

New Knowledge of Social Realities and a new method for change in Late Colonial Maharashtra

Name- Santosh Pandhari Suradkar

Address - Assistant Professor, Department of History, Gondwana University, Gadchiroli- 442605

Mob- 9953516144

Email- suradkarsantosh@gmail.com

Mahatma Jotirao Govindrao Phule was born into Mali caste (gardener) in 1827. Phule spent his whole life in Pune city, which was dominated by Brahmanical cultural, religious and political glory. Originally, Jotirao's family known as Gorhays came from Katgun village in Satara district of Maharashtra. Although he started his schooling in *Gavhathi* local school, he had to leave the school in order to help his father in family farming. Two of his neighbours were impressed by Jotirao's intelligence and his thirst for knowledge. One was a Muslim teacher, and another was a Christian gentleman who persuaded his father Govindrao to allow him to study in a secondary school. In his childhood, he came in contact with Muslim friends, and due to their criticism of the Hindu religion and caste distinction, and also due to missionaries' work, he became aware of Hindu religion and caste system.¹

In addition, an incident took place in 1848 that made him aware of the tyranny caste system wielded and the predominant position of the Brahmins in the social set-up. He was invited to attend a wedding of one of his Brahmin friends. As the bridegroom was taken in a procession, Jotirao accompanied him along with the relatives of his Brahmin friend. Coming to know the fact that Jotirao belonged to the Mali caste, which was considered inferior by the Brahmins, the relatives of the bridegroom insulted and abused him. Jotirao left the procession, returned home with tears in his eyes, and narrated his experience to his father who tried to pacify him. After this incident, Jotirao made up his mind to defy the caste system and serve the Shudras and women who were deprived of all their rights as human beings under the caste system.

Jotirao gave priority to education as a tool of social change, and he believed that educating women was in a sense educating society; therefore, in 1848 he started a girl's school, where his wife Savitribai was the first teacher in modern time. As a result of it, the reactionaries threatened Jotirao's father with dire consequences if he did not dissociate himself from his son's activities. Yielding to the pressure, Jotirao's father asked his son and the daughter-in-law to leave his house as both of them refused to give up their noble endeavour and in fact established another school for Mang and Mahar caste.² Phule realised that without education they would not realise their human rights. On 25th March 1853, 'The Poona Observer and Deccan Weekly report', published his letter about this Mang and Mahar School, wherein he described "this event as a new era in the Hindu cultural history."³ On 24th September 1873, he established a social organisation called '*Satyashodhak Samaj*', which was to spread within and without Maharashtra. According to Rosalind O'Hanlon, "this initiative set off a broad and very active movement of the lower castes which had to have a profound effect upon the growth of the political organisation in the Bombay Presidency, and the shaping of the nationalist movement towards the end of the century".⁴ In his life, he worked for the cause of Shudras and Ati-Shudras and women's emancipation and to bring about a complete transformation in the culture and life of the oppressed people. Till his death in 1890, he was a member of the *Satyashodhak Samaj*.

In 1875, in its organisational report, the *Satyashodhak Samaj* described its goal as the emancipation of the Shudras (socially backward castes) from the Brahmin, Bhat, Joshi and Upadhyay's exploitation. It is through the religious text that, these subordinate castes have been exploiting Shudras for thousands of years. Therefore, to educate

¹Y D Phadke (ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai. 2006. p.336.

²Both caste are untouchables, they do not come under Varna system. Phule called them ati-Shudra. In present time they are in scheduled caste.

³Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai. 2006. p.654.

⁴Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste conflict and ideology*, Orient Longman, Cambridge University Press, p.1.

Shudras to be aware of their rights was the mission of the Samaj.⁵ The Satyashodhak Samaj included all the socially suppressed and oppressed people and exploited Shudras and Ati-Shudras, labours, farmers and women of all castes.

Phule and his Satyashodhak movement adopted some methodological approach from anti-caste tradition and from modern era of enlightenment to be critical analyse the dominant culture. His work completely varied from that of other organisations.

Method of social change

If historically one would evaluate the history of the oppressed lower castes, one would realize the fact that Phule's anti-caste ideology had a strong base in traditional anti-caste movements based on rationality. Before the establishment of the Satyashodhak Samaj, the ideas of Kabir and Tukaram were needed to congregate Shudras and Ati-Shudras. Like Tukaram, Phule attacked the notion of caste in his writings, but he never called the poems of Tukaram *abhang*, rather he identified them as *akhand*. Due to its limitations, the Bhakti movement produced spiritual enlightenment rather than having a major impact on the caste system. This might be the reason that Phule was against idolising the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra.⁶ But Phule's criticism of the Hindu religion was on the basis of rationality which was used by Bhakti movement in medieval Maharashtra.

In India, Buddhism and Jainism had a strong tradition of being anti-Varna caste. These ideologies were working in different forms in various epochs. In nineteenth-century caste discourse, some reformers started to use this traditional anti-caste ideology to liberate people from mental slavery. The Buddhist text '*vajrasuchi*' gave philosophical support by providing rational discourse to all Maharashtrian anti-caste religious movements.⁷ Dadoba Pandurang, a religious revolution of the nineteenth century, was influenced by this Buddhist text enabling him to discourse on caste distinction.⁸ Phule was very much influenced by *vajrasuchi's* method in a new form in the modern period and interpreted all Hindu myths through this method. *Vajrasuchi* critically appraised the story of caste origin, which Phule made use to expose the religious authority of caste. With rational vision, he appraised the origin of the four Varnas and raised a question that while the four Varnas came from Brahma's body where then the British and other non-Indians came from. Further, he wondered how different parts of the body could give birth. The domination of Brahmin religion was built on the principle of the Vedas. In other words, the Vedas were the backbone for all types of social stratification including Brahmin domination, caste system and gender discrimination.⁹

Phule influenced by 'a disputable revolutionary liberal thinker of the time'. It was none other than Thomas Paine and his writings on the questions of 'rights of man'. His writings reflected discontent against British government's policy towards black people. In the eighteenth century, Thomas Paine supported French revolution for upholding universal human values. Inspired by this work, Phule debunked the liberal face of Brahmins who themselves gave this first book of Thomas Paine to divert his ideas against Britishers and Christianity. Thomas Paine's work was known for its polemics against Christianity and the British government and the same was used by Brahmins to criticise foreign rule in India. Through this method, Phule made a point that Puranic and Vedic stories were written without any coherence. Phule made it clear that nobody can say that in Ramayana and Mahabharata all notions are true and believable.¹⁰ He critically described stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, and showed that there is no coherence between these stories. Using his rational critique, he wanted to initiate the process of thinking and wondering in the minds of Shudras and Ati-Shudras.

