit upliftment. Gopalbava Valangkar was another example of the ensuing revolution who, alongwith few more energetic and intelligent men, came forward from among the Depressed Class under the inspirational patronage of Phule. As a matter of fact, Valangkar was the pioneer of Dalit movement in Maharashtra who, in a way, could be called the forerunner to Dr. Ambedkar.¹²¹ Thus, Phule’s movement was making a significant change in Hindu society at its grass-root level and preparing a fertile ground for the rise of a radical Dalit emancipation movement in due course of time.

Phule also turned his movement to the initiatives aimed at the well-being of cultivators. Indeed, the question of agriculture and cultivators was at the centre of his thought and concerns. Himself a horticulturist, Phule’s orientation was naturally towards the peasant and the agrestic problems. In the new alignment of power created

119 R. Umapathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

120 Uma Chakravarty, *Rewriting History: The Life and Limes of Pandita Ramabai*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1998, pp. 74-75.

121 Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222.

by the British through its land revenue administration in the rural Maharashtra, the merchant moneylenders (*Shetjis*) and the Brahman and other high caste officials in the British bureaucracy (*Bhatjis* and *Latji*) – which included both urban as well as rural (like *Kulkarnis* etc.) elites – joined hands together to exploit the poor and illiterate cultivator causing complete disruption of agriculture and growing indebtedness of the cultivator. As a result, the impoverished peasants in the districts of Poona, Ahmednagar, Satara and Sholapur rose in revolt in 1875. This revolt, officially called the ‘Deccan riots’¹²², was a violent reaction against the *Shetji-Bhatji-Latji* nexus. Being very sensitive over the issue of cultivators, Phule openly came forward in solidarity with the peasantry. He, alongwith his *Satyasamajists*, extensively toured in rural areas, addressing large gathering of peasants, and helping organise boycotts of the exploiting moneylenders and landlords.¹²³

In order to awaken the peasants and rural masses, Phule wrote some speeches which he delivered in the adjoining rural areas of Poona during 1882-83 in meetings of *Kunbi* peasants/tenants in Junnar *Taluka* who were agitating against the local *Kulkarni* landlords. He compiled these speeches in the form of a book entitled *Shetakaryacha Asud (Cultivator’s Whipcord)* and sent a copy of his book to British Viceroy Lord Duffrin.¹²⁴ His purpose was double-ended – to awaken the cultivators and also to draw the attention of the British Government towards the urgency of agrarian reforms. The insights of Phule presented in it are an eye-opener for his critics, who under the wrong impression, believed that he was a lover of the British rule. Interestingly, he echoes much of the nationalists’ economic critique of the British rule. He appears to be fully aware of the exploitative character of the colonial rule which is evident from the fact that even before Dadabhai Nauraji, he came out with a ‘drain-theory’ regarding colonial exploitation of the villagers. In addition to presenting an economic critique of colonialism, he directed his attention to the

122 *Nasik District Gazetteer*, 1883, p. 67.

123 Braj Rajan Mani, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-281.

124 The original manuscript of *Shetakaryacha Asud* is available in National Library, Kolkata, see Rosalind O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

'drain' from peasantry to the urbanised bureaucratic elite.¹²⁵ Phule wrote another booklet in 1885 entitled *Ishara (A Warning)* to highlight the plight of the toiling people, particularly peasants, who were living a hand-to-mouth existence in the caste-feudal order patronised by the colonial rulers and whose exploitation got reinforced due to the emergence of intermediary classes like moneylenders, *Kulkarnis* etc. as more powerful than the earlier days.¹²⁶

Phule described in his speeches (delivered among peasants/tenants of Junnar) that the Forest Department of the Government had become a huge land-grabber. Similarly, the Irrigation Department gave huge loans to the foreign moneylenders but failed to provide water in time for farming. Explaining the adverse effects of the process of colonialization over peasants, artisans and village economy, Phule pointedly observed, giving minute details of the crisis, that under colonial rule weavers, *Julahas* and *Momins* had become so poor that they were forced to live near salvation.¹²⁷ Most importantly, Phule heavily criticised the British land revenue policy. He informs us that at each assessment after 30 years, the revenue increased indiscriminately.¹²⁸ The white officers avoided their duty and indulged in 'lassitudinous luxury' relying solely upon the advice of the Brahman subordinates who, in most cases, were corrupt and partial. But the Government was blindly going on spending the money collected from the peasants, upon the salaries and pensions of its 'white and black bureaucrats.'¹²⁹

Phule also criticised the functioning of the British Courts of Law. All the courts were predominantly staffed with Brahmans, right from clerks to judges. Most of the pleaders also belonged to the same caste. The Brahman moneylenders had easy access to their caste-mates. Even the *Marwari* and *Gujar* (Gujarati) moneylenders

125 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in Asha Mundlay (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 52-53.

126 Jotirao Phule, *A Warning*, in P.G. Patil (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 55-60.

127 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, G. P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 132.

128 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, G. P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

129 *Ibid.*

had friendly or business-type relations with the officials, pleaders and judges in the court.¹³⁰ At the village level, the witnesses favouring the cultivator were threatened by the *Kulkarni* who also helped the moneylenders in preparing false witnesses. Even the Brahman judges, according to Phule, humiliated the illiterate cultivator in the courts using disgraceful language.¹³¹

Notably, the Government agencies and other objective observers of the period recorded the increase in the number of civil suits against cultivators and their facts were exactly the same as were described by Phule in *Shetakaryacha Asud*. As a result, the British officers had started realizing that their legal system was defective and that it helped the moneylending class to exploit the peasantry.¹³² Finally, the Government sought to protect the cultivator from the moneylenders. Accordingly, the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act (1879) was passed. The object of this Act was simply to restrain the moneylenders from ejecting the peasants from their lands. But Phule criticised the Act and pointed out that the moneylenders had now started demanding a complete 'sale deed' of land as a security for the loan instead of the 'lease of land' and this made the alienation of land more certain and easier. To him, the farmer's poverty was basically caused by the heavy revenue demands. So he demanded that the Government should take concrete steps to reduce the burden of tolls and taxes.¹³³

As told, Jotiba Phule helped in organizing the poor tenants of Junnar *Taluk* in Poona during 1882-83 who were agitated due to their exploitation by the local *Kulkarni* landlords. He himself undertook the responsibility to represent their case before the Government. As a result of his representation, the Government put a ceiling on the amount of rent to be collected from the tenants.¹³⁴ But the problem remained still unresolved and no change was witnessed in the con-

130 *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

131 *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

132 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

133 Jotirao Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 156.

134 J.R. Shinde, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

ditions of tenants. As a result, in 1884-85 tenants and peasants in Junnar again got highly agitated against the *Khot* landlords and moneylenders and under the guidance of *Satyasamajists*, demanded low rate of land revenue and minimum rate of interest. A sharp tension was witnessed between villages and the landlords and moneylenders. Under Phule's guidance, the villagers boycotted their exploiters, refusing to till the fields of landlords for not less than a period of three years. The inhabitants of about forty villages in Junnar had also agreed to have matrimonial and other religious ceremonies performed without the aid of 'Arya-Bhat' priests and had actually performed 300 such marriages.¹³⁵ The movement reached its climax when a farmer of Otur, Balaji Keshavji Patil, conducted marriage of his daughter according to *Satyashodhak* rites and without aid of Brahman priest. Therefore, the reactionary priests filed a writ against Patil. But Phule helped him in his case on behalf of *Satyashodhak Samaj* and presented in his defence to the High Court a declaration by the *Samaj* which contended that the Hindu *Shastras* allow full authority for all the followers of the Hindu religion, especially Marathas, *Malis*, *Kunbis*, *Kolis*, *Dhangars*, and other castes. In 1888, the verdict of the High Court came in favour of Patil and the followers of *Satyashodhak Samaj*. Accordingly, people from non-Brahman castes gathered in large numbers under the *Satyashodhak* banner.

Phule was now hopeful that his movement would reach the various corners of Maharashtra and other parts of India. Hence, the *Samaj* started a process of uniting the various agriculturist castes, and taught them to fight against landlords and moneylenders through boycotts. This movement also popularised Phule's idea of 'Bahujan *Samaj*',¹³⁶ which further became the basis of the rise of many other non-Brahman/Dalit movements in modern India. In fact, Phule had deep concerns for the development of agriculture, village, peasants and the tenant cultivators. He also gave many pointed and explicit suggestions for transmitting a productive partnership between the village community and the state in order to pioneer groundlaying

135 *Din Bandhu*, 25 May 1884, also see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-279.

136 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society*, pp. 178-179.

agrarian reforms and agrestic transformation in Maharashtra in particular and India in general, to effect improvement in agriculture and the lot of the cultivators as well as other villagers.¹³⁷

A large number of people were attracted towards Phule's idea/framework of reform, and we know that in due course of history many powerful non-Brahman movements arose in Bombay and other regions of south India, most of which were inspired by Phule. Hence, his idea of '*de-brahmanized*' Hinduism caused a 'non-Brahman revolution' in the country which further prepared the background of the rise of radical Dalit movements, especially in Maharashtra, and also many non-Brahman movements in south Indian provinces and princely states like Madras, Mysore and Telangana.

Despite his great contributions in socio-religio-economic reforms, there were some limitations/shortcomings in the approach, framework and strategies of Mahatma Phule. His response to the British Raj, for instance, has been a major issue of hot debates among historians. No doubt, he criticized the British Government for neglecting the educational and economic interests of lower castes and agriculturists and also for advancing more opportunities to Brahmans and providing safeguards to moneylenders and merchants. But at the same time, he did not join hands with the nationalist leaders of his times against colonialism. G.P. Deshpande compares his understanding of the role of British rule in India with that of Karl Marx who wrote in 1853 that England had to fulfill a 'double mission' in India – one destructive and the other regenerative – by the same token in annihilating of old Asiatic society as well as laying the material foundations of modern society in India. Phule also welcomed the coming annihilation of the *Brahmanic* feudal systems. He also hoped that British rule would lay the material and institutional foundation of a modern, equalitarian society, particularly through its social and educational policies.¹³⁸

However, his huge expectations from the British Raj in his struggle for dismantling the structure and superstructure of Hindu socio-religious tradition were doomed to be disappointed. Thought

137 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

138 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 18-19.

the Raj brought in its wake changes in education, economy, politics, administration and agriculture in the nineteenth century, the British rulers did not interfere in the prevalent socio-religious orders. Further, imperialist exploitation could not be justified just on the ground that those who opposed the British rule were conservative and socially undemocratic. Phule also failed to recognize that the peasants and masses were the ultimate victims of the colonial exploitation. He also could not succeed in suggesting a viable strategy to combat the formidable collaboration of the bourgeoisie and the feudal classes on the one hand and British imperialism on the other.¹³⁹

Yet, given the powerless site from which Phule was articulating his radical critique of inegalitarian Hindu society, it was inescapable for him to side with any of the two of power centers – the British or the bourgeois nationalist assertion of the upper caste elite – to render his reality meaningful.¹⁴⁰ The result was that, as Deshpande also points out, Phule and *Satyashodhak* his comrades ended up taking softer and softer positions on British imperialism and ultimately lost their ground to the nationalist movement.¹⁴¹

Though we must remember that Phule was not a submissive supporter of the British and never became a compliant collaborator of the Raj. It is pointed out that he was the single member of Poona municipality to oppose spending of Rs. 1000/- for the Viceroy's visit in the city. We have noted his criticisms of the British educational and agrarian policies. However, if the choice between the British rule and the *Brahmanic* organisational dominance, he opted for the British rule as the best guarantee of the conditions under which the lower caste people could progress. But even then his position of asking from the British colonial masters to initiate reforms/changes which as colonial power they had neither the will nor the competence to

139 M.H. Jadhav, "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra: Review of Dynamics of Cultural Revolution: 19th Century Maharashtra by J. R. Shinde", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 17, 26 April, 1986 (hereafter: "Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra", *EPW*, 26 April 1986), pp. 741-742.

