

Role of Education in the Upliftment of Society: Mahatma Phule

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Abstract

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is a leading educationist, social reformer, activist and thinker of modern India. He was born in Katgun, Satara district, Maharashtra in 1827 and died in 1890. He lived sixty three (63) years storming life to create awareness among low caste people or untouchables about their fundamental rights in Maharashtra. He was a vocal leader for the low caste people in the society. He belongs to Mali caste that comes under OBC category which was excluded from the society. He worked for his entire life for the upliftment of downtrodden masses who are exploited under the hierarchy of upper caste people in the society. He was the chief founder of Satyashodhak Samaj which was founded in 1873. The main objective of this organization to secure social justice and human rights among low caste people of society. The main objective of this research paper is to focus on Mahatma Phule's incessant work for the social upliftment of Mahars, Mangs, women and other downtrodden masses of the society. He realised that there is only one solution of education to overcome on thesesocial injustices existed in Indian society. Education plays a very vital role in maintenance of social equilibrium in the society. Bahujan people can fight with the orthodox nature of people without using the weapon of education. He realised that Aryans were foreigner who came to India and subjugated to lower caste people and women of India to establish their monopoly. Mahatma Phule creates an awareness among untouchables and Shudras to challenge the caste based discrimination created by the upper caste people (Brahmins) in Indian society. Mahatma Phule brings a positive attitude in education, agriculture, social caste system and the position of women. Phule was highly appreciated and recalled for the most dedicated service to educate untouchables and women in those days when they were restricted only to their roles for 'cooking and give birth to child'. Mahatma Phule and his wife, Savitribai Phule were main pioneers of women education in India. Mahatma Phule had a firm affirmation that education can bring a positive change in the life of untouchables, other backward classes, marginal section of society and women.

Key Words: Educationist, social reformer, activist, thinker, fundamental rights, excluded, hierarchy, social justice, human rights, orthodox, subjugate, education, monopoly, uniformity,

Discrimination, agriculture etc.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) is a leading educationist, social reformist and thinker of Modern India. His work as an educationist and social reformist prominently took place in Poona (now Pune), Maharashtra. He fought against the orthodox Brahmin society that was very stern and dominant in Pune. Brahmins subjugated the lower caste (untouchables) people and women to sustain their superiority in the eyes of patriarchal society. Education was only a cup of tea for the higher caste people and did not allow to lower caste people or untouchables and women for education because elite group of people thought that if they will be educated it would damage their social monopoly. Being an activist, Mahatma Phule was run a movement against the existing predefined caste structure, revolt against the established orthodox Brahmins and fought for the rights of peasants and education of untouchables and women.

The great grandfather of Phule was a chougala in the town. He was mere an inferior servant. His work was to carry out documents of officers from one place to another. He was living in Katgun. Patil and Kulkarni were two major officers in the village. As usual, Kulkarni belongs to Brahmin community and Patil belongs to Maratha community. Under these two officers, Gramsevak, a village level officer who were doing different kind of works of the people. Great grandfather of Jyotiba Phule was fulfilling his livelihood on an inadequate income. Phule was earlier known as 'Gorhe'. Due to dispute between great grandfather and Kulkarni, who harassed him and made him impossible to live peacefully in the village. Chougala killed him and fled from Katgun and settled in Khanwadi, district Purandar where they have given birth to, 'Shetiba', a single child. He was great grandfather of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. Shetiba was innocent man who had three children namely, Ranoji, Krushna and Govind. These three children had to work in their childhood days because of the economic condition of their family. Later on, they had tried their luck in the business of flowers under the ownership of well-known businessman of flowers. By acquiring basic skills and knowledge of flower business, Peshwa called them for order to provide different kind of things made by flowers like bed, mat, pillow and costumes etc. Peshwa offered them a work of gardening. By seeing their outstanding work of gardening, Peshwa gave them thirty five (35) acres land as reward for their works. From here, the people are calling them as 'Gorhe' instead of 'Phule'.