Phule utilized some myths and stories to construct the history of Shudras that spoke of a casteless society before the Aryan invasion. These mythical stories created a sense of fellow consciousness among Shudras and Ati-Shudras which they lacked for thousands years. He mentioned that the cause for shudras' predicament was nothing but

⁵Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai.2006.p.205.

⁶*Ibid*.p.595.

⁷ Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabhodhan Aani Varga Jati Prabhutva*, Sugava Prakashan, Pune, 2007, p.310.

⁸*Ibid* .p.310.

⁹*Ibid*, p.324.

¹⁰Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai.2006.p.488.

mental slavery rooted in the caste system. Thus, he appealed to the Aryans and non-Aryans to annihilate the caste system as both categories were victims of this poisonous system.

Phule was very idealistic and rational in his approach. He used to emphasise that a movement must be founded based on true faith by using good means rather than applying improper means to achieve the aim. Phule used Brahmanical texts to dig out the history of Shudras and Ati-Shudras from the perspective of lower castes. Phule wrote about historians and their prejudices operating while writing about the past. In this regard, he showed how caste mentality does work in writing history. Therefore, Brahmins created history in such a manner that it should benefit their caste.

Aryan and non-Aryan Struggle and the Origin of Caste

Aryan and non-Aryan struggle was a central issue taken up by the nineteenth century social reformers. Among them the interpretation of Aryan and non-Aryan struggle was quite different. Tilak, for example, emphasised the superiority of Aryan culture and considered the conquest, and assimilation of non-Aryans, as a sign, not of tyranny and injustice, but strength and vitality of the Aryan races. On the other side, Mahadeva Govind Ranade presented the religious ideas of the Aryans as a basis for national political unity and held the primitive people of south India responsible for corruption of Aryan customs by introducing customs that degraded women such as sati, polygamy, polyandry and communal land tenure'.¹¹ R G Bhandarkar and G G Agarkar spoke of Aryan glory. Phule's interpretation of the origin of caste system was entirely different.

According to Phule, Aryans came from Iran in groups in search of a prosperous wealthy and fertile land. Phule mentioned, in his literature, that the Aryans entry was the cause of degradation of India. He argued that "the extreme fertility of the soil in India, its rich productions, the proverbial wealth of its people, and the other innumerable gifts which this favoured land enjoys, and which have more recently tempted the cupidity of the western nations, no doubt, attracted the Aryans, who came to India, not as simple emigrants with peaceful intentions of colonization, but as conquerors."¹² Whether they (Aryan) came from Iran or anywhere else, is beside the point. Phule was not writing Aryan theory from a sociological point of view, but his interpretation of history provided strength to his struggle. He rejected the history of Shudras and Ati-Shudras written from Brahmanical perspective. If we keep this in mind, we can make sense of his polemic, and see its historical necessity and inevitability.¹³

According to Hindu texts, Aryan period was very progressive, glorious and golden period. Phule squarely denied the above interpretation and argued that Bali's kingdom was the golden period in Indian history. According to Phule, "there was no distinction in Bali's state. The kingdoms of most of these rulers (chiefs) were in prosperous condition, and it would be no exaggeration to say that the land of king Bali was literally flowing with milk and honey. Just then, the Aryans i.e. the Iranians discovered the useful and novel art of archery. So some adventurous, violent, covetous and ever avaricious Iranian Brahmins, Iranian Kshatriyas and Iranian Vaishyas banded together and invaded this land a number of times and, it is rumoured that at the end of the their campaigns, the Aryans flayed the skin off the bodies of the brave warriors of this land."¹⁴

Further, he described that Aryans subjugated or displaced the aboriginal people after defeating them and called aboriginal people by such opprobrious terms as Shudras 'insignificant', mahari 'the great foe', antjyaja, chandal etc.¹⁵ Further he says "Under such leaders as Brahma, Purshram and others, the Brahmins waged very protracted wars against the original inhabitants. They eventually succeeded in establishing their supremacy and subjugating the aborigines to their entire control. Accounts of these conquests, enveloped with a mass of incredible fiction, are found in the books of the Brahmins."¹⁶ Later when Brahma dies these Aryan, people began to be called Brahmins.

¹¹Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste conflict and ideology*, Orient Longman, Cambridge University Press, p.149.

¹²Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai.2006.p.128.

¹³ G P Deshpande, (Ed) *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, Left Word Publication, New Delhi, 2002, p. 7.

¹⁴P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-2 Selection*, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay. 1991. p.8.

¹⁵Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai.2006.p.128.

¹⁶*Ibid*.p.129.

Later on, the laws were developed to impose restrictions upon Shudras and Ati-Shudras. When they fought with aboriginal people, Mahars gave them a tough fight; therefore they were treated poorly, and were made outcastes.

Regarding the origin of caste, he wrote that earlier, there were no distinctions between farmers. Later on some farmers continually engaged in land cultivation and became Kunbis, those who started gardening became Malis, and those who started domesticating animals became dhangars. Initially this type of distinctions was based on materialistic changes, but later it came to be called caste.¹⁷

Phule called Shudras and Ati-Shudras as Kshatriyas. However, in his point of view Kshatriya means those who were real inhabitants of this land, of this 'Kshatra' region. They used to be known as astiks, pishachas, rakshasas, ahirs, kakatas, bhuts, kolis, mangs, mahars etc. After defeating the aboriginal people of this land, the Aryans, who were divided into three Varnas, incorporated shudras as a fourth category of Varna, thus came into existence the 'chaturvarna system'. In the kingdom of Bali there was no notion of superiority and inferiority within society, all were equal. But Aryans came with their three classes and adopted Shudras as the fourth class. He argued that "finally the Aryans created a fourth category (class) comprising all the Shudras in the land of Baliraja and assimilated them among the Iranian Brahmins, the Iranian Kshatriyas, and the Iranian Vaishyas. They (the Aryan Brahmins) further banned imparting education (instruction) to the original (brave) Kshatriyas of this land (of Bali) i.e. the Shudras and Ati-Shudras here".¹⁸ Thus, Phule has made the ideas behind the chaturvarna clear and stressed that Varna system came into existence due to Aryan people to India.