140 Mahesh Gavaskar, "Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule's Critique of Brahman Power" in S.M. Michael (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 103.

141 G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

carry out, was not very much sound. Hence, Gail Omvedt seems to be right in pointing out that it was not simply that the *Sarvajanik Sabha* and Indian National Congress were at his time dominated by the *Brahmanical* elite, he could not visualize the possibility of the rise of any all-India freedom struggle, in his time or in future, that would not come under the elite control.¹⁴²

If all the things are seen in the context of British colonialism, it can become obvious that most of the upper caste reformers and leaders were primarily interested in dealing with the colonial power, in the first instance. Hence, it was the struggle for political independence that overshadowed struggles against social injustice and inequalities. Moreover, to be fair to the reformers and nationalist leaders, it must also be said that a number of such leaders might have been politically but not socially progressive because forms of discrimination that *Brahmanical* social order entailed did not affect them directly. In fact, Tilak was determined to oust the British power from India and had launched a determined struggle against it. The point is if Phule's movement is seen within the colonial context, the significance of struggle for political emancipation too cannot be ignored.

After the death of Mahatma Phule the second generation of *Satyashodhak Samaj* leaders, namely Bhaskar Rao Jadhav, Annasaheb Lathe, Mukundrao Patil, Nana Patil, Sripatrao Shinde, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, Madhavrao Bagul, Bhaurao Patil etc. expanded the activities of the *Samaj* in the rural areas of Maharashtra and tried their best to mobilize the masses around the *Satyashodhak* movement by a variety of means.¹⁴³ The non-Brahman movement had grown and the *Samaj* had a revival during 1910-1920, but many aspects of Phule's radicalism were lost. The firm effort to include Dalits was retained, the village orientation remained central to *Satyashodhak* organising, the involvement of masses could be seen – but anti-Aryanism tended to fade in the presence of a renewed effort to regain a *Kshatriya* identity.¹⁴⁴

142 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p. 124.

143 G. Bhadru, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest", *IHC*, Vol. 63, pp. 851-852.

144 *Ibid.*, p. 372; quoted in Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 217.

Phule's hopes were based upon the belief that the non-Brahman educated elite would continue to have cultural and family ties with the masses that would limit their ability and willingness to exploit the masses, as the orthodox Brahmans did. Though he was never convinced that economic or educational benefits to the elite would eventually result in overall social progress, but, as Gail Omvedt remarks, he could not foresee that even the benefits of agricultural development might not easily flow from rural elite to the rural masses.¹⁴⁵ There are, however, evidences that he was aware that the educated non-Brahmans of his days were also tended to accept the caste hierarchies and *Brahmanical* values.¹⁴⁶

The stalwart *Satyasamajist* during this period was Chatrapathi Shahu, the enlightened king of Kolhapur, who gave a great boost to the movement through financial aid and ideological encouragement.¹⁴⁷ Shahu encouraged the opening of branches of the *Samaj* in his princely state. His influence over the *Samaj* working in his princely state was so prominent that it used to be known as '*Shahu Satyashodhak Samaj*'. In the initial stages, the *Satyashodhak* activities in the Kolhapur state were centred on arranging marriage and other religious ceremonies without the help of '*Arya-Bhat*' priests. 200 marriages and many other similar ceremonies were reported in 1912 which increased to 266 and 299 in next two years respectively.¹⁴⁸ Shahu also adapted the policy of promoting non-Brahmans in

145 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p. 123.

146 *Ibid.*, p.126.

147 Chhatrapati Shahu's interest in social reform originated in a personal experience when the Brahman priest in the royal household had refused to perform for the ruler the religious rituals according to the Vedic rites on the ground that he was not a *Kshatriya*. Resultantly, a heated dispute arose between the Maratha landed gentry claiming *Kshatriya* status and the Brahmans who opposed them on the ground that after the annihilation of *Kshatriyas* by Lord Parshuram, no *Kshatriya* was left in Maharashtra. See: Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb 1989, p. 431; also see A.B. Lathe, *His Highness Shri Shahu Chatrapati, Maharajah of Kolhapur*, Vol. I, The Times Press, Bombay, 1924.

148 G. Bhadrū, "Contribution of Satyashodak Samaj to the Low Caste Protest", *IHC*, Vol. 63, pp. 852.

state administration by reserving 50 per cent of posts in the state services. He established twenty hostels for the lower caste students between 1897 to 1927.¹⁴⁹ Despite all these, he had an intense desire to be considered as a *Kshatriya* king and for that he conflicted with Brahmans, which actually meant that he accepted somehow the *Brahmanic* norms. It also gave sanction to similar efforts going on among the *Kunbi*-Maratha castes. The most striking event for the movement was that Chatrapathi himself had joined the *Arya Samaj*, though he continued his support to *Satyashodhak Samaj*.¹⁵⁰

With the aid of Chatrapathi Shahu and others, a non-Brahman party was formed in the first decades of the twentieth century. The party contested the elections to the provincial legislative assemblies and a few of its leaders even held ministerial posts under the diarchy.¹⁵¹ In the legislative councils, the non-Brahman leaders sought to achieve opening up the bureaucratic positions for non-Brahmans, to hasten the process of transforming the *Watandar Kulkarni* into a *Talathi* and to abolish the hereditary rights of the village priests (*Joshis*). At the same time, however, they sponsored Patil conferences and also resisted Dr. Ambedkar's attempts to abolish the *Mahar Watan*.¹⁵² The later generation of militant non-Brahmans like Keshavrao Jedhe and Dinkarrao Javalkar in Poona fought militarily on the streets and in the courts, but continued to emphasise a *Kshatriya* identity. Subsequently, Ambedkar would tell these young Marathas that "you are against Brahmans and not Brahmanism; we are against Brahmanism."¹⁵³ With political power in sight, the enthusiasm for social reform further diminished. Phule's dream of a united radical movement of '*Shudras*' and '*Atishudras*' proved to be short-lived and the non-Brahman party gradually disassociated itself from the newly emerging emancipation movement of the Untouchables under the leadership of Ambedkar.

149 *Ibid.*

150 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 228.

151 Nalini Pandit, "Caste and Class in Maharashtra", *EPW*, Feb 1989, p. 431.

152 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p.127.

153 Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura*, p. 229.

In the earlier decades of the twentieth century, his *Satyashodhak Samaj* movement gradually came under the control of the non-Brahman land-owning and business castes. The new followers of the movement would not accept its founder's equation of 'Shudras' with the 'Atishudra' (or *Dalits*, a newly acquired identity given to them by Phule himself). These followers mostly belonged to the higher castes among the non-Brahmans, particularly the Marathas. The leaders of the movement demanded for themselves a higher status within the Aryan fold, which was still being denied to them by the Brahman leaders including B.G. Tilak, and were scornful of the castes below them. As such, the most significant part of Phule's ideology, the emphasis on a 'non-Aryan cultural unity' of all the masses from *Kunbi*-Maratha peasants to the *Mahar-Mang* Untouchables was soon given up, and his *Samaj* appeared to have disappeared as a vital force in Maharashtrian society.¹⁵⁴ As J.R. Shinde has rightly pointed out, this decline of the movement was the outcome of the discarding of Phule's equalitarian and revolutionary ideology.¹⁵⁵

However, Phule's own thought and life-work has not yet found its fulfillment. The concept of 'non-Aryan' unity of the '*Mulnivasis*' (i.e., original inhabitants or lower caste '*Shudra-Atishudras*') as a part of the *Dalit-Bahujan* discourse remains as an underlying theme; the call for revolutionary attack on the injustices of *Brahmanical* social order can still be heard with more vigour; the emphasis on social equality and rationalism continues to propel populist themes of cultural revolt. While his thoughts remain one of the most important part of not only Maharashtrian cultural tradition but also of an all-Indian *Bahujan Samaj* movement in twenty-first century; and also that its cultural revolutionary drives have still not dispersed; the hopes of liberation, to use the words of Omvedt, are yet to be actualized.¹⁵⁶

In view of the organic insights and historic contributions of Jotirao Phule in the field of social reform during the nineteenth century India, it may be finally established that his framework of Hindu

154 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

155 M.S. Jadhav, *op. cit.*, pp. 741-742.

156 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in A Colonial Society*, p.128.

social reform appears to be full of potentials and to be highly relevant in the present Indian context also as, we know, the issue of social reform in Hindu society is still lying unresolved and has been emerging as a burning issue in the country. The existence of the institution of caste with all its medieval characteristics, frequent occurrence of atrocities on the lower castes and increasing caste conflicts are few small examples. Hence, the 'father of Indian social revolution' mattered, and, of course, still matters in India today.

Extended Glossary

- Aarti/Puja* A Hindu ritual of worship in which light/flame is offered to one or more deities. It also refers to the songs sung in praise of deity/ deities when the light/ flame is being offered.
- Abhangal/
Akhandas* *Abhanga* means a religious poem written in an irregular rhymed manner. This has been a popular poetic form in Maharashtra, mostly used by the *Bhakti* poets. Jotirao Phule wrote *Abhangas* in an influential style and created a new word for it, the *Akhandas*.
- Aluta* The term *Aluta* is found alternatively for the term *Baluta* in Maratha records (*Mahajars*) in extension of application of the later for certain new village servants. Unlike *Balutas*, *Alutas* were not regularly found in every village. (Also see: *Baluta*)
- Anarya
Dosh-Parihar
Mandali* The term literally denotes a 'Society for the Removal of Evils among Non-Aryans', founded in 1890 by Baba Gopal Krishan Valangkar (1840-1900), an Untouchable (*Mahar*) by caste and an associate of Mahatma Phule. He founded his society, in addition to aiming social reforms, mainly to address a petition to the Government of Great Britain to resume the recruitment of *Mahars*, *Mangs* and *Chambhars* in the British armies which was halted by Lord Kitchener in 1890s in favour of the so-called martial races.

- Ardheli/Dharakeri* The term *Ardheli* is used for such *Kunbi* tenants who were earlier peasants and whose lands were grabbed by *Khots*, the petty landlord belonging to *Kulkarni* Brahmans. The condition of the *Ardheli* was only little better than that of slaves. Some tenants were, however, superior to them, who were called *Dharakeri*.
- Artha* One of the four ideals/goals of the life of a Hindu: *Dharma* (doctrine of religiously ordained duty), *Artha* (material prosperity), *Kama* (sexual/worldly pleasures), and *Moksha* (salvation).
- Arya/Aryan/Indo-Aryan* The term is a historical race-concept which emerged in the late nineteenth century to describe a collection of ethno-linguistic groups of people speaking Indo-Aryan languages, a sub-group of Indo-European language family, who came to Indian subcontinent about two millennia BC.
A recent 'Indo-European migration theory' claims that the introduction of Indo-Aryan languages in the Indian subcontinent was the result of migration of the people from *Sintashta* Culture through *Bactria-Margiana* Culture from which they borrowed their initial religious practices. The alternate 'indigenous Aryan theory' claiming Indo-Aryan languages entirely 'indigenous' is currently rejected by the mainstream scholarship.
- Arya Samaj* The term literally denotes a 'Society of the Aryans', founded in 1875 at Bombay by Swami Dayananda Sarasvati. *Arya Samaj* was a Hindu revivalist reform movement which believed in the utopia of golden age of Aryan/Vedic past of Hindus.
- Aryavrata* Ancient name of India; a term used to emphasize 'golden age' of Aryan/Vedic India.
- Asud* Whipcord. Nick-nomenclature of a highly thought-provoking book authored by Phule entitled *Shetakaryacha Asud (Cultivator's Whipcord)*.