Mahatma Phule was the second son of Chimnabai and Govindrao. He was born on 11th April 1827. Brahmins were statesman/rulers and they feel that the poor/inferior/low caste

people are born to be serve as a servant for their family and caste. Brahmins were considering themselves socio-politically and culturally superior than others. Mahatma Gandhi gave glorification to Jyotiba Phule by calling him as a 'Mahatma'. Veer Savarkar admired Phule as a 'social revolutionary' and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar considers him as his 'Guru'. Justice Ranade takes his co-operation to create awareness about the social, political, educational, religious and economic reforms among the society. The mother of Jyoti was passed away when he was one year old. After the death of Chimnabai, Govindrao did not marry with other woman but he offered babysitter as a caretaker for Rajaram and Jyotirao. In those days, education was only rights of the uppercaste people or Brahmins and did not allow the lower caste or marginal people of society. Govindrao was not educated but he was very attentive about the education of Jyoti. At that time, there was not any awareness about education among the downtrodden masses of the society. Education was very worst in the rural area because there was Pantoji (Brahmin) as a teacher who taught only to the children of businessperson and the rich people. There was hegemony of particular class in the education. In this regard, it is worthwhile to quote Mahatma Phule:

“Let there be schools for the Shudra in every village, but away with all Brahmin school masters! The Shudras are the life and sinews of the country, and it is to them alone and not to the Brahmins that the Government must ever look to tide them over their difficulties, financial as well as political. If the hearts and minds of the Shudras are made happy and contented, the British Government need have no fear for their loyalty in the future” (Web).

Mahatma Phule was very aggressive about the education for the low caste people like SC, ST and OBC because they are deprived from the mainstream of society. He realised that there is only one cause for their socio-political and cultural exploitation was a lack of education. In every village, there should be school for Shudras without Brahmin school masters because they were making discrimination among the students on the basis of caste, creed and religion.

In 1836, the government has started the 'gram' (rural) school as an experiment with the expenditure of the then government. There were writing; reading and mathematics were fundamentals subjects of teaching learning. As per the rules and regulations of British East India Company in 1813, 'Education' opens to all Indian. Education plays a very vital role in making and changing of new social policy and reformation in the society. In 19th century, an entire world turns into westernization. The influence of western culture became predominant on the culture of India. Earlier, Britishers were arrived as a colonizer in India. Later on, they established their government and became ruler in India. It has long lasting influence on the

social structure and government system of India. Due to these consequences, government has made certain changes in the policy of education. Reformation in education took place only because of two reasons: British government requires clerical servant in their respective offices for working purposes who have knowledge of English language. This policy helps to develop an ambition of education among every Indians. Christian Missionaries had started Marathi schools at Pune in 1824. After that, there was a big dispute among the people to take education through English or their own native language. One group said that the western education should be given through English language to all Indian. The second group said that the Eastern education should be given through the language of their own country. The first Law Minister and Government Education Committee Chairman, Thomas Babington Macaulay had declared that the western education should be given through English language only to all Indian. The main purpose of British government was to spread European literature and science through education among the Indians. At that time, there were a number of hindrances and obstacles in the way of education. Brahmins considered that the 'education is only a cup of tea of Brahmins and not for others'. Brahmin community considered superior themselves than others for education because 'others' are inferior to them in their status, caste and religion. Untouchables and women were marginal and Brahmins living in the center of the society. They were far away from the education and living in an ignorance without taking education. Due to lack of education, uncertain kind of fear and phobia created in the mind of the people belongs to the lower caste in the society. They were indulging into unreal traditions and customs of religion created by the higher caste people in the society. Mahatma Phule first identified the cause of this unknown fear in the mind of lower people is education.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was admitted to Scottish High School, Poona (now Pune), in 1841. In that school, he met to Sadashiv Ballal Gowande, who was a very close friend of Phule throughout his life. Jyoti and Gowande were close friend from their school days. From their school days, both were very ambitious and dedicated to their works. They were influenced by reading an autobiography of Shivaji Maharaj and Washington. They were highly inspired by gallant works, love about their country with grandeur ambition of Shivaji Maharaj and Washington. They took oath to make reformation in the life of country brothers. They were highly influenced by the book, 'Rights of Man' written by Thomas Pen. In Europe, the book was very popular and the common people described it as a 'Bible'. They devoted their entire life for the welfare of entire humankind.