According to Phule's point of view, caste affiliation cannot be determined on the basis of personal qualities. He wrote, "We cannot determine the various caste distinctions based on the temperaments or personal nature or personal qualities of different human beings. Some parents provided a fine liberal education to their children and made them well behaved and well trained, and thus became qualified to shoulder high responsibilities (positions). On the other hand there are other parents who take great pains (efforts) to provide their children with the best possible education, but they are extremely dull and un-receptive, and hence turn out to be 'learned fools' and vicious to boot, with the result that they tend to perform mean jobs. (You will also grant that) virtue or vice is not hereditary (which can be passed on by the parents to their children). For, we often find that the children of virtuous and profoundly learned parents do not turn out always as virtuous. Nor do the children of cunning (shrewd) Aryan Brahmins turn out to be as virtuous as the Shankaracharya himself. So an impartial and just gentleman can never say that if we choose intelligent children of the Ati-Shudra Chamars (shoe-makers) and train them properly they will not become scholars who will hold a candle even to the Shankaracharya himself."¹⁹ Through this interpretation, Phule gives hopes of inspiration to Shudras and Ati-Shudras that they can break caste restrictions and reach a high level. He broke Hindu religious concepts basing on which caste occupation is decided as also social status.

Further he wrote that our creator had sympathy about Shudras and Ati-Shudras' condition, therefore he always sent people who were against caste system. Phule looks towards Mohammedans as believers in equality. He wrote, "Our most compassionate creator, in his infinite mercy, sent the Mohammedans who believe in him as our common creator and who had supplanted (destroyed) all invidious caste distinctions among them, to this country in order to liberate the helpless (crippled) Shudras and Ati-Shudras from the trammels of the cunning, wicked Aryan thralldom. But unfortunately the Mohammedans set at nought his commendable commands and were given to a luxurious way of life such as song and dance, soft and enervating comforts of life and a taste for good and rich viands. Thus, they were so intoxicated with power and luxury (pelf) that they imagined themselves to be in the seventh heaven. So incensed was our creator with the Mohammedans that he cast them into the utmost straits and destroyed all their glory and grandeur".²⁰ After failure of Mohammedans, he saw the liberators in the English people and said, "the English people rose to prominence and prosperity from a barbarous state, endowed them with many admirable qualities (of head and heart) such as bravery, and sent them (directed them) to our country to accomplish his mission of releasing the helpless Shudras and Ati-Shudras in our land from the trammels of the cunning and wicked Aryan

¹⁷*Ibid* .p.263.

¹⁸P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule Vol-2 Selection*, Government of Maharashtra Bombay. 1991. P.8.

¹⁹*Ibid*. P.7.

²⁰*Ibid*. P.10.

Brahmins' thralldom".²¹ He accepted that under the British government, we got individual freedom to present our thoughts without any hesitation.²² Phule saw deism in Muslim and Christian religions as that which created goodwill and brotherhood in society and made all equal in their religion. Moreover, Christianity and Islam emanate not as unequal religions rather they argued for equality; therefore, he talks in favour of both religions but against Hindu religion.²³ Here he saw that both religions were not only destroyers of Brahmin domination but also against idol-worship.

Phule described all aboriginal castes as Shudras and Ati-Shudras and endeavoured to connect them into one identity. It was the process of demarcating Shudras identity from Brahmin in order to foster a feeling of unity among them, and widen the struggle against Brahmanism to establish universal principle of humanity.

Formation of new identity

The interpretation of the term 'Maratha' was on a regional basis comprising all from Mahar through Brahmin in Maharashtra.²⁴ It means that Phule was conscious that Maratha identity itself was a regional identity, in which he included Mahar and Mang in one identity i.e. Maharashtrian untouchable castes. Phule acknowledged the Brahmins' interpretation that there are only two Varnas in this fourth age called *Satiyug*. It was easy for Phule to gather non-Brahmin people in one identity. Phule called these non-Brahmin castes Bahujan.²⁵ In addition, he called to Shudras and Ati-Shudras Kshatriya. Wherein, in his point of view they are aboriginal of Indian land.

Education to Shudras' and Ati-Shudras' Emancipation

Phule's undertaking the emancipatory venture was aware education was an imperative and a main weapon to free oppressed people from mental slavery. Therefore, his proposition to government that if Shudras and Ati-Shudras children are not willing to go school then government should make a law for compulsory education. To materialise his action, he established schools, teaching students in various disciplines.

When British government established Hunter commission for education, Phule addressed the commission, submitted some demands, and suggested the significance of compulsory education until at least 12 years of age for children.²⁶ He was annoyed by the peoples' attitude of spending huge money to establish temples, but not to open schools for Shudras and Ati-Shudras children. Phule knew that the economic backwardness would not permit Shudra students to attend school. Phule gave more examples about why Shudras and Ati-Shudras students are educationally backward. In that he says due to caste distinction, untouchable castes were prohibited from taking education.²⁷ Shudras got isolated because British government was spending money on higher education instead of primary education.

His comparative understanding of European slavery with the slavery of Shudras and Ati-Shudras came with a conclusion that Indian slavery is worst than European slavery and he admired, those who fought against domestic slavery.²⁸ He knew that British ignorance about Brahmin exploitation of Shudras in the past and present times. Hence, he emphasised British writers to comprehend inhuman exploitation of Shudras, which might instigate them to know what they have missed out. To emancipate Shudras and Ati-Shudras from caste practices, he asked British government to intervene and prohibit the social practice or social evils by making law to this effect. Phule said due to illiteracy Shudras have a lack of self-respect, economically very poor and they are always dependent on others.²⁹

Religion and exploitation

²¹P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-2 Selection*, Government of Maharashtra Bombay. 1991. P.11.

²² Hari Narke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule: Shodhachya Navya Vata*, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jotirao Phule Aani Rajashri Shahu Charitra Sadhane Prakashan Samity, Maharashtra Shasan, 2006, p.26.

²³*Ibid*, p.27.

²⁴Y D Phadke (ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal,Mumbai.2006.p.337.

²⁵*Ibid*.p.772.

²⁶*Ibid*.p.145.

²⁷*Ibid* .p.767.

²⁸*Ibid*.p.124.

²⁹ *Ibid*.p.767.

In Hindu culture, religion is at a high level to which nobody can criticise. Phule called to Hindu religion as an artificial religion crusader against Hindu religion because its religious text is saying that this religion is created by God, but Phule denied their interpretation and gave importance to natural religion rather favouring artificial religion like Hinduism. According to Phule, truth is natural which is same everywhere. Hence, he called his religion *Sarvajanik Satyadharma*.