- Atishudra* The term is used for the people below the caste Hindus who were treated as untouchables and also called *Avarnas*; a general term used by Phule to denote the *Avarnas*/Untouchables. (Also see: *Avarna*)
- Avarna* The term literally means 'outcast' and is used for those people who lived outside the pale of *Varna Vjavasthal Chaturvanya* system. Since they did not fall in any of the four *Varnas*, they were called *Avarnas*. The Vedic literature mentions some groups such as *Chandala*, *Ayogava* and *Paulkasa* who are also referred to as belonging to *Panchama* or *Panchama Varna* meaning 'fifth caste'. Manu has mentioned them as *Antya*, *Antyaja* or *Antiyavasin*. Terms like *Bahiya*, *Antyayoni*, *Asprishya* (Untouchable) etc. were also used for them from time to time.
- Avtar!*
Avatarakalpa The term literally means 'incarnation'. A theory of manifestation of a Hindu god/deity (such as Vishnu) in bodily form on earth. In the *Puranic* mythology, some important incarnations of lord Vishu are mentioned as *Matsya* (the fish), *Kurma* (the tortoise), *Varah* (the boar), *Narasimha* (the man-lion), *Vaman* (the dwarf), and *Parshuram* (Ram with the axe).
- Badkarma* Sexual misdemeanor, e.g. adultery, extra-marital or inter-caste sexual relations.
- Bagwan* Gardener, fruit seller.
- Bahujan*
Samaj Etymologically, *Bahujan* is a Pali term frequently found in the Buddhist texts and literally refers to 'the many' or 'the majority'. It appears in the famous dictum '*Bahujan Hitaya Bahujan Sukhaya*' (benefit and prosperity of the majority) articulated by Buddha. In modern times, the concept of *Bahujan Samaj* was first used by Jotirao Phule and then by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram. Phule in his usage referred to the majority of people in Hindu

society that experienced “*Brahmanic* slavery” in the caste system and whose conditions were “similar to that of American slaves.” Ambedkar used the term in almost similar context with a Buddhist ideological touch. In 1984, Kanshi Ram, a *Dalit* leader from Punjab, formed a political party namely *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) and described ‘*Bahujan*’ denoting a collective whole of a precise set of castes/communities only excluding *Dwijja* (twice-born) people. However, after Kanshi Ram, the BSP leader Mayawati also allowed *Dwijjas* to join the party and constructed a new concept of ‘*Sarvajan Samaj*’ (Society of All).

Bajra

A type of millet grown in India.

Baliraj

The term literally means ‘kingdom/regime of king Bali’. An utopia of golden age visualized by Phule, as against the golden age of Aryan/Vedic past emphasized by the *Brahmanical* elite, in pre-Aryan India under the benevolent kingdom of Baliraja, a popular mythical hero, under which the people of agrarian and working classes/communities lived happily in a casteless moral society believing in the ‘religion of truth’.

Balasthan

Phule used this term for pre-Aryan ancient India which was under the benevolent kingdom of Baliraja. The Aryans invaded *Balasthan* again and again and, in the course of time, the original inhabitants lost their freedom and ownership of the land to the Aryans.

Bandhara

A small dam.

*Balutedari/
Bara-Baluta*

It was a peculiar form of the *Jajmani* system in pre-modern Maharashtra. According to the Maratha records (*Mahajars*), there were *Bara-Balutas* or ‘twelve groups of village servants’ (not always twelve) who held some rent-free land-gifts

(*Watan*) in village; and in lieu served *Patil*, other state/village officials and the village community. Normally, the *Balutas* held hereditary monopoly over the sphere of their service/occupation/land-gift. They received from each peasant household a fixed *Baluta*-remuneration for their services in form of grains and other farm-produce or sometimes cash and also cooked-food on the festival occasions according to the customary laws/traditions. They were also entitled to some hereditary 'rights' in the village in lieu of their duties which in most cases were in the form of *Begar*.

- Bapat* A sub-caste/clan of the *Upadhyaya* Brahmans in Maharashtra. *Bapat* could be the family-priest of peasants and other caste Hindus, but not of Brahmans. (Also see: *Upadhyaya*)
- Begar* Forced labour/compulsory labour, usually without payment.
- Beldar* A meson.
- Bhadralok* Literally, the term means a 'class of gentlefolk' or 'well-educated and well-mannered persons'. The *Bhadralok* mainly arose during the British colonial rule in Bengal which chiefly comprising the high caste Hindus like Brahman, *Thakur/Tagore*, *Baidyas*, *Kayasthas* and *Mahishyas*. Normally a *Zamindar* bearing *Roychaudhury* or *Chaudhury* at the end of his name and *Babu* at the beginning would be considered to be a *Bhadralok* fellow.
- Bhadrapad* Sixth month of the *Saka* calendar year that corresponds to August/September in the Gregorian calendar.
- Bhajan/ Kirtan* The term is derived from the Sanskrit term *Bhajanam* which means 'reverence'. It's a devotional song(s)/chant(s) with religious themes or spiritual ideas expressing love and worship for deities/gods

- etc., especially among Hindu and some other Indian religions, in any of the Indian languages.
- Bhakti* It's a Sanskrit term which literally means 'devotion, worship, love, attachment and purity'. It had been originally used in Hinduism, referring to emotional devotionalism and love for a personal god or the spiritual ideas. The term also refers to a religious movement initially pioneered by *Alwars* and *Nayanars* which grew rapidly in medieval India in the form of various traditions/sects, both orthodox (like *Bhagwat Sampraday*) as well radical *Nirguna* sects (like *Kabirpandhis*, *Ravidasias*, Sikhism etc.) possibly in response to and also as a result of the arrival of Islam and Sufi ideas.
- Bhangi* The term literally means 'broken men', i.e., the people who were broken away from the society. It was a lowest caste of untouchable Hindus found mainly in north India in large numbers and mostly engaged in scavenging, sweeping and cleaning latrines and handling dead bodies. They also performed many other menial services as well as *Begar* in the traditional *Jajmani* system. The *Bhangis* are sometimes called *Chubras* and *Mehtars*, but they honorifically call themselves *Balmikis*. The caste has been included in the list of Scheduled Castes (SCs) under Indian Constitution.
- Bhat/*
Arya-Bhat/
Bhatji *Bhat* is a member of an Indian caste of bards or entertainers. Phule, however, used the term(s) for an orthodox Brahman in a sarcastic sense.
- Bhatin* A woman belonging to the *Bhat* caste. Phule, however, used the term for an orthodox Brahman woman.
- Bhedas* Phule used the word for *Vedas*, who was of opinion that *Vedas* were originally known as *Bhedas* (secrets) as the Aryans kept their texts in secret, and later on

- the texts came to be known as *Vedas*. Though etymologically such impression of him does not appear to be correct.
- Bhikshuk* A Hindu or a Buddhist monk or a religious mendicant; a wanderer; a beggar.
- Bhil/Bheel* An Indo-Aryan speaking ethnic group/tribe found in western and central India. As of 2011 census, the *Bhils* are among the three largest tribal groups in India, others being *Gonds* and *Santhals*. The tribe has been included in the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) under Indian Constitution.
- Bhudev* ‘Embodiments of God on earth’. In old orthodox Hinduism, Brahmins – the priestly order – were described as a divine class of intermediary super humans (*Bhudevas*) between God and man to carry out religious rituals (*Karmakand*).
- Bipramati* A part of Kabir’s poetic work *Bijagranth* which condemns Brahmanism.
- Brahmal*
Brahmdeva The term *Brahma* means ‘supreme cosmic spirit’. *Brahmal* *Brahmdeva* is a Vedic god having four faces and called creator of the universe and also the *Varna Vjavastha*.
- Brahman* The term is derived from the Sanskrit word *Brahma* which means ‘supreme cosmic spirit’. In Hindu society, Brahman is a member of the first and highest of four hierarchically arranged primitive castes called *Varnas* mentioned in *Purusa Sukta* of *Rigveda*. The Brahmins have been mainly working as priest (*Pandit*), teacher (*Acharya*) or specialist in sacred learning.
- Brahman*
Dharmal
Brahmanism The terms are generally used in a critical sense to explain the religion of orthodoxy and also the hegemonic ideology/system which perpetuated, rationalized and made sacrosanct the dominance of the Brahmins – the priestly order – in Hinduism

and also the ideas of caste and gender hierarchies (alongwith diversified pantheism), particularly through its strategies of disseminating knowledge (religious/philosophical/secular) in society. Brahmanism had its roots in the ancient Vedic age when the Brahmins strengthened their position through a complex sacrificial religion which later on became the dominant orthodox tradition/constituent of Hinduism. Phule differentiated between *Brahman Dharma* and Hinduism as the former caused the *Brahmanic* hegemony ('*Brahmanache Varschaswad*' or '*Brahman Varschaswad*' in Hindu society).

*Brahmo
Samaj*

Literally denotes a 'Society of the Worshippers of *Brahma*/Brahman (i.e., the highest cosmic spirit), founded by Raja Rammohan Roy in 1828 at Calcutta.

Brijbhasha

Brijbhasha is a western Hindi language spoken by the people inhabiting in *Brij Bhoomi* (the supposed birthplace of Lord Krishna, according to the popular Hindu tradition) in northern India. Alongwith Awadhi (a variety of eastern Hindi), it was one of the two predominant literary languages of north-central India before the switch to the literary Hindustani/Hindi in nineteenth century. Much of the Hindi literature, particularly its *Bhakti* poetry, was developed in *Brijbhasha*. The famous medieval *Hindvi* poets like Amir Khusro and Surdas composed their popular devotional songs in this language. Much of *Brij* literature is of mystical nature mostly written from a female point of view, even by male poets, to express the spiritual love for their worshippee, Krishna.

Cavdi

A sub-division police authority under the state of *Peshwas*.

*Chamar/
Chambhar*

The term literally means ‘cobbler’ or ‘leather worker’. An Untouchable Hindu caste found all almost over India in large numbers. Mostly engaged in disposing off carcasses of dead animals and tanning and leather work, the *Chamars* also made leather buckets, halters, whips, shoes and articles for agricultural use. They were sometimes called *Mochi* (shoe maker) and *Jingar* (sandal-maker). They also performed many other menial services as well as *Begar* in the traditional *Jajmani/Balutedari* system. Their most notable offshoot is the *Ravidasia* sect of north India which follows the teachings of a radical *Bhakti* saint Ravidas belonging to the caste. The caste has been included in the list of Scheduled Castes (SCs) under Indian Constitution.

Chandala

Chandala is a Sanskrit word for someone who deals with disposal of corpses. It’s a Hindu lower caste traditionally considered as Untouchable. The *Chandalas* are of dark complexion who engage themselves in cultivation and different menial jobs. They also perform the most important task of hanging criminals. Historically, they have been among the most ancient people of the land. The Vedic literature mentions them to be belonging to *Panchama* or *Panchama Varna* meaning ‘fifth caste’. The term also refers to a ‘mean’ or ‘low’ person which indicates the deeply rooted prejudice of the society against them. The caste has been included in the list of Scheduled Castes (SCs) under Indian Constitution.

Charidham

The term literally means ‘four pilgrimage places’, defined by Adi Shankaracharya, located at north, west, east and south of the country namely Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameshwaram. The *Vaishnavite* Hindus believe that visit to these cites helps a Hindu achieve *Moksha*.