The year of eighteen forty eight(1848) was a crucial year for Jyoti when he was invited for marriage ceremony of his Brahmin friend who was very akin to him. Before to the

marriage ceremony, there was a procession organized for bridegroom with Brahmin women, men and children. There was a very rare people belong to other communities in the marriage ceremony. Brahmins were very orthodox in nature when they saw a boy belong to Mali caste was wondering in the procession of bridegroom. Because of superiority complex or orthodox nature, one Brahmin man irritated upon Jyoti and said, "How did you dare to walk with Brahmin, Aye! Shudra! You forgot all restrictions laid down by the caste and custom, you are humiliating us. You are considering yourself equal to us" (Keer 20). Brahmins did not consider other as equal to them because they presumed that these people are Shudras and Untouchables and they are not equal to us. Jyotiba was totally shocked and confused by listening such a humiliating words through the mouth of that Brahmin man. Suddenly, he awakened with his consciousness and humiliating words of Brahmin hurt him a lot. Instantly, he left the procession of bridegroom with stern anger and reached at home with new resolution. Jyoti's father believes in old tradition and custom, he said; 'we belong to the lower caste, how we can be equal to Brahmins. They are pioneer in religious and social life' (Keer 20). The people belong to other castes or untouchables are born to be ruled by the Brahmins. They were born in slavery and died in the slavery.

After such humiliation in marriage ceremony, Jyoti took resolution to revolt against the pre-established Brahmin community. Jyoti did not consider traditional opinion of his father and stands against odds created by Brahmin community for the untouchables and lower caste people of society. Here I quote statement made by Jyotiba, 'Social slavery is very dangerous than political slavery' (Keer 20). Jyoti pointed out that the caste discrimination is the biggest enemy of organization, unity and cultural life of people in Indian society. Its external nature was appeared in the form of Brahmanshahi (dynasty). Brahmins were exploiting the lower caste people on the basis of their lower caste. Jyotirao Phule had tried to eliminate their predefined social structure of Brahmin community from Indian society. He also eliminated the concept of superior and inferior from the eyes of Indian society. Ram Mohan Roy, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Jaggannath Shankar Seth, Balshashtri Jambhekar and Krushnashashtri Chiplunkar were contemporaries of Jyotiba Phule. They all joined government services but Jyotiba did not join any government service because his goal was different from them. He had made up his mind to fight for the fundamental rights of downtrodden people like education, social, cultural and religious equilibrium for Mahars, Mangs, Chamars and Others in Indian society. He had spent his entire life for the betterment of SC, ST and OBC category.