Phule wrote that Arya Brahmin made religious text to exploit Shudras. This exploitation has occupied their whole life. Before to birth any Shudras child, from that time religious rituals start's to till his death, not only death after death his son should do death anniversary rituals. Through these rituals, Shudra got exploited whole life.

The Aryan banned on Shudras education and they are exploiting them from thousands of year, whose evidence gets in Manu Smriti. While this discrimination was going on that time Buddhism played a great role to emancipate Shudra from Brahmins artificial religion. Later Shankaracharya took the support of Turkey people to finished Buddhist people, and thereafter Shankaracharya made some changes in Hindu religion to become more firm.

In colonial period, mostly social reformer and nationalist leader were searching their backwardness in their history. There was misconception in the minds of Shudra that cause of their backward or slavery of foreign government was leaving of their own religion but Phule revealed that the Hindu religion and Brahmin conspiracy was the root cause of their slavery. Although, Hindu religion reformer had different interpretation but everyone referred Brahmanical text source of their religion.

According to Phule, Aryan came to India they make slave to Shudras and Ati-Shudras for longer time but this slavery could not sustain without religious text in which every one had assigned their caste occupation, which was basically a religious duty. In this manner Brahmin brought religion in every human act like the Shudras religion to serve the Brahmin, doing thief its thefts religion, doing fraud its fraud's religion, to wash cloth its washer man's religion etc.³⁰ Therefore we can see in Indian society, human behaviour is bound in religion. All human acts will be verified through the religion. Hence, in Indian society, for women there is *Stridharma* (women's religion), therein she is totally imprisoned from thousands year, she could not challenge about her slavery.

In Hindu religion, caste occupation has been related with Dharma. According to Hindu Religion, performing the act of caste occupation is the duty towards religion, for instance, if cobbler makes shoes it is cobbler's religion and so on. Phule rejected this religious concept with sharp remark that it is not their religion but a profession.³¹ They prohibited uttering against religion by contextualising notions into law to prevent other castes from raising their voices. An individual should follow the code of law while performing his caste duty. To program the minds of those belonging to lower castes, they constructed the gospel of occupational relation with code of law. According to Phule, it was not their religious duty; rather it was their profession where one could change as per his capability. It implies that Phule attacked on hereditary occupation where man cannot change one's social status. Through this idea, Phule did open the process of social endosmosis by giving more stress on individualism. Phule relates individual freedom with human rights, which according to him are natural rights.

By creating the concept of destiny, according to Phule, Brahmins used to fool the Shudras and Ati-Shudras for their own personal interests. He linked mental attitude of people to destiny to their thinking pattern. Brahmins never took the responsibility of something bad that would happen to Shudras and Ati-Shudras but diverted their mind to destiny so that the socially backward will always think that whatever wrong happened to them was predestined. Therefore, Phule was totally against the Hindu concept of fatalism that destiny extends the hope of a better future to the next birth.

In Phule's view, every religion will have at least a modicum of truth. In addition, he says in one home a woman can follow Buddhism, her husband can follow Christianity, their daughter can follow Islam and if their son wants to follow Sarvajanik Satyadharma, he can.³² Here the significant thing is that when he counted all religions he did not count Hinduism with in the framework of religion, which suggested that he had made up his mind that people should

³⁰*Ibid*.p.371.

³¹*Ibid* .p.482.

³²*Ibid*.p.533.

not follow Hinduism. Phule concluded that being part of Hindu religion, one cannot change one's social position and one cannot annihilate caste system. He says that, there is no single religion that contains absolute truth.

According to Phule, Brahmins are saying that we accepted Vyas and Vasishta Rishis (saint) as Brahmins in our religion but they were not Brahmins they were sons of Shudra women. Then Phule asked the counter question; but their fathers were Brahmins, that's why you allowed them in your religion and that is not a big deal. The question is; how many Shudra people did you allow into your religion?³³

According to Phule, Hindu religion and culture have patriarchal values because of which Brahmin women were subject to inhuman conditions. Hence, Phule attacked patriarchy as a system. According to Phule, Brahmins have imposed restrictions on women through religion. Most of the religious texts have been written by men and in their own favour. As per Phule's point of view, there is no religion which is written by women. If women were learned enough, then men would never have been able to be so partial and so deceitful.³⁴ Phule considered women as being discriminated within caste system.

God and Exploitation

In Hindu religion, there are stories of incarnation of Vishnu. He debunked all these stories based on rationality. While exploring these stories, he used Thomas Paine's method that is 'in the truth there must be coherence' and if there is no coherence, it means that it is not the truth.

Mahatma Phule wrote that when the Aryans entered India, they made the Shudras slaves, politically and then mentally. According to Phule, it was a mental slavery, which they created through the ban on Shudras' education.³⁵ He wrote that to make Shudras permanent slaves, Aryans wrote some fake texts in their own interest. Later, Aryans said to the Shudras that God dictated these texts. God's purpose was that Shudra would provide service to the Brahmins for fulfilling their life.³⁶ On this basis, the text got legal authority; therefore, nobody could challenge the text. With this legal sanction, they were able to call themselves superior. In this way, the notion of caste and Varna gets indirect legal authority. The Veda's statement that the Four Varnas were born out of four parts of primeval man gives support to the theory of origin of Varna caste system.³⁷ Let us note the simple fact that Phule himself was firmly against any notion of revelation.³⁸

Phule's notion of God was different from that of the Hindu God. Phule called his God 'creator'. He made his God's image based on rationality and humanity. Phule got the concept of his God from deism and from Thomas Paine. According to Paine, our 'Maker' has made us all humans and have got freedom by birth and all are equal by birth. ³⁹ Thus, he called God in Marathi as Nirmik.

Brahma was the main figure in Brahmin religion because he was the creator of Varna system. Therefore, Phule critically discussed his image. He showed how Brahma was immoral and tried to destroy his image. Phule verified the Hindu notion for example; Hindu God is formless, then how did he write the four Vedas. Further, he asked the question that even if the God wrote Vedas in Sanskrit and in the world only few people know Sanskrit, then how can we say that he made Vedas for all human beings and for their emancipation. In addition, if God made Vedas for all human beings then Brahmin alone would not have been allowed to read the Vedas.