- Chaudi* The community hall of a Maharashtrian village.
- Chaugula/
Gramani* Under the *Watandari* system, the *Chaugula/
Gramani* was an assistant to the *Patil* who helped in collecting land revenue and also in bringing back cultivators who had left their fields. He transported the revenue collection in kind from his village to the headquarters of *Paragana*. He also looked after the warehouse and private storage of the village.
- Chhatrapati* The term literally means ‘Lord of the Umbrella’; the title of the Maratha ruler Shivaji and his successors.
- Chitpavan* The term literally means, ‘sacred-hearted’. An influential sub-caste of Maharashtrian Brahmans, also called as *Konkanatha* (others being *Deshastha* and *Saraswat*). The *Chitpavans* claimed to be the highest in caste hierarchy and were highly orthodox. The *Peshwas* belonged to this sub-caste under whose rule the state provided its active support to the *Brahmanical* elite and to protect, maintain and strengthen the *Brahmanic* dominance and *Varna Vjavastha* in Hindu society.
- Daitya* A race of giants/demons mentioned in Hindu mythology, usually portrayed as the enemies of the gods. According to Phule, the *Daityas* were the aboriginals who fought against the Aryan invaders with such prowess that they came to be known as *Dvaiti* (means, in Marathi, one who disagrees), and a corruption of the word had become *Daitya*. Though etymologically such impression of him does not seem to be correct.
- Daiva* A term used for god, destiny or fate.
- Dakshina* The fee or gift as money/food/other articles to be given to Brahmans. The practice of giving *Dakshina* to Brahmans was mainly upheld by the *Peshwas* in the name of religion. Started with a view to encourage learning, the practice became a state-

grant generously distributed to all Brahmans. The last *Peshwa* Bajirao-II used to give *Dakshina* in huge amounts to his caste-fellows. The dependence on *Dakshina* made the orthodox Brahmans, lazy, ignorant and greedy.

Dalit

Literally the term is a vernacular form of the Sanskrit word *Dalita* means 'suppressed', 'broken' or 'scattered'. In modern Indian caste system, a person belonging to the erstwhile Untouchable castes is usually called *Dalit*. The term was first used by Phule in the context of oppression and 'caste-slavery' faced by the Untouchables, and also by his contemporary social reformer Dayananda Sarasvati in the same sense (who gave a call for *Dalitoddhar* or *Dalit* upliftment). B.R. Ambedkar also used the term in his Marathi periodicals like *Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat* etc. In 1970s, some Ambedkarites of Maharashtra formed *Dalit Panthers* to fight against caste atrocities. Though the term has also sometimes been used to refer all of India's oppressed peoples, the social scientists nowadays generally use the term for the ex-Untouchables.

Dasa/Dasyu

The term *Dasa* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Dasya* which came to signify a bonded man. In this sense, it has its analogue in the word slave. Some parts of *Vedas* bear out the fact that the Vedic people fought many battles with other contemporary inhabitants whom they called *Dasa*, *Dasyu*, *Daitya*, *Danava*, *Asur*, *Rakshasa* etc. and succeeded in subjugating them due to their use of horses and possibly some better arms. In that sense, the word(s) has/have also its analogue in the indigenous aboriginals of ancient India.

Dauryagosavi

A caste of drum beaters.

- Deshak* In pre-modern Maharashtra, the village community was comprised chiefly the village hereditary officers called *Watandars*, the land holders or peasant proprietors called *Mirasdars*, and the village servants called *Balutedars*. All of them together were called as *Deshaks*.
- Deshastha*
Brahmans The second important sub-caste of Maharashtrian Brahmans, after the *Konkanastha/Chitpavan* Brahmans. Phule opined that *Deshasthas* were not Aryans (like *Chitpavans*) as there were a number of similarities (like skin colour, social customs and family deities etc.) between the *Deshastha* Brahmans and the *Shudra-Atihudras*. T. Laxmanshastri Joshi also holds the same opinion.
- Deshmukh* Under the *Watandari* system, the *Deshmukh* was a state official belonging to the Brahman caste who worked as an intermediary between the state and the village. His main duty was to supervise the work of *Patil* and the officials like *Kulkarnis* and *Shetes* (moneylenders) of his *Paragana*. He was entitled to certain rights, perquisites, privileges and free services of the villagers, particularly the *Balutedars* and *Dalits*.
- Deshpande* Under the *Watandari* system, the *Deshpande* was another state official who, in most cases, was Brahman. He was subordinate to the *Deshmukh*. His main duty was to keep the accounts of the village(s) under his jurisdiction. Sometimes, he also worked as *Kulkarni* of the village in the absence of a hereditary *Kulkarni*. He was entitled to certain rights, perquisites, privileges and free services of the villagers, particularly the *Balutedars* and *Dalits*.
- Dham* Place of pilgrimage. (Also see: *Chardham*)

- Dhangar* There were three major caste groups of peasants in Maharashtra: *Kunbis*, *Malis* and *Dhangars*. Those who mainly took up the tending of lives stock were called *Dhangars*.
- Dharma* The term literally means 'religion'. But in Hindu philosophy, the practices and duties laid down for an individual by virtue of his/her caste as well as position in society are also defined as his/her *Dharma* (religiously ordained duty).
- Dharmik* The term literally means 'religious', particularly in orthodox sense.
- Dhedh* The term is derived from the Gujarati word *Dhayadavan* which means 'to drag/pull'. A sub-caste of the *Chamars* found mainly in Gujarat and some other states of India. Sometimes, *Mahars* and *Bhangis* were also called *Dhedhs*. Mostly the *Dhedhs* were engaged in dragging/carrying away and disposing off carcasses of animals and the works related to leather and animal hides. They also performed many other menial services as well as *Begar* in the traditional *Jajmani/Balutedari* system. The caste has been included in the list of SCs under Indian Constitution.
- Dhobi/Parit* Etymologically, the term *Dhobi* is derived from the Hindi word *Dhona* which means 'washing'. A caste of washermen found throughout India, the *Dhobis*, also called *Parits* in Maharashtra, have been involved in the work of laundry/washing clothes, with a few having taken up agriculture and some other trades. In the *Jajmani/Balutedari* system, the *Parit* washed the cloths of the villagers. Under the *sanskritization* process, they honorifically call themselves *Rajput*, though in many states the caste has been included in the list of SCs or Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

- Dhotra* A tradition of the Maharashtrian garment consisted of a length of cotton, traditionally worn by the men in a single or double fold.
- Dom/Domba* The term *Dom*, etymologically connected to the Sanskrit word *Damaru*, literally means 'drummer'. It's a Hindu lower caste traditionally of musicians and drummers. They also work as basket makers, cultivators, hunter gatherers and laborers; their wives serving as midwives. At some places, they perform the most important task of cremation of the dead bodies. Many nomadic and peripatetic groups such as *Bengali*, *Kanjar*, *Sansi*, *Bazigar*, *Bhantu* etc. also belong to the community. The *Doms* are found all over north India. Particularly in Bengal, their population is found in large number. The caste has been included in the list of SCs under Indian Constitution.
- Dravidal*
Dravidian The term Dravidian was first used by Robert Coldwell, based on the usage of Sanskrit word *Dravida* to denote geographical region of southern India. The term Dravidian is generally used for the large family of the languages spoken in the southern India and northern Srilanka that includes Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. A member of any of the people that speaks any of these languages is also called *Dravidal/Dravidian*. It has been claimed that Dravidian people belong to the pre-Indo-Aryan inhabitants who were racially different from Indo-Aryans, though it is controversial.
- Dussehra* A major Hindu festival, also called *Vijayadashami*, celebrated at the end of *Navaratri* on the tenth day of *Karthik* month every year. The festival is celebrated to commemorate the victory of Lord Rama over the demon king Ravana as well as to remember the victory of goddess Durga over the buffalo demon Mahishasura.

- Dvaivarnic* The two-*Varna* binary/dimension (Brahmans verses non-Brahmans/*Shudra-Atishudras*), emphasized by Phule in Hindu society during his non-Brahman movement.
- Dviija* Literally means ‘*Twice-born*’, the term is used for the members of three upper castes (*Varnas*) whose male members are entitled to be invested with the sacred thread, signifying a second birth, when they entered *Brahmacharya Ashram* (student life).
- Ekmeij Lok* The term, literally means ‘world of commonness’ was used by Phule to define his idea of nation which had to be built upon the foundations of individual freedom and social equality and which would allow the world of commonness (*Ekmeija Lok*) to develop.
- Ekpakshija* One-sided/partial/bias.
- Ganapati/
Ganesha* An elephant-headed god in Hinduism. The mythological tradition states that *Ganesha* is one who, being the lord of obstacles or difficulties, can remove all obstacles or difficulties in life. *Ganapati* was the family deity of the *Peshwas*.
- Gaogada* The term literally means ‘village chariot’. In pre-modern Maharashtra, the four major classes of people inhabiting permanently or temporarily in the village and having certain *Watan* rights (i.e., *Watandars*, *Mirasdars*, *Balutedars* and *Uparis*) were often describes as the ‘four wheels’ of the *Gaogada* who worked for the entire village community.
- Gatha* Any of the seventeen poems attributed to Zoroaster, which are the most ancient texts of the *Avesta*; a saga in long story, account or sequence of events.
- Garudapuran* A Hindu scripture which one of the eighteen *Puranas* in Hinduism. It is part of Vaishnavite literature corpus, primarily centering around Hindu god Vishnu. (Also see: *Purana*)

- Gau-Brahman Pratipalak* 'Protector of cows and Brahmins' – an image of Shivaji constructed by B.G. Tilak who saw him as an orthodox anti-Muslim king and savior of the culture of *Brahmanic* Hinduism.
- Gavali* A Maharashtrian caste of cow-herdsmen, milkmen and dairymen which is akin to that of *Ahirs/Yadavs* of north India.
- Gayatri Mantra* First appeared in *Rigveda*, the *Gayatri Mantra* is a hymn to Savitr, the sun god. According to Douglas Brooks, the sun in the *Mantra* represents both the physical sun and the divine in all things. The *Mantra* represents the Vedic tradition of Yoga and meditation.
- Ghadshi* The term used for a vocalist in Marathi.
- Ghondali* The term used for a musician in Marathi.
- Grabhadhaan* A religious ritual performed at the time when a woman is reported to have conceived and got pregnant.
- Gramrakshasha* The village demon. Phule used the phrase to characterize critically the *Kulkarnis* (village accountants) who used to exploit the primary producers, the poor and illiterate cultivators.
- Gujar* The *Gujars* or *Gurjaras* were initially known as '*Gauchers*', literally means care taker of cows and buffalos, in medieval times who originated from Afghanistan and are an ethnic agricultural and pastoral community of India. Sometimes, *Gujars* are said to have been originally a sub-tribe of the *Hunas*. Historically, they were, at one end, founders of several states (e.g., *Gurjara* kingdom of medieval Rajasthan), cities (e.g., Gujranwala and Gujarat in Pakistan etc.) and villages, and at the other, also nomads with no lands of their own in some regions (like Kashmir etc.). The Indian states of Rajasthan and Gujarat were known as *Gurjaradesa*

and *Gujaratra* prior to the arrival of the British. In many states, the *Gujars* have been included in the list of OBCs. The *Gaddi Gujars* are categorized as STs in the states like Jammu & Kashmir.

Jotirao Phule, however, used the term *Gujar* sarcastically for the money lenders who had come in Maharashtra from Gujarat.

Haldi

A traditional ceremony before marriage.

Hindu

Literally denotes a 'Society of Hindus', founded by M.M. Malaviya in 1915 as a social organization and in 1933 as a political party. The party preached the idea of 'Hindu nationalism' arguing for "racial unity" of all Hindus. The *Mahasabha* emphasized on *Sangathan* and *Shuddhi* with an appeal for abolishing the harmful social customs/practices of Hindu society including untouchability. Under the leadership of V.D. Savarkar, the party intensified its political activities.