The year 1848 was a revolutionary year because Phule had started the first girl's school in Bhidewada in Pune and Karl Marx had published his historical dissertation on "Communist Manifesto" (1848). In America, the movement of women salvation was started by at Welsian Church. In India, vice versa, women were living in slavery under the domination of patriarchal society. As per the concept of religion, Brahmins considered the women inferior to men in Indian society. They considered women secondary to men. Bal Shastri Jambhekar and Bhau Mahajan severely attacked on the false prejudice and ignorance of Hindu society. They emphasized equal status of women with men, with this equality social development cannot be possible. They tried to create awareness about the social reformation in the society. Jyotiba said, education is a mean to lead developed life. Education gives the knowledge of wrong and right and the people can think properly with the help of education. Education is a key to develop critical thinking intellectually. Phule started first girls' school in Pune to make them empower in Indian society with male. He realized that women should have her independent voice in the society accompany with men. Jyotiba himself taught some subjects in that school but he could not find any other teachers for teaching. Brahmins have spread a prejudice that education is a sacred work only for superior caste or people like them. The students belong to Mangs, Mahars and other communities, if they learnt they would pollute the sacredness of education. Mahatma Phule gave an importance to women education because he realized that if woman learnt, she would educate her entire family. Indian society had a negligible attitude towards women education, but Phule was well aware with the importance of women education. It is worthwhile to quote Miss. Farar from the book, *Mahatma Jyotirao Phule* of Dhanjay Keer 'who expressed her deep sense of distress or sorrow about the negligible attitude of Indian society towards the education of women' (Keer 25). The children of Mangs, Mahars (untouchables) and others were learning in the school started by Phule in 1848.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule was a revolutionary leader who became a voice of downtrodden, untouchables and others in Indian society. They are real pioneer of women education. It is very unfortunate to say that the women did not know the real sacrifice of Savitribai Phule for their education. Today, women have occupied very important position in different sectors and equal status in the society only because of Savitribai Phule. It is heart aching to say that these women are not still worshipping 'Savitri' as real goddesses of knowledge instead of 'Sarasvati'. They should have to start new tradition by worshipping Savitribai before commencement of any programme. Mahatma Phule had begun women education by educating his wife, Savitri and trained her for the school of untouchable girls.

She was the first modern women teacher in India and her birthday; 3rd July should be celebrated as 'Teacher Day'. Mahatma Phule had started institutes like 'Pune Female Native Schools' and 'Society for Promoting Education for Mahar and Mangs'. Jyotirao taught her wife, Savitri at home and made her ready to teach in the girl's school. Savitribai had to face stern opposition from the orthodox society, while walking on the street; people were throwing stone and dung on her body for teaching girls and the people from underprivileged society. It is very apt to quote Savitribai Phule who said; 'Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world'.

Jyotiba firmly believed that education would change position of Indian women in society. Despite opposition of orthodox (Brahmin) community, Jyotiba and Savitribai continued their works of education for women and untouchables. Jyotiba had a strong assurance that women's education will make emancipation of women from this orthodox and oppressed society. Women will come out of closet in public domain with the help of education only. Jyotiba thought that 'we are human beings and we should have equal rights and status as a human being'. The real empowerment of women can be happen through education. Mahatma Phule appealed to the people to send their children to the schools that was opened for untouchables and women. He recommended that education should be compulsory, universal and innovative education should be given to the untouchables and women. According to Mahatma Phule, education is a priority of women and untouchables (lower caste people) for all-inclusive development of society. Phule fought incessantly for fundamental rights of education for the lower caste people and women without considering the caste, creed and religion. It is important to quote Jyotiba Phule from his book, *Cultivator's Whipcord* (1881) where he said:

"Without education, wisdom was lost;

Without wisdom, morals were lost;

Without morals, development was lost; without development, wealth was lost;

Without wealth, the Shudras were ruined;

So much has happened through lack of education." (Web)

Mahatma Phule had identified importance of education for untouchables and others to maintain social equilibrium in the society. Education will make them strong to fight against odds arrived in their lives during the then period of orthodox (Brahmin) society. The proper education will make them eligible to stand on their own legs. He tried to eliminate untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste because 'we are all equal human beings, so we cannot differentiate the people on the basis of caste, creed and religion'.

Education is only medium that give them(lower caste people) social, political, educational, cultural and economic rights. It is said that, 'if we want demolish or destruct any country, we have to first demolish education of that country'. Mahatma Phule was very well aware about importance of education, so he made awareness among Mahars, Mangs and OBC about education. If untouchables and women educated they will survive strongly in this world. Swami Vivekananda said in his work, 'Ignorance is Death! Knowledge is Life!' He strongly condemned stubborn behaviour of Brahmin community with untouchables and women. He made aware Shudras, AtiShudras and Women about education. He advocated them to take education to make them powerful and they are not slaves but human beings. Mahatma Phule was the real father of social revolution in India.

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