Brahmanical domination

According to Phule, Brahmins have created some stories to show how they are more respectable than God. He says, They have left it on record, in one of their spurious scriptures, that when "the Sage Bhrigu kicked Lord Vishnu (or Adi-Narayan as they rever) on his chest, he (Vishnu) began to rub (massage) Bhrigu's foot gently lest it (Bhrigu's

³³ *Ibid* .p.367.

³⁴ *Ibid*.p.531.

³⁵ *Ibid*.p.146.

³⁶ *Ibid*.p.138.

³⁷ Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabhodhan Aani Varga Jati Prabhutva*, Sugava Prakashan, Pune, 2007, p.312.

³⁸ G P Deshpande, *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, Left Word Publication, New Delhi, 2002, p. 10.

³⁹ Hari Narke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Goverao Granth*, Dr. Babahsaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule Aani Rajashri Shahu Charitra Sadhane Prakashan Samity, Mumbai, p. 253.

foot) was hurt (by the kick). One can clearly see through this subterfuge. As Adi-Narayan put up with the indignity of being kicked on his chest by Bhrigu and further demeaned him by gently rubbing (massaging) Bhrigu's foot, the Brahmins wanted to impress upon the minds of the Shudras that even if the Brahmins wanted to kick them and buffet them to death; still they should submit to this indignity meekly. This is the real intention or purpose of the Brahmins.⁴⁰ In this, Phule explained the story of a Brahmin who had made his image at a higher level than God had. The psychological message of this story was that if God hurts a Brahmin, he also feels bad and says sorry. Therefore, Shudras should follow politely, without any resistance, because Brahmins have authority, even are the real *Bhudeo*, Gods on earth.

Phule exposed the influence wielded by Brahmins on British administration. Phule knew the role of media in the reform movement,⁴¹ and he criticised the Marathi media, which was controlled by Brahmins. He criticised the British understanding that Brahmins are representatives of Hindus.

Therefore, he suggested to Queen Victoria that recruitments for all posts should be open to all, based on their caste numbers.⁴² However, most of the posts in the British administration were held by the Brahmins. In this regard, Phule states that if Shudras were not eligible for that post, they should recruit European workers but not Brahmins. This demand for the recruitments of Shudras in British administration was a demand for democratisation of government services. While nationalist leaders were demanding Indianisation of ICS which was related to the ambitions of the newly educated middle class, Phule was describing Shudras' and Ati-Shudras' representation in services.

Phule suggested that one has to leave behind the belief that Brahmins are superior. He attacked the practice of offering food to the Brahmins, in the religious rituals'. He says that when in the Shudras and Ati-Shudras' home any person dies, one has to offer food or donation to Brahmin, but when a Shudra dies, are Brahmins doing such rituals?⁴³

Phule called the Sarvajanik Sabha and National Congress as Arya Bhat Brahmins' organisations.⁴⁴ The Sarvajanik Sabha consisted mostly of Brahmins. Further, he said that if it is a universal organisation then have they ever thought about Mahars' deprivation, or brought them into their Sabha or struggled for them.⁴⁵ He raised the question; how many Mahar and Mangs are literate? This National Congress is always demanding that Indians be taken in services; demands pertain only to the elite castes.

Phule criticized some of the contemporary organisations about their isolation from caste issues. He raised the question in his book called *Satsar* that if Brahmo Samaj is saying that we do not believe in the caste distinctions, then why are they not making Shudras *Brahmo* and involving them in the Brahmo Samaj.⁴⁶ Phule concluded that now we do not want any Brahmanical organisation, therefore we do not need to join Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj.⁴⁷

Phule says Britishers were earning money from taxes, which they are getting in large numbers from Shudras and Ati-Shudras, but instead of using the money for providing education to Shudras and Ati-Shudras, they were spending this amount on Brahmins' children's education. Phule attacked the new educated middle class that was emerging from Brahmin community for not doing work for the rest of illiterate society. He showed how they are following their tradition and modernity in a new way. About their diplomacy Phule wrote that "it is a fact that the children of the cunning Bhat Brahmins were educated (became scholars) through the English schools opened for

⁴⁰P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-1 Slavery*, Government of Maharashtra Bombay. 1991. P.32.

⁴¹When some Bombay Satysamajist member gave printing press, at that time Phule was not interested to start news paper. And it was issue due to had dispute between Phule and his friend Bhalekar. Phule did apposed because due to Shudras illiteracy.

⁴²Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai.2006.p.618.

⁴³*Ibid*.p.461.

⁴⁴*Ibid*.p.519.

⁴⁵*Ibid*.p.520.

⁴⁶*Ibid*.p.365.

⁴⁷*Ibid*.p.366.

them out of the funds collected by way of taxes from the ignorant Shudras and Ati-Shudras. They desired to hide effectively from public view the Brahmanical plot which had a religious garb but whose kernel was purely political. This deceit was resorted to in order to save them from possible embarrassment. Thus blindfolded, they hastened to establish two Societies the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj. The religious philosophy on which these two societies are founded is a hotchpotch stealthily purloined from the tenets of Christianity. The (Brahmin) followers of these two societies (meditate, worship) with closed eyes before the imaginary Brahmaji, and by this ruse (practice) are attempting strenuously once more to instil into the minds of the ignorant Shudras and Ati-Shudras the old fiction (heresy) regarding the imaginary Brahma."⁴⁸

In Hindu religion, there was a ban on undertaking a journey out of the country over the seven seas. Phule connected this issue with Brahmins' conspiracy and wrote that the ban on journey over water was in order to continue their domination. They feared that if Shudras are exposed to Western society, this will demystify slavery and they would not tolerate Brahmin domination. Further, he says that due to this ban we could not progress. Brahmins prevented Shudras and Ati-Shudras from reading the Vedas because they did mischievous things in their past and the evidence to prove their mischief is in Vedas. Therefore, they were not willing to permit others to read Vedas nor did they encourage the translation of Vedas because they knew its reality and phoniness. According to Phule though the British were exploiting Shudras, their colonial policies were giving Shudras an opportunity to come up economically.

Phule looks upon Muslim and British rulers as the emancipators of Shudras and Ati-Shudras.⁴⁹ He argued that Muslims gave freedom to Shudras and Ati-Shudras from Arya Brahmins by involving them in their religion of one God and brotherhood and started inter caste marriage and inter dining with a human dignity. Christian missionaries and some other Britishers translated all Brahmanical literature that opened the eyes of Shudras and Ati-Shudras to the exploitation by Aryan Brahmins.