Huns/Hunas

The terms *Huns/Hunas* have been used for different nomadic tribes belonging to central Asia, living east of the Volga river in an area that was part of Scythia. According to some historians, there was a link of the *Huns* with *Xiongnu* people who were northern neighbors of China. Modern culture generally associates them with extreme cruelty and barbarianism. In ancient Hindu texts, the *Hunas* are referred to as a group of central Asian tribes (called *Irani Hunas*) who entered India via Khyber Pass in fifth or sixth centuries and attacked Gupta empire. Ancient European observers like Ptolemy and others, however, also mention a different tribe of *Huns* who raided into the Roman Empire and conquered Italy and many other parts of Europe up to fifth century. Though Roman historian Caesarea linked the 'white *Huns*' to the tribe who also invaded northwest India

- stating that they were of the same stock. But there is a controversy on the issue.
- Inam/Inamdar* The term *Inam*, literally means 'reward', is generally used for a land-gift. The *Inamdar* was such person who holds *Inam* rights due to his position as hereditary feudatory under the medieval states (such as *Mughal* Empire or *Peshwai*).
- Itihas-Purana* A *Puranic* mythological tradition of history which also got integrated in the popular culture and oral traditions of Hindu society.
- Jagir/
Jagirdar* A *Jagir* was a type of land granted to a feudal chieftain or officer (who was called *Jagirdar*) in the Indian subcontinent to maintain troops and provide their service to the state when asked. The *Jagirdari* system prevailed in medieval India and also continued under the British East India Company rule in a changed form.
- Jahaals* The extremist/orthodox nationalists, led by Lokmanya Tilak, in Indian national movement in its early stage.
- Jat/Jatt* The term *Jat* is probably akin to a Sanskrit term *Jartikah*, name of an ancient tribe having Scythian origin. They are a traditionally non-elite ethnic agricultural and pastoral community of northern India who first settled in the lower Indus valley of Sindh and migrated into the region of Punjab in late medieval times and subsequently *Rajputana*, Delhi and western *Gangatic* planes. Historically, they took up arms against the *Mughals* in later-medieval period and later also founded some states (e.g., *Bhartpur* state of Rajasthan). The community also played an important role in the growth of martial *Khalsa Panth* of Sikhism. The *Jats* also adopted Hinduism and Islam in different regions. They were not a caste in the usual Hindu sense as the male *Jats* married

into the whole range of lower castes which indicate their breach of the norms of *Brahmanical* social order. Under the *sanskritization* process, they honorifically called themselves *Khatriya*, though in states like Rajasthan and U.P. the community has been included in the list of OBCs.

Jati/Jati
Vyavastha

Jati is an endogamous class/sub-class of Hindus, means caste or sub-caste, which was a byproduct of *Varna Vyavastha*, the institution of four hierarchically arranged primitive castes as prescribed in *Purusa Sukta* of *Rigveda*. Alongwith other things, the *Jati Vyavastha* is normally distinguished by relative degree of ritual purity or pollution, social stratification, caste-ridden matrimonial and social relations and caste-based occupations.

Jatra

A fair, referred to an event which is held for specific period to a specific place and includes some rituals.

Joshi

A sub-caste of Brahmans working as village priests and astrologers.

Jotiba

A popular folk deity in Maharashtra which is a symbol of peasantry. Among the peasant communities, the term *Joti* also means a 'plough bearer' or 'cultivator'.

Jowar

A variety of sorghum grown in India, used to make flatbreads.

Julaha

Etymologically, the term is derived from the Persian word *Julah* which means 'ball of thread'. The term is also associated with the Hindi term '*Jala*' or '*Jali*' meaning interlaced thread. A caste of weaver artisans, found among both Muslims and Hindus, who traditionally used to weave cloths on handlooms. The Muslim *Julahas* honorifically call themselves *Ansari* and relate themselves to *Nurbaf* (weaver of light), the Prophet's term for the Muslims of Medina. Most of the Hindu *Kabirpanthis* are *Julahas*

- who have been included in the list of SCs under Indian Constitution. (Also see: *Kabirpanth*)
- Kabirpanth* A *Nirguna Bhakti* sect of the lower caste Hindus, mostly belonging to *Julahas*, founded by a radical *Bhakti* saint Kabir (1440-1518) of medieval India. In some states, the *Kabirpandhis* have been included in the list of SCs under Indian Constitution.
- Kalamkasai* The term literally means 'wielders of the pen'. Phule used the term to characterize critically the *Bhatji* in his role as a priest, a schoolteacher, a village accountant, a *Mamlatdar* and a clerk etc. who all used to exploit the primary producers, the poor and the illiterate cultivators.
- Kaliyuga* The last of the four epochs (others being *Satyuga*, *Dwaparyuga* and *Tretayuga*) according to the Hindu mythology, and the one in which we live.
- Karmal*
Karmavipaka The Hindu religious theory which expounds that present state/condition of life of an individual is the consequence of the deeds done in previous life/existence. Hence, fortunes/misfortunes of the present life are the fruits of good/evil actions performed in previous life/existence, and, as such, are to be accepted by the individual. The theory of *Karma* (alongwith the theory of rebirth), at a certain point, gets mixed with the theory of caste as it has been believed that the people belonging to high castes did 'good *Karma*' (deeds) in their last birth/life whereas the lower caste people did 'bad *Karma*' in their last birth/life. In view of this, Phule strongly opposed the theory of *Karmavipaka*.
- Karmacharan* Traditional social conduct/norms for certain Hindu castes, in accordance with the laws of *Varna Dharma*. For instance, under the *Peshwa* rule, wearing of the sacred thread (*Janeu*), reciting Vedic Mantras in religious ceremonies/prayers, performing certain

specific rites and announcing the greeting word of *Namaskar* were, according to the state orders, *Karmacharan* of Brahmans/few high castes, but not of non-Brahmans/ lower castes.

Karmakand

The practice of carrying out certain religious rituals in Hinduism with a specific objective and performed while chanting Vedic or *Puranik* mantras with the help of a Brahman priest. (Also see: *Yajna*)

Koli

Also known as *Kori* or *Koliyar*, the *Koli* is a hilly tribe, like *Bhil*. The *Kolis* were found in regions like Gujarat and Rajasthan where some of the *Kolis* were petty chieftains and had hypergamous relations with the less significant Rajput families. Though generally classed as a tribe inferior to *Kunbis* in status, *Kolis* have been designated as a Hindu caste in Maharashtra who used to work as water carriers, fishermen or weavers. Under the *sanskritization* process, the *Kolis* honorifically called themselves *Rajputs*, though in different states the caste has been included in the lists of SCs, STs or OBCs.

Kathakar

A Puranic story teller.

*Kayasthal/
Prabhu*

Also referred to as *Kayasth* or *Kayeth*, the *Kayasthas* are considered to be a literate scribe caste and have historically acted as administrators, keepers of public accounts, writers etc. in Hindu states. According to some traditions, they were 'fallen' Brahmans or *Kshatriyas* and later on many *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* were included in the caste, though their exact *Varna* status has been a subject of controversy. The *Kayasthas* were traditionally an urban, educated and professional caste and their intellectuals even supplemented the achievements of Brahmans in academic and literary pursuits since medieval times. In Maharashtra, they were called as *Prabhus* or *Kayastha-Prabhus* who in the Maratha state held

- position such as *Deshpandes* and *Gadkaris* (front holders), though the *Peshwas* in 1790s specifically ordered them to “behave like *Shudras*” and not to recite Vedic *Mantras* but *Puranic Mantras* in their ceremonies/prayers.
- Khandoba* One of the most popular *Kuldevatas* (family deities) and patron deities of the peasant communities (like *Dhangars* etc.) in Maharashtra. *Khandoba* developed from a folk deity into a god professing the attributes of Shiva. The center of *Khandoba* worship is in Jejuri. According to Phule, *Khandoba* was actually a pro-people official/lieutenant of the ancient mythical king Bali who made him in-charge of the nine *Khandas* (provinces) of his kingdom.
- Khot* A petty landlord, in most case, belonged to the *Kulkarni* Brahmins.
- Kotwal* A top police official of the city of Poona under the state of *Peshwas* who was chief representative and symbol of the *Peshwai* authority. In additions to his responsibility to maintain law and order, the *Kotwal* and his police enforced the government regulations and engaged in surveillance, closely watching over the activities of individuals and castes that violated the ‘religion’ and caste based societal and moral codes.
- Krantisurya* The term literally means ‘the Sunlight of Revolution’. A term used for Mahatma Phule by his followers in reverence.
- Kshatriyal*
Kshetriya The term *Kshatriya* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Khatra* which means ‘ruler’ or ‘authority’. The member of the second highest of four hierarchically arranged primitive castes (i.e., *Varnas*) of Hindu religion, as prescribed in *Purusa Sukta* of *Rigveda*, which has been associated with warriorship. The ‘warrior’ castes like *Rajput* or *Thakur* in north India

also claim *Kshatriya* status, though, according to historians, they are different from ancient *Kshatriya*. Some scholars believe that the word *Kshatriya* is the equivalent of '*Kshetriya*'. In the *Vedas* the word *Kshetrapati* (which is derived from the word *Khetra*, literally means 'region') seems to have been applicable to any party exercising authority of any kind or extend in any region. In view of this, Phule claimed that the aborigines of India were called by the Aryans as *Kshetriya/Kshetrapati/Kshatriya* (i.e., aboriginal warriors).

Kulambin

The term literally means a '*Kunbil* peasant woman'.

Kuldevata

The term literally means a 'patron/ancestral deity'.

*Kulkarni/
Gramlekhi*

Under the *Watandari* system, the *Kulkarni* was an important village *Watandar* who in Marathi records has been referred to as *Gav Kulkarni* and *Gramlekhi*, i.e., village accountant and record-keeper and was normally a Brahman. His main duty was to keep a record of the lands held by each individual cultivator and the revenue due from each one. Sometimes, he also worked as an astrologer in the village. He was entitled to certain rights, perquisites, privileges and free services of the villagers, particularly *Balutedars* and *Dalits*.

Gunahgari

A fine collected by the police officials (like *Kotwal* etc.) from the individuals and castes who violated the 'religion' and caste based social and moral norms under the state of *Peshwas*.

*Kumbhar/
Kumhar*

Etymologically, the term *Kumhar* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Kumbhkar* which means 'earthen-pot maker'. It was a caste of potters having been involved in making earthen-pots, vessels, pitchers, grain jars, toys, earthen lamps, idols etc. The *Kumhars* are found throughout India known by different names like *Bhande*, *Kulal* etc. In the

- Jajmani/Balutedari* system, the *Kumbhar* supplied the villagers with earthenware, pitchers, water pots and jars and received a cake of bread/ some grains for his articles and other services. A section of *Kumhars*, under the *sanskritization* process, honorifically call themselves *Prajapati* after the Vedic lord Daksha-Prajapati, son of Brahma who 'created' the universe. In most of the Indian states the caste has been included in the list of OBCs.
- Kumkum* A turmeric powder used for social and religious markings in India; a red pigment used by a Hindu woman to mark a round mark on her forehead.
- Kunbi* A general Marathi term for a cultivator/peasant/ farmer. There were three major caste groups of peasants in Maharashtra: *Kunbis*, *Malis* and *Dhangars*. Those who were depended entirely upon cultivation were known as '*Kulwadis*' or '*Kunbis*'. The *Kunbis* were a dominant caste of peasant proprietors/cultivators. During pre-colonial times, they claimed *Khatriya* status, though the orthodox Brahmans had hardly accepted their claim and continued treating them as *Shudras*.
- Kurma* The tortoise incarnation of lord Vishu.
- Lakshmi/Laxmi* Also known as Stri, Maya, Narayani and Kamala, Lakshmi is one of the principle goddesses in Hinduism. She is the consort of lord Vishu and known as goddess of wealth and purity and also associated with Maya (illusion). Alongwith Parvathi and Sarasvati, Lakshmi forms the trinity of Hindu goddesses (*Tridevi*).
- Latji* A term used by Phule for Government officials who in his times were either the British/Whitemen or their 'black' subordinates belonging to the high castes.

- Lavani* The term is derived from the word *Lavanya* (beauty). *Lavani* is a genre of traditional dance and song, performed by a girl(s) to the beats of *Dholki*, in Maharashtra. Historically developed as a form of entertainment for the tired soldiers, the *Lavani* was of two types: *Nirguni* (philosophical) and *Sringari* (sensual).
- Lohar*
Gadia Lohar A term literally means a person who makes and repairs things in iron by hand and used for a caste involved traditionally in the trade of iron/black smithy. The *Lohars* make and repair the shoes of ploughs and other agricultural tools/implements and also household iron tools/utensils. In the *Jajmani/Balutedari* system, they provided their services to the village officials and the village community. There is also a nomadic tribe/community of *Lohars*, called *Gadia/Gadulia Lohars*, found chiefly in Rajasthan and other north Indian states which moves on from one place to another place on bullock carts. Their origin is shrouded in legend. They believe that their forefathers were blacksmiths in the army of Maharana Pratap of Mewar and when Mewar fell to *Mughals*, they pledged never to return to their homeland and never to settle anywhere until the Rana's hegemony was restored. In many states, the *Lohars* have been included in the list of OBCs. The *Gadia Lohars* are also categorized as OBC, though many other similar tribes are considered STs in most states.
- Mahajars* Maratha records.
- Mahalwari* A land tenorial settlement introduced by the British in Punjab, parts of United Provinces and some other regions of India to collect land revenue under which the 'village community' was assigned a role of intermediary between the state and the cultivators.

Mahanubhava Cult The *Mahanubhava* cult was one among several heterodox movements arose in ancient/medieval Maharashtra which challenged the cultural dominance of the Brahmans (others being Buddhists, Jains, *Lingayats* and *Nathas*). The cult was radically opposed to the *Brahmanic* religion and the priestly caste and had a strong base of support particularly among the lower castes and Untouchables. The *Mahanubhavas* produced the earliest Marathi literature and first talked about Marathi cultural identity in popular terms.

Mahar The term literally means 'Maha-Ari' or 'great enemy'. It was an Untouchable/*Dalit* caste of Hindus found in Maharashtra and also some other states of India. According to a popular myth, the Maharashtra in ancient times was the land of *Mahars*, the aboriginals. However, under the rule of *Peshwas*, the *Mahars* alongwith other Untouchable castes (like *Mangs*, *Chambhars* and *Malas*) faced many state-imposed humiliating restrictions. They were asked to content themselves with the services of their own casteman-priests, i.e., the '*Medhe Mahars*'. The *Mahars* performed numerous menial services as well as *Begar* in the traditional *Jajmani/Balutedari* system. Sometime, they were called *Dher Bhoomia* (guide), *Yeshkar* (watchman), *Taral* (gate keeper/bearer of burdens). Each village had a *Maharwara* (locality of *Mahars*) on its outskirts. The caste has been included in the list of SCs under Indian Constitution.

Maharashtra Dharma Samrath Ramdas (1608-1681), an orthodox Brahman saint of medieval Maharashtra, had established the sect called '*Maharashtra Dharma*' during the *Bhakti* movement. It mainly gained support among the traditional elites of Maharashtra, particularly Brahmans. In his work *Das Baudh*, Ramdas

urged a strong political drive for the protection of Hinduism from Muslim encroachment. He inspired the orthodox interpretation of Maratha upsurge from the time of Shivaji.

*Mahila Seva
Mandal*

Literally denotes a 'Society for Serving the Women', founded in 1852 at Poona by Savitribai Phule (wife of Jotirao Phule) who has been credited with being the first native lady teacher in India. While her contemporary reformers were busy in reconstructing the images of the mythological *Pativrata* Hindu woman based on Sati-Savitri module, Savitribai expressed the earlier Indian feminist fervor.

Mali

Etymologically, the term *Mali* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Mala* which means 'garland'. It was a caste of horticulturists/gardeners/florists/ farmers which Phule also hailed from. There were three major caste groups of peasants in Maharashtra: *Kunbis*, *Malis* and *Dhangars*. Those who maintained horticulture alongwith farming came to be known as *Malis*. A section of the caste also called themselves *Phul Mali* due to their occupation of growing flowers.

The *Malis* are found throughout north India. They adopted the new nomenclature *Saini* in 1930-40s after the name of a mythical king Sursen. They also got registered themselves to be *Sainik-Kshatriya* in 1941 census, though the caste has been included in the list of OBCs in many states.

*Mamledar/
Mamlatdar*

A government official responsible for collecting the land revenue. The *Mamledar* or *Mamlatdar* was appointed as administrative chief of the unit/group of villages constituted under a *Taluka* or *Tahsil*.

*Manavadharma
Sabha*

Literally denotes a 'Society for Human Religion', founded in 1841 at Bombay by Dadoba Pandurang.

- Mangalashbtaka* Wedding songs. Phule also wrote *Mangalashbtakas* to be sung at the weddings conducted by *Satyashodhak Samaj*. In such songs, the bride and bridegroom asked each other to take vows of loyalty and good conduct to each other as well as to society, particularly the downtrodden.
- Mansab/
Mansabdari* The word is of Arabic origin meaning 'rank' or 'position'. The *Mansab* was a military unit within the administrative system of the *Mughal* empire introduced by Akbar. The *Mansabdari* system determined the ranks, salaries/allowances, rights and duties of all the state officials including military generals.
- Mantra* Hymn. (Also see: *Sambhita/Yajna*)
- Maratha* Literally, the term *Maratha* denotes all Marathi-speaking people. Under the reign of Shivaji, who belonged to *Kunbi* caste, the term got associated with rulership with mastery over land and, most of all, with military powers and heroism. During the course of time, the *Kunbis* began to call themselves 'Marathas' which is evident from the common Marathi proverb, '*Kunbi majhala Maratha jhala*', means 'when a *Kunbi* becomes prosperous, he becomes a Maratha'.
- Marathi-
Manus* A typical Maharashtrian person; a common man of Maharashtra.
- Marwari* A man of *Marwar* (which literally means a 'land of death') region, a desert land of Rajasthan; A caste of traders and moneylenders which originally belonged to *Marwar*.
- Masoba* One of the folk deities and *Kshetrapal* (guardian deity) of the peasant, *Dalit* and tribal communities like *Dhangars*, *Pradhans*, *Mangs*, *Chambhars* etc. in Maharashtra. *Masoba* is considered to be the god of spirits and the temples of the deity are found gen-

- erally near *Shamshan* (cremation ground) or outside the villages. The devotees offer sacrifice of he-goats to the deity. At many places of Maharashtra, *Masoba Jatras* are also organized.
- Matang/Mang* Etymologically, *Matang* means 'one who creates terror without weapons'. An untouchable Hindu caste found in Maharashtra and also some other states of India. The *Mang* was sometimes called *Vajantri* (musician). The *Mangs* also performed many other menial services as well as *Begar* in the traditional *Balutedari* system, e.g., rope making, broom making, curing, midwifery, cattle midwifery etc. The caste has been included in the list of SCs under Indian Constitution.
- Matsya* The fish incarnation of lord Vishu. (Also see: *Avatar*)
- Maulanal*
Mulla A Muslim priest who also took care of the mosque and tombs. The *Maulana* found a place in the *Balutedari* system in Maharashtra and was accordingly entitled to certain customary rights.
- Mavaals* The moderate 'liberals' or nationalists, led by Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, in Indian national movement in its early stage.
- Mavande* A sweet feast offered to Brahmans after performing *Chardham Jatra* by the devotees.
- Mhasoba* A horned buffalo deity and *Kshetrapal* (guardian deity) of the pastoral and peasant communities like *Gavalis*, *Kunbis* etc. in Maharashtra. *Mhasoba* is sometimes connected with Shiva. The center of *Mhasoba* worship is in Purandar Fort. According to Phule, the *Mhasoba* was official-in-charge of the large province or the '*Maha Subah*' of the kingdom of ancient mythical king Bali. Though etymologically such impression of him does not seem to be correct.

- Mirasdars/Thalkaris* The land holders/peasant proprietors who mostly belonged to the communities like *Kunbi*, *Mali* and *Dhangar* in Maharashtra.
- Modi* A special Marathi script.
- Moksha* In Hindu theology, the idea of ultimate liberation of the soul from the cycle of rebirth. (Also see: *Artha*)
- Momin* An Arabic term, frequently referenced in *Quran*, meaning a 'true believer' of Islam who has complete submission to the will of God; a faithful and toiling Muslim.
- Mrudanga* A percussion instrument/drum of ancient origin which is primary mytheme accomplishment in *Carnatic* music ensemble.
- Mulani* A community of butchers.
- Mulnivasi* The term literally means 'original inhabitants'. Phule used this word for ancient *Kshetriya/Kshetrapati/Kshatriya* (i.e, aboriginal warriors) and present-day *Shudras-Atishudras*. (Also see: *Dasa* and *Kshatriya/Kshetriya*).
- Murtipujak* A worshipper of idol.
- Nachni* An annual grass, also called *Regi*, having a panicle with a whorl of fingerlike spikes, grown as cereal crop in India and Africa.
- Narasimha* The man-lion incarnation of lord Vishu. (Also see: *Avtar*)
- Navi/Nhavi/Nai* A caste of barbers found throughout India. The *Navi/Nhavi/Nai* had traditionally been involved in barbering trade, with a few having taken up agriculture and some other trades. A few were also practitioners of Ayurveda medicine. In the *Jajmani/Balutedari* system, the *Navi* shaved all the villagers. He attended the weddings in *Patil's* family and also attended him/his family in the festivals. Whatever

Patil received from the villagers, came duly through the *Nhavi* to him.

Under the *sanskritization* process, the *Navis* honorifically call themselves *Thakur*. In many states the caste has been included in the list of OBCs.

Navyana

The term literally means 'New Wheel'. It refers to the reinterpretation of Buddhism by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), a stalwart leader of *Dalits* in India; who renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism in 1956 alongwith half a million of his followers mostly belonging to the lower caste Hindus. In his book *Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957), Ambedkar radically reinterpreted Buddhism and accepted only 'Four Noble Truths' to be the foundational in Buddhist tradition and, therefore, rejected *Hinayana* (*Theravada*), *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* traditions. He called his religion *Navyana* or neo-Buddhism which emphasizes on egalitarian and scientific side of the teachings of Buddha.

Nirmik

The term literally means 'creator'; it was used by Phule for God.

*Nishkama
Karmal
Karma Yoga*

The theory, propounded in *Bhagwat Gita*, is suggestive of a disciplined selfless action without desire for the fruits of action. The *Karma Yoga/Marga* (path of selfless action) is one the three spiritual paths in Hinduism, others being *Jnana Yoga* (path of knowledge) and *Bhakti Yoga* (path of devotion). According to Ambedkar, the theory of *Nishkama Karma Yoga* appears to have originally inspired from the Buddhist philosophy which emphasizes on the aspect of sorrow in human life and suggestive of a selfless life without desire to get rid of sorrow.

Padaja

The term literally means 'born from the feet'. The *Shudra* was given this nomenclature under the

- Varna Vyavastha* implying thereby that God has created him to be the eternal slave of Brahmins.
- Pali/Prakrit* *Pali* and *Prakrit* are names of two ancient languages of India. These languages are included in the middle Indo-Aryan languages and, though, are not same, but are same in the sense that the both were used by the common people in ancient India. These languages were native to the Indian subcontinent spoken particularly during the time of Buddha. *Pali* or *Maghadian* is also a language of the sacred writings of Theravada Buddhism (e.g., the canon known as *Tripitaka*). *Prakrit*, literally means 'natural' as opposed to *Sanskrita* or Sanskrit (which literally means 'constructed' or 'refined' and actually a refined and codified version of archaic Vedic language), is supposed to be the mother of various vernacular languages of India with a complicated relationship with Sanskrit.
- Pandharpesha* The term sarcastically means 'religious business of Brahmins'; phenomenon of Brahmanism.
- Paramahansa Mandali* Literally denotes a 'Society of the Super Being', founded in 1849 at Bombay by Dadoba Pandurang.
- Paranjape* Among the *Upadhyaya* Brahmins in Maharashtra, the *Paranjape* had been the priest of Brahmin families only. (Also see: *Upadhyaya*)
- Parshuram* Literally 'Ram with the axe' – a Brahmin deity who, according to a *Puranic* story, attempted massacre of *Kshatriyas* twenty-one times.
- Parsi* An Indian community of Zoroastrians mainly inhabiting in Gujarat.
- Patal* Underground/ lower regions.
- Patil* The chief hereditary *Watandar* of the village who was the village-head, chief revenue officer and also united in him the function of chief judicial officer.