Phule attacked the Peshwai regime.⁵⁰ He exposed the inhuman attitude of the state towards Shudras and Ati-Shudras and the rigidity of caste in their rule with a high level of caste distinction. Rigidity somewhat was to be diluted under the British government when Shudras and Ati-Shudras got the opportunity to emancipate themselves. Therefore, thanking his creator he wrote that, "the roots are eternally grateful and beholden unto the all merciful God and they further pray to him, "O Lord! (we make this statement because) after the advent of the English Raj (rule) here, the common people heaved a sigh of relief, for they were freed, at long last, from the inhuman oppression and tyranny (born of envy and jealousy) religious, ethical administrative and diverse other manifestations (of the same)".⁵¹

He started social awareness campaign among the Shudras and Ati-Shudras to open their minds to the question as to why the Brahmins are the owners and Shudras and Ati-Shudras, their slaves. He exhorted the Shudras and Ati-Shudras to cast off the fake religion that is the root cause of their slavery. In his point of view, originally, there was no caste distinction among human beings and as they trusted on Brahmins' lip interpretation, it made them to believe on caste distinction without any enquiry. In Marathi, there is rhyme, '*rushiche kule ani nadiche mule yacha shodha karu naye*'⁵² meaning clan of rushi (saint) and root of river one should not ask. He attacked on this religious concept, which would not allow the non-Brahmins to do a critical analysis of the Hindu religion.

He wrote that Ramdas⁵³ created negative attitude in Shudra people, Ramdas says that you ask your own selves that there is nobody happy in the world. This way Ramdas tried to give a pessimistic lens to look at the world. Phule

⁴⁸P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-2 Selection*, Government of Maharashtra Bombay. 1991. P.24.

⁴⁹ Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai.2006.p.478.

⁵⁰State of Maratha rule by Brahmin minister called Peshwai.

⁵¹P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-1 Slavery*, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay. 1991. P.53.

⁵²Y D Phadke (ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal,Mumbai.2006.p.369.

⁵³Ramdas was Brahmin saint in Maharashtra.

criticized some Maharashtrian saints like Dnyaneshwar and Ramdas. He wrote that these saints did not talk on shudras' exploitation; they did work only for their own castes.⁵⁴

Besides social prejudices, Phule also identified economic reasons behind exploitation of Shudras-the preponderance of Brahmins, as landowners and administrators. The village accountant and keeper of land records was called *Kulkarni*. According to Phule, the Kulkarni played a great role in Shudras' exploitation. He said, "Many kulkarni's catch hold of some illiterate Shudras in dire distress, lend money to them and made them sign mortgage deeds in favour of themselves (the Kulkarnis). Kulkarnis incorporate a difficult set of condition of mortgage deeds from the ones they read out to the illiterate and their own caste men (other Kulkarnis) aid them in this nefarious practice. The illiterate unsuspecting Shudras affix their thumb impressions on these mortgage deeds, and in due course of time the rapacious Kulkarnis pocket the Vats of the Shudras, to the Shudras' eternal mortification and penury."⁵⁵

Myth to History

Phule's struggle was for the emancipation of Shudras and Ati-Shudras. Phule knew that in any struggle a people should know their history because history provided inspiration for an ideal society. Phule understood that history has been written by the Brahmins and Shudras' and Ati-Shudras' history was ignored by them. Therefore, Phule searched for Shudras' history in the Hindu religious texts and traditional local myths. For writing the history of Shudras and Ati-Shudras Phule, accessed Puranic myths and therefore he made traditions, customs and the Puranas.⁵⁶ Because Shudra were far away from education from long time, he was to follow a method that had been developed in Europe where Vico had introduced to rewriting history that Phule got through the Christian missionary.⁵⁷

In the Hindu religion, there is the story of king Bali who was killed by Vaman, the fifth incarnation of Vishnu. This story has been described in Mahabharata and Bhagawat Purana. In south Indian local tradition and particularly Keralites⁵⁸ and Maharashtrians recognised Bali as cultivators' king.⁵⁹ According to the Puranas, Bali was the king of Asuras and was very popular among the people. In this story Vaman asked Bali three steps of space and Bali granted, Vaman then put his three step in following way, first on Earth, sky and last step he putted leg on his head and pushing him into hell. After Bali's death, the Shudras people lost their glory and were degraded. Phule took support of this myth to depict Bali's kingdom as the golden era of India. Phule constructed Bali's image as a philanthropist king. Bali's state was divided in nine regions (*Khand*), therefore these regions' chief officers were called *Khandobas*. These officers *Bhairaba*, *Jotiba* and the nine *Khandobas*, all took care of people's happiness. To create Bali's image Phule used traditional myths and some stories, on whose basis he showed that Bali was (*as Rayatecha Raja*) people's king. He described how all people were happy in his state and were equal. Therefore, people still took his name in their daily lives. Phule says that therefore people are always expecting that Bali's kingdom should return. Due his supposed greatness, in Maharashtra there is one popular proverb that '*eeda pida jao aani Baliche rajya yeo*'⁶⁰ 'May sorrows and troubles disappear and the kingdom of Bali come'.

Phule used Bali's myth to illustrate Brahmins and Shudras' differentiation in their cultural traditions.⁶¹ Phule depicted that Bali's kingdom was a democratic one, and he has shown the democratic notion in Bali's state. Bali was ideal humanitarian person to him but not in historical contest. Therefore, Bali's name was not only used for Indian

⁵⁴Y D Phadke (ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskriti Mandal, Mumbai, 2006, p.175.

⁵⁵P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-1 Slavery*, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1991. P.48.

⁵⁶ Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabhodhan Aani Varga Jati Prabhutva*, Sugava Prakashan, Pune, 2007, p.333.

⁵⁷*Ibid*, p.333.

⁵⁸Onam festival and its ten days calibration in Kerala, in this festival people remembers to Bali.

⁵⁹ Hari Narke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule: Shodhachya Navya Vata*, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jotirao Phule Aani Rajashri Shahu Charitra Sadhane Prakashan Samity, Maharashtra Shasan, 2006, p.196.

⁶⁰Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskriti Mandal, Mumbai, 2006, p.162.

⁶¹ Hari Narke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule: Shodhachya Navya Vata*, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jotirao Phule Aani Rajashri Shahu Charitra Sadhane Prakashan Samity, Maharashtra Shasan, 2006, p.196.

contest but also in the European to represent those who fought against injustice.⁶² In Europe, Phule called those who struggled against slavery and injustice, as Bali's followers. Phule wrote that when Shudras were exploited by Brahmins with the assistance of religious texts, that time King Bali had come to provide justice to them on the basis of equality and to establish the state of Nirmik (creator).

As about, inter caste marriages, Phule has showed that there was (in Bali's kingdom) inter caste marriage among Shudras in their history. He wrote that this time there is prohibition about inter caste marriage but inter dining is open, on this basis we can say that they were (kunbi, mali, dhangar) one farmer caste's people.⁶³ Here for inter caste marriage Phule gave instance that Khanderao of Jijuri who was the kulswami of Shudra married Mhalsabai (kunbi caste) and Banabai (dhangar caste), through this instance he wrote that there was inter caste marriage among Shudras.⁶⁴ All these instances occur in the Bali's state where culture of inter caste marriage and inter dining used to happen without any restriction. In this way, Phule depicted the Kingdom of Bali as a welfare state and shown that it was caste less society.

Alternative culture

In every society, two type of traditions exist; one is elite tradition and the other tradition of the masses.⁶⁵ Since ancient times such type of tradition existed. Most of the anti-caste culture emerged against dominant culture but later on these traditions became part of the traditional caste system. Thus, these anti-caste movements were against caste system but later they struggled hard to fight against the caste but with less success. Phule knew that caste system was bound in tradition and cultural values that always support to retain caste system. Phule thought without annihilating this traditional culture, caste system could not be finished. Therefore, he started a new alternative culture in relation to golden era in Bali's kingdom, while other reformers were searching their lost glory in Vedas.

Phule saw that cultural domination in the form of caste is more powerful than others. Therefore, he sought to give up Hindu culture by establishing a new culture as he knew that in Hindu religion, Shudras' and Ati-Shudras' emancipation will not materialise. In his new culture, there was a revolutionary feeling and it was against every type of cultural domination and exploitation. According to Gail Omvedt, it was a Cultural Revolution. Through this Cultural Revolution, he denied the role of Brahmins in religion.

Hindu religion, in all its rituals needed the mediation of a Brahmin. Without him, a ritual cannot get legal authority and it would not be accepted by society, but Phule denied the Brahmin's role. Phule expressed his sensitivity in his poem with dissatisfaction of Hindu religion. He appeals to the Shudras and Ati-Shudras to leave this fake religion to create a brotherhood among them. Thus, he established a new religion called 'Sarvajanic Satyadharma' (the universal religion of truth). As we know, caste is nothing but culture that has its association with religion. To liberate them from cultural slavery, he developed an alternative culture with all new rituals. These rituals, introduced under the banner of Satyashodhak Samaj and for significant occasions like marriage, worshiping, had their affiliation to respecting non-Brahmin heroes. At a meeting held in Bombay in 1885, for instance, Phule was at pains to emphasize that the lower castes should organise their ritualistic and religious activity themselves, so that the role of Brahman priest becomes redundant.⁶⁶ Bali and his all ministers are ideal heroes in his poems and created their image as the emancipators Shudras and Ati-Shudras in order to generate hope in Shudras to regain Bali's state. In Hindu religion, there were various rituals performed among various castes but it is decided according to their social status. On the contrary, he clearly mentioned that these rituals could be used by any castes; there would not be any demarcation on the basis of caste status.

The concept of merit (Punya) was related with complex rituals in Hindu religion. On other side, Phule's conception of merit is that it lies in those who do not hurt others mentally and physically. Phule knew that if Shudras and Ati-Shudras will follow Hindu culture then they would not be liberated because following Hindu culture means to

⁶² Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskriti Mandal, Mumbai. 2006. p.174 -75.

⁶³ *Ibid* .p.263.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.p.263.

⁶⁵ Hari Narke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule: Shodhachya Navya Vata*, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jotirao Phule aani Rajashri Shahu charitra sadhane Prakashan samity, Maharashtra Shasan, 2006, p.4.

⁶⁶ G P Deshpande (Ed), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, Left Word Publication, New Delhi, 2002, p. 5.

maintain the existing Brahmanical social order. In other words, according to M N Srinivas (sociologist), it is the process of sanskritization where the lower castes follow elite culture and standard of living in order to attain superior social status. This process of emulation goes in favour of caste system having the base in Varna.⁶⁷ But Phule did not follow elite culture. Therefore, Phule denied sanskritization process to establish alternative culture as an option to Shudras and Ati-Shudras rooted in India's history. Phule discovered Shudras and Ati-Shudras' culture and tradition in non-Brahmin culture. This was a process of exploring new ideas and possibilities rooted in the old tradition of anti-caste struggle.

In India, Sanskrit was a religious language and culturally an elite language. Hence, Shudras were not allowed to learn Sanskrit. All Hindu religious texts were in Sanskrit. In Pre-British Maharashtra, Sanskrit had political support in Peshwai. However, after decline of Peshwas, Britishers were not willing to hurt Brahmins and started Sanskrit colleges in Pune with fixed donations for Sanskrit education. Therefore, when Phule started his writings, he did not use elite language and he denied supremacy of Sanskrit language. He wrote his literature in Marathi, which was a language of the masses. Phule rarely used the term Hindu or Hindustan. When Phule talks of India as a nation with the vision of *Balistan* means place or land of Bali. Here he totally denied that it was the land of Hindus.

Mid nineteenth century onwards in colonial Maharashtra, most of the social reformers and nationalist leaders used Shivaji's history for their struggle with a variety of interpretations. There was a different type of Shivaji's image created by Brahmins that Shivaji was seen as '*go Brahmin pratipalak*' meaning protector of Brahmins and cows. Phule denied Brahmanical interpretation about Shivaji's image, discovered Shivaji's tomb, and described his contribution in Maharashtra. He made his image as a benevolent king and king of cultivators. Therefore, in his poem he called Shivaji '*kulwadi bhushan*' meaning an ornament of cultivators.

The Universal Religion of Truth

Ever since ancient times in India many religions emerged as anti-caste religions and later became victims of Indian caste system. Buddhism was an anti-Varna religion but this was almost driven away from India. Therefore, Phule could not get a religion of anti-caste nature having its base of equality. As a result, Phule established '*Sarvajanik Satyadharma*'.⁶⁸ According to Phule, truth is the base of religion. Truth is the single religion in the world. Phule talks on religion, not from a conservative point of view by commenting on Indian religious but with an enlarged world view. According to Phule, truth is same everywhere, which is why he called his religion as '*the universal religion of truth*'.