- His was a hereditary office usually held by a family of the Maratha-*Kunbi* community. His duty was also to bring the idle and barren land under cultivation and to make it fruit-bearing. The *Patil* represented the state at village level. He was entitled to certain rights, perquisites, privileges and free services of the villagers, particularly the *Balutedars* and *Dalits*.
- Pativrata* The term literally means ‘virtuous wife’ who has made a vow (*Vrata*) to her husband (*Pati*) in devotion and protection. She listens to her husband and acts accordingly. She protects her husband through undertaking various rituals/fasts to please gods hoping that they would grant him all fortunes and a long life. The word *Sati* is often used as synonym for *Pativrata* whose devotion, according to Brhaspati (a Hindu law giver), has gone to the level that she “dies when her husband dies”. Such beliefs had given birth to the practice of *Sati* in Hindu society. (Also see: *Sati*)
- Pavada* A Marathi ballad composed in an alliterative poetic form that recounts the achievements of a warrior or the talents of a scholar or the excellences of a great person.
- Peshwa* A term used for the *Chitpavan* Brahman prime minister who served Shivaji and his successors and eventually seized all powers of the Maratha state. Under the *Peshwa* rule, the state provided its active support to the *Brahmanical* elite and to protect, maintain and strengthen the *Brahmanic* hegemony and caste-based societal and moral norms.
- Petal*
Mahal A smaller administrative unit (like *Taluka*). The administrative head of this unit was called *Mahalkari*. A group of *Petas/Mahals/Talukas* formed a district or *Zilla*.
- Phalgun* The twelfth month of the Hindu calendar.

- Phule-
Ambedkar
Tradition/
Dalit-Bahujan
Movement Phule-Ambedkar tradition' of social reform is also called as '*Dalit-Bahujan* movement' in academia nowadays which is one of the most radical protest movements in modern/contemporary India having many dimensions, e.g., social, political, spiritual (neo-Buddhism/*Navyana*), cultural, economic, academic/literary (Dalit Studies/Literature) etc.
- Pindal*
Dashpindl
Shradha A religious rite performed on the 10th day after death of a Hindu.
- Pola* The term used for a bull festival.
- Prabhu/Vani* A small trading caste of Maharashtra found in parts of Konkan. The *Prabhus* belonged to the *Kayastha* community. (Also see: *Kayastha*)
- Prajapati* The term etymologically composed of two Sanskrit words, *Praja* (creation/born-ones) and *Pati* (lord/master), means 'lord of all creatures/born-ones'. Originally, the word was an epithet for sun. In the later Vedic texts, *Prajapati* is a distinct deity but whose significance diminishes. Later the term became synonymous with other gods, particularly Brahma.
- Prarabdha* The term means primitive or predestination. (Also see: *Karmavipaka*)
- Prarthana*
Samaj Literally denotes a 'Prayer Society', founded by Atmaram Pandurang at Bombay in December 1866. Under the leadership of M.G. Ranade, the *Samaj* intensified its socio-educational activities in Maharashtra.
- Punarjanma* The theory of rebirth. (Also see: *Karmavipaka*)
- Punya* Righteously earned beneficence.
- Purana* One of the sacred scriptures, called *Puranas*, of Hindus, supposedly eighteen in number.

- Puranik* A scripture reader, mostly belonging to the Brahman caste.
- Puja* The term literally means reverence, homage, adoration and worship. A *Puja* is ritually performed by the Hindus to offer devotional homage and prayer (in the form of light, flowers, water or food) to one or more deities, to host or honor a guest, or to spiritually celebrate an event.
- Puratan Chal* The term literally denotes 'ancient usage'. An established code of conduct based on religiously ordained duties/vocations assigned hierarchically according to the laws of *Varna Dharmal*/caste in affairs like marriage/sexual intercourse, dining, smoking, conversion, association with the outcasts/Untouchables/non-Hindus etc.
- Purusa Sukta* The hymn 10.90 of the of the *Rigveda*, dedicated to *Purusa* (the Cosmic Being), which gives a mythological story of the origin of the four *Varnas* – from the mouth (Brahman), arms (*Kshatriya*), thighs (*Vaishya*) and feet (*Shudra*) of lord Brahma. Some historians believe that certain verses of *Purusa Sukta* are later interpolations to *Rigveda* because it is the only hymn that mentions four *Varnas* by name.
- Purvaree* A lower caste inhabiting in Maharashtra.
- Rajput* Etymologically, the term is derived from the Sanskrit word *Rajaputra* which means 'son of a king'. The word *Rajput* (also *Thakkar* or *Thakur*) has been used for a large multi-component cluster of tribes, castes, kin-bodies, patrilineal clans and local groups generally associated with warriorhood and rulership in past. Earlier historians characterized *Rajputs* as the decedents of *Scythians* or *Hunas*, but recent researches suggest that they came from a variety of ethnic and geographical backgrounds. Historically,

the caste was formed when various tribal and nomadic groups became landed aristocrats and transformed into a ruling feudal class and who, in order to legitimize their newly acquired power, claimed *Kshatriya* status. It was during the period of *Mughals*, who had great interest in genealogy, that their various *Rajput* feudatories fabricated their genealogies linking themselves to the ancient dynasties having *Kshatriya* origin (like *Suryavanshi*, *Chandravanshi* etc.). Henceforth, the term got hereditized. Though the new claims to the *Rajput* status continued as late as the twentieth century as a part of the *sanskritization* process, but now the so-called 'original' *Rajputs* did not recognize them. (Also see: *Kshatriya*)

- Rakshasa* A term used for demons or enemies of the gods in Hindu mythology. (Also see: *Dasal/Dasyu*)
- Ramana* A five-day spectacle used to be held annually in Poona during the time of *Peshwas* in which Brahmans, all and sundry from Kashi in the north to Kumbhakonam in the south, flocked to participate who were offered *Dakshina* and *Brahman-Bhojan* (Brahman's feast) by the *Peshwa*.
- Ramoshi* A caste of the people who normally held the office of watchman. The *Ramoshis* automatically turned into auxiliaries in the police when the dispute pertaining to the country was settled. Under the weak government or under anarchy, sometimes they became thieves and robbers.
- Rishi* Etymologically, the term is derived from the Sanskrit root *Rsh* which means 'to go, to move'. It's a Vedic term for an accomplished and enlightened person or a *Sadhu* (sage) who after intense meditation realized the supreme truth and eternal knowledge. The term generally means a Hindu seer, sage or saint who has wisdom/spiritual knowledge.

- Ryot* The term, originated from the Arabic word *Riyayah* which means 'flock' or 'peasants', is generally used for an Indian peasant or tenant cultivator who owns or rents a small piece of land and grows crops and/or keeps animals on it.
- Ryotwari* A land tenurial settlement introduced by the British firstly in Madras Presidency and subsequently in the provinces of Bombay, Sind, Berar, Assam and some other regions under which the cultivators had to pay the revenue directly to the state.
- Sada* A religious ritual/ceremony performed after marriage.
- Sambhita* It's a Sanskrit term which literally means 'collection'. There are four Vedic *Sambhitas*, i.e., *Rigveda*, *Samveda*, *Athurveda* and *Yajurveda* which are collections of metric texts (*Mantras*) and are considered the most ancient and sacred Hindu literature. Though the *Vedas* are considered *Apauruseya* (not of man/divinely ordained), yet, according to tradition, *Vyasa* was the compiler of *Vedas* who arranged the four kind of *Mantras* in four *Sambhitas*. The *Sambhitas* are also called *Srutis* which are considered to be the most authoritative source of *Dharma*. The schools which cite *Vedas* as the spiritual authority are considered as 'orthodox' (*Astika*). There have also been schools (like *Shramana* traditions) which do not regard *Vedas* as authoritative and that are referred to as 'heterodox' (*Nastika*).
- Sanad* It's a Persian term which means a charter, warrant, diploma, deed etc. issued by state; a letter having the force of an edict or ordinance in India.
- Sanchit* Accumulated demerits of previous births.
- Sanskritization* A social tendency under which a low Hindu caste starts changing its customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of certain high castes, particularly Brahmins/*Kshatriyas*.

Saptaha	A holy week festival in Maharashtra.
<i>Sarvajanik Sabha</i>	The term <i>Sarvajanik</i> literally means 'universal' or 'of all the people'. The <i>Sarvajanik Sabha</i> (peoples' association) was an early nationalist society, founded by M.G. Ranade in April 1870. It was a prominent organization in socio-political sphere in western India in 1870s.
<i>Sati/Sata</i>	The horrible practice of self-immolation by a woman on the funeral pyre of her dead husband in Hindu society. The <i>Sata</i> was an ironical coinage by Phule to suggest a male <i>Sati</i> .
<i>Satsar</i>	A term used by Phule which literally means, 'the essence of truth'.
<i>Satyadharmā</i>	Phule's spiritual concept which means 'religion of truth' and/or 'righteousness and moral conduct'.
<i>Satyais̥h</i>	A term used by Phule which literally means 'the godly truth'.
<i>Satyaprakash</i>	A term used by Phule which literally means 'the light of truth'.
<i>Satyasamaji/Satyasamajist</i>	Member/worker/follower of Phule's reformist society namely <i>Satyashodhak Samaj</i> founded in 1873.
<i>Satyashodhak Sabha</i>	Literally denotes a 'Truth Seekers Society', founded in late 1860s at Bombay by Baba Padamji.
<i>Satyashodhak Samaj</i>	Literally denotes a 'Society of Researchers of Truth', founded by Jotirao Phule in 1873 at Poona. Aim of the society was to oppose <i>Brahman Dharma</i> and preach and propagate <i>Satyadharmā</i> among the masses. The society raised a vigorous voice against 'Brahmanism', <i>Varna Vyavastha</i> and caste-slavery and demanded social equality and justice for all the downtrodden sections of Hindu society including lower castes, women and peasants.
<i>Satyodaya</i>	A term used by Phule which literally means 'the emergence of truth'.

- Sawakar* The term literally means 'moneylender'.
- Shastra* The term literally means a 'book(s) of religion; which include all ancient Hindu texts/scriptures such as the *Shrutis (Vedas)*, *Smritis*, *Purans*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, *Upnishads*, *Epics (Ramayanas and Mahabharatas)* *Bhagwat Gita* etc.
- Shastri* A learned Brahman; a scholar well-versed in *Shastras*.
- Shenavi* The word is used to refer to *Gawda Saraswat Brahmins* of Goa among whom the popular surname is *Shenoy* which is derived from the word *Shenavi*.
- Shetji* A term used by Phule for money lenders who, in most cases, were *Marwaris*, *Banias* and Brahmins, and in some cases, *Kunbis* etc.
- Shimpi* A term used for the caste(s) involved traditionally in the trade/business of clothing, tailoring, designing, dyeing and dressing. The *Shimpis* are found all over India known by different names such as *Chhippa*, *Chhippi*, *Chhippolu*, *Darji*, *Khatri* etc. Under the *sanskritization* process, they honorifically call themselves *Kshatriya*, though in many states the caste has been included in the list of OBCs. Their most notable offshoot is the *Namdev-Shimpi* sect of Maharashtra which follows the teachings of the *Bhakti* saint Namdev.
- Shivari* One coin.
- Shramana/ Shramanic* Etymologically, the term *Shramana* is derived from the Pali word *Samana* which means 'one who labours, toils, or exerts themselves' or 'seeker' or 'one who performs acts of austerity. The term comes to refer to several non-*Brahmanic* ascetic schools/traditions/ movements parallel to and separate from Vedic religion, including Jainism, Buddhism and others such as *Ajivakas*, *Ajnanas* and *Charvakas*. The *Shramanic* traditions had been having a diverse

range of beliefs and ideas but almost all were against *Brahmanic/Vedic* religion and didn't regard *Vedas* as authoritative. These schools are referred to as 'heterodox' (*Nastika*) schools.

Shudra

Etymologically, the term *Shudra* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Kshudra* which means 'minute', 'mean', 'trifling' or a 'person of the lowest stage of consciousness'. The *Shudra* was member of the last of the four hierarchically arranged primitive castes (i.e., *Varnas*) of Hindu religion, as described in *Purusa Sukta* of *Rigveda*, having the lowest ritual status, though he was, of course, *Savarna* (a person bearing a *Varna*) because those ranking below them actually had no *Varna*/caste and were called *Avarnas/Untouchables*. Historians believe that initially there was not much difference between *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* and both were collectively part of *Vish*, i.e., masses. These two were often clubbed together as *Paap-Yoni* (those born of sin). The later Vedic period witnessed differentiation among all communities – and the producing classes of peasants, artisans and labours were segregated as *Shudras*. Certain disabilities were imposed upon them, e.g., they were not entitled to hear the *Vedas* or wear the sacred thread and were kept out of all *Yajnas/Anusthanas*. (Also see: *Vaishya*).

Smriti

It's a Sanskrit term which literally means 'that which is remembered'. *Smritis* are a class of ancient Hindu sacred literature, written in contrast to *Srutis* (Vedic literature) but considered less authoritative, which include *Vedangas*, Epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), *Dharmashastras*, *Puranas*, *Bhashyas*, *Nibandhas*, *Kavyas* etc. The word *Smriti*, is, however, used mainly to refer texts of ancient Hindu jurisprudence, i.e., *Dharmashastras* (like *Manusmriti*, *Yagnavalkya Smriti*, *Narad Smriti* etc.).

- Suba/ Subah* Province or division of *Mughal* or some other pre-modern empires in India.
- Sunar/Sonar* Etymologically, the term *Sunar* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Suvarnakar* which means 'worker in gold'. *Sunar* was a caste of goldsmiths also having involved in many other professions. In the *Jajmanil Balutedari* system, the *Sunar/Sonar* made jewelry for the villagers on their demand. They are mainly found in north India and known by different names like *Swarnakar*, *Verma*, *Soni*, *Suri*, *Kapoor* etc. Under the *sanskritization* process, they honorifically call themselves *Kshatriya*, though in many states the caste has been included in the list of OBCs.
- Sutar/Khati* A term used for the caste involved traditionally in the trade of carpentry, engineering, chariot-making, house/temple building, construction etc. In the *Balutedaril/Jajmani* system, the *Sutar/Khati* was regarded as 'head' of the artisans. He made for the villagers, ploughs and repaired their carts and also provided his services for building houses or making wooden household goods. The *Sutars* are found throughout north India and known by different names like *Sutardhars*, *Suthars*, *Khatris*, *Tarkhans*, *Jangirs* etc. The majority of *Sutars* belong to the *Vaishnava Bhakti* sect. Under the *sanskritization* process, they honorifically call themselves *Vishwakarma* (a Hindu lord who 'constructed' the universe) and adopted the surname of *Sharma* (normally the preserve of Brahmins), though in many states the caste has been included in the list of OBCs.
- Swadharma* The term literally means 'one's religiously ordained duty'. (Also see: *Dharma*)
- Swaraj* The term literally means 'self-rule'/'home rule'.
- Talathi* A *Kulkarni* who, under the British Raj, became a paid employee and was designated as *Talathi*.

- Tali* A rite of picking up a statue (of *Khandoba* or *Ganapati*) along with coconut and rice etc.
- Taluka* The term used for a local administrative unit in medieval/colonial India, particularly for the purpose of land revenue administration. A centrally located town or village was normally made headquarters of the *Taluka* and all its administrative offices were housed at this place.
- Tamboli/ Tamuli* Etymologically, the term *Tamboli* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Tamuli* which means 'betel leaf' (*Pan*). A caste traditionally occupied in the work of cultivating and selling betel leaf, alongwith areca nuts and found throughout north India. The *Tamulis* are also known *Chaurasia* in some states. In the *Balutedari* system, the *Tamboli* supplied betel-leaves free of cost to different village officials. Under the *sanskritization* process, the Hindu *Tambolis* honorifically call themselves *Vaishya /Suryavanshi-Rajput/ Nagavanshi-Brahman*, though in many states the caste has been included in the list of OBCs.
- Teli* Etymologically, the term *Teli* is derived from the Hindi word *Tel* which means 'oil'. A caste traditionally occupied in the work of oil making/pressing and found throughout India among both Hindus and Muslims. In Maharashtra, the *Telis* were also regarded to be belonging to the Jewish Bene Israel community with nicknamed as *Shaniwar-Teli* (Saturday oil-pressers) for their Jewish custom of abstention from work on *Shabbat* (Saturday). Under the *sanskritization* process, the Hindu *Telis* honorifically call themselves *Vaishya/Kshatriya*, though in many states the caste has been included in the list of OBCs.
- Tirtha* The term literally means 'holy pilgrimage/water/thing'. In a religious custom prevalent in

- Maharashtra, the right toe of a Brahman's foot was required to be dipped and washed in water and the same water was taken as '*Tirtha*' and consumed by a non-Brahman person.
- Toran* The term literally means a 'gateway', commonly of wood but sometimes of stone, consisting of two upright pillars carrying one to three transverse lintels.
- Upadhyaya* The highest order of Maharashtrian Brahmans who provided their services as family-priests to the caste Hindus (excluding Untouchables who had their special priests from their own castes) in the *Jajmani* system. Among *Upadhyayas*, the *Paranjape* had been the priest of Brahman families, whereas the *Bapat* was the family-priest of peasants and other caste Hindus. (Also see: *Bapat/Paranjape*)
- Upadesha* The term literally means 'advice' or 'religious preaching'.
- Upari* In pre-modern Maharashtra, the village community was comprised chiefly the *Deshaks* (three major classes of village inhabitants having permanent *Watan* rights, i.e., *Watandars*, *Mirasdars* and *Balutedars*). To help them, there was another class of people called *Uparis* (strangers) or tenants who initially had no inhabiting in the village, but could subsequently get an opportunity of becoming part of the village community in the due course of time. (Also see: *Gaogada*)
- Vaishya* The member of the third of four hierarchically arranged primitive castes (i.e., *Varnas*) prescribed in *Purusa Sukta* of *Rigveda* who, in ritual status, ranked only above the *Shudras*. But in the *Vedas*, the word *Vish* (which means 'masses' or 'people') seems to have been applicable to the large number of people

including traders, professionals, artisans and farmers who, in theory, were supposed to produce and supply the material things/goods to Hindu society. It indicates that initially there was not much difference between *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. The two were often clubbed together as *Paap-Yoni* and *Vaishyas* were also often bracketed with *Shudras* for serving Brahmins and *Kshatriyas*. But the aftermath of later Vedic period witnessed a systematic differentiation among the producing and commercial classes, and the traders, professionals and moneylenders got succeeded to retain their slightly better status as *Vaishyas*, and the classes of peasants, artisans and labours were segregated as *Shudras*. (Also see: *Shudra*)

- Vajrasuchi* Also called *Vajrasuchik-Upnishad* and most frequently ascribed to a Buddhist monk Ashva Ghosh, it was a fiercely anti-Brahman tract. According to some historians, there was great influence of this work on the Marathi saint-poets like Bahinabai, a disciple of Tukaram and also on many others including Jotirao Phule. The birth-based 'Brahmanhood' is the main target of criticism in *Vajrasuchi*. It attacks the doctrine of *Varna* arguing that if all of the four *Varnas* have processed from the body of god Brahma, then they must all be alike.
- Vaman* The dwarf incarnation of lord Vishu. (Also see: *Avtar*)
- Vani* The term used for certain trading merchant castes having *Vaishya* status.
- Varah* The boar incarnation of lord Vishu. (Also see: *Avtar*).
- Varkari Cult* The predominant cult of *Bhakti* movement in Maharashtra in which a tradition of pilgrimage procession of the people belonging to all castes around

- Pandharpur temple (of the folk deity Bittaga/Vithoba/Vitthal) developed. The cult generated pride for Marathi language and culture among the people which created 'national' consciousness among all the Marathas (Marathi speaking people).
- Varna* One of the four hierarchically arranged primitive castes. (Also see: *Varna Vyavastha*)
- Varna Dharma* Religiously ordained order based on the hierarchically arranged classes/castes; religiously ordained duties/vocations determined hereditarily under *Varna Vyavastha*.
- Varna Vyavasthal Chaturvarna* Institution of four hierarchically arranged primitive castes (i.e., Brahman, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*) into which all Hindus, with the exception of *Avarnas*/Untouchables, were in theory divided. The institution later on gave birth to the hierarchical social order of Hindus based on caste system and untouchability.
- Varnashrama Dharma* The Vedic 'religion' (system) chiefly based on of the hierarchically arranged four classes or *Varnas* of society, i.e., Brahman, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*; as well as four stages or *Ashrams* of the life of an individual, i.e., *Brahmacharya* (student life), *Grahastha* (household life), *Vanprastha* (retired life, ideally to be lived in forest) and *Sanyas* (renunciation, ideally to be lived as mendicant/bigger).
- Vastushanti* Rites performed before the construction/entrance of a new house.
- Veda* One of the earliest writings of the Hindus, four in number, which go back to 2000 B.C. or even 2500 B.C. Considered as the 'holiest books the Hindus', the *Vedas* are supposed to have been uttered by lord Brahma and preserved by oral tradition. The *Vedas* give ample information about the origins of polit-

- ical, religious, social and economic institutions of the ancient Aryans/Vedic people and their culture.
- Veskar* A Marathi term which literally means 'protector'.
- Vidya* It's a Sanskrit word having root in *Vid* which means 'to reason upon', 'knowing' or 'understanding'. The term thus means 'knowledge', 'learning', 'science' and 'scholarship'. It refers to the valid/true knowledge.
- Vina* An Indian stringed musical instrument related to a Sitar consisting of a triangular frame with vertical strings.
- Vitanda* The Marathi term which literally means 'destructive criticism'.
- Waddar* A de-notified tribe of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka which speaks *Waddari* or *Vedari* language which, according to some ethnologists, is a separate Dravidian language having closely related to Telugu. The *Waddars* have been included in the list of the SCs/STs in some states under Indian Constitution.
- Wari* A Marathi term which literally means 'pilgrimage'.
- Watan/
Watandari* The *Watan Sanshta* was an important socio-economic institution found in rural Maharashtra having feudalistic features which fixed hereditary monopoly of certain possessions, services or occupations in the traditional village administration/social economy. It was a sign of prestige and dignity to have *Watan* rights (in the form of land-gift and/or other privileges). All village officials were called *Watandars*; but interestingly, the *Mirasdars* and even some *Balutedars* were also entitled to have certain '*Watan*' rights.
- Watandar* Hereditary village officer/occupant of an administrative position. The different state representatives/officers (like *Patil*, *Deshmukh*, *Chaugula*, *Deshpande*,

- Deshmukh* and *Kulakarni*) were important *Watandars* who claimed a possession of hereditary *Watan* rights (a traditional family possession) in the village.
- Yajmana* The person who has the sacrifice performed in a *Yajnal/Anusthana* ritually conducted by a Brahman priest.
- Yajnal/Anusthana* Also spelt as *Yagna* and transliterated as *Yagya* and *Anusthana*, the *Yajna* is a sacrificial rite in Hinduism performed, while chanting Vedic mantras and sublimating *Havana Samagri* (herbal preparations) in the sacred fire, with a specific objective and conducted with the help of a Brahman priest. The practice has been significant in ritualistic tradition of Hinduism called *Karmakand*. (Also see: *Karmakand*)
- Zamindari* A land tenurial settlement introduced by the British in Bengal, Bihar and some other regions of India to collect land revenue in which the landlords (*Zamindars*) were assigned the role of intermediaries between the state and the cultivators.

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