In the Phule's point of view there is no single religion carrying the seeds of universal truth from beginning to the end. He has shown that how in Hindu religion there is no coherence, leading to utter inconsistency. To demonstrate this, Phule critically described the stories within the Hindu texts about God and religion. He says if God has created all people then why some are superior and the rest are inferior. If all rivers are to flow into the sea, then how only one river would be pure?⁶⁹

To gain God's (creator) goodwill, Phule stressed on human relations, which would be good for all human beings. He denied taking his name constantly for his prayer; he gave emphasised on act of humankind's betterment. He denied the process of food offering to the God. He wrote, on the earth, our creator has created all the existing things. Therefore, what is the need to give back his things? He wrote if you want to offer something to God, then offer to those who are struggling for the cause of the society and to those who are excluded. We should offer food to everybody those who are struggling, for the good of the humanity; we should not make a distinction if one is a Brahmin, a foreigner or an untouchable.⁷⁰

Even though there is no all-encompassing truth in any religion, but in all religions there are some truths. Phule took a secular stand and he says, we should not be obsessive about our religion and we should not hate any other religion. He wrote that "the reason of this deep division among them according to me is as follows: they do not think in

⁶⁷ Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabhodhan Aani Varga Jati Prabhutva*, Sugava Prakashan, Pune, 2007, p.8.

⁶⁸ Hari Narke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule: Shodhachya Navya Vata*, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jotirao Phule Aani Rajashri Shahu Charitra Sadhane Prakashan Samity, Maharashtra Shasan, 2006, p.21.

⁶⁹ Y D Phadke (ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskriti Mandal, Mumbai. 2006. p.459.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* .p.464.

impartial and dispassionate (rational) manner about their own religion or about other (people's) religion, but hold (believe) obdurately and obstinately that their own religion has the monopoly or truth. I am convinced that if all of us think impartially and dispassionately about our (different) religions, we would never be so foolish or rash to dub other people's religion as untrue."⁷¹ Here Phule's idea is similar to deism.

In the *Satsar* Phule demonstrates that the essence of Hinduism is that the majority Shudras and Ati-Shudras should serve Brahmins for no avail. For our assistance or bitterness whenever we want, we will adopt to Mohammedans or Christianity either we will ask to our creator to provide good religion for us. Arya Brahmin never took care of us.⁷² Here Phule comes to a conclusion that now one should leave Hindu religion.

We can understand through his thought that what type of ideal society he was expecting. His book 'Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak' was authored in his last days. In that he wrote, I have written this book for 'prabhudha' means 'enlightened' people.⁷³ We can see here that Buddha serves an ideal person to him. He wrote that one who does not fear anything and behaves truly forever, sharing happiness with all human beings would be called Buddha, who is an ideal for human beings.⁷⁴

Social Change based on equality

Phule's understanding was that all are equal in society, which is made by nature. To establish equality he attacked patriarchy. Phule says Buddha, Christ, Musalmans, mahars, Brahman are all brothers,⁷⁵ and must treat each other as brothers. In Phule's viewpoint, our creator had made all of us, then how can we say that one is superior and another inferior. Both men and women got freedom by birth that is an intrinsic fundamental right. All human beings have a right to use their human rights; nobody can take away from them. Here he denied hierarchical social status and wrote that we should allow every one to enjoy their rights. About freedom, he wrote that our creator has given all human beings full freedom to express, to write, and to publish their personal opinions and views regarding the human rights. Phule stated that along with Brahmin women, all the women belonging to Shudras and Ati-Shudras fold should get equal rights like upper caste men do. According to Phule, all human beings are alike.

Untouchability

Phule traced the origin of untouchability in Aryan and non-Aryan struggle. At the arrival of Aryans into India, there were struggles between the inhabitants of this land and Aryan Brahmins. The original inhabitants lost the battle, they were imposed with severe restrictions through the religious law, and untouchability was a result of this, which was to continue for two thousand and more years. Arya Brahmin lawyers fixed the position of mangs and mahars to a degraded state with religious sanctions. Manusmriti imposed prohibitions on them and they became outcasts to live away from the society. Phule wrote that Aryans were always enjoying with Britishers, drinking and eating along with them without any hesitation but they keep away themselves from mangs. If marriages were conducted at mang's home, they take donation and accept good food from Mangs and still they dub them untouchables.⁷⁶ Our creator has created everybody as pure as anybody and no body is impure. There is no one brilliant by birth and all have equal brains. Due to untouchability, the untouchables are deprived economically and religious law code prevented them to take any other profession and forced them indulge in robbing others. Phule touched the basic problems that were faced by untouchables in their daily life. Phule wrote that in our history Shudras' condition was very pathetic due to slavery. If a Brahmin will keep physical relation with the Shudra women, he would get very soft punishment, but for the same crime, Shudra will get strict and hard punishment.

Phule suggested that from now, onwards Brahmins should change their behaviour and if they will bring change in their behaviour then they will get good response from Shudras and Ati-Shudras. For that, he wrote, "there is only one remedy for their sins. All the Aryan Bhats/Brahmins regard themselves shamelessly as the earth-Gods. If they

⁷¹P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-2 Selection*, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay. 1991. p.38.

⁷²Y D Phadke (Ed), *Mahatma Phule Samgra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Aani Sanskrity Mandal, Mumbai.2006.p.369.

⁷³*Ibid*.p.560.

⁷⁴*Ibid*.p.574.

⁷⁵*Ibid*.p.290.

⁷⁶*Ibid* .p.592.

genuinely repent for this crime, and if they search for the (eternal) truth and if they sincerely try to follow the path of the truth (if they genuinely worship the truth and try to translate it into actions), then (and then) only will the Shudras and Ati-Shudras, and the bhils (Tribals) and the fisherman etc. will not take revenge upon them for their past and present crimes committed against them, but will certainly forgive them (*magnanimously*).⁷⁷ And “when all the Aryans Bhats/Brahmins will discard (through away) their spurious, wicked, bogus scriptures and when they will begin to behave in a truthful manner (when they will follow the path of the truth in their dealings with) towards all human beings (all men and women), then all the men and women in the wide world will bow down reverently before the benevolent creator of us all, and will pray unto him fervently for the welfare and happiness of the said Aryan Bhats/Brahmins (who were their erstwhile tormentors) undoubtedly (I have no doubt about it).”⁷⁸ Regarding Brahmins’ behaviour, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar tendered advice to Brahmins to make improvement in their behaviour and gave an indication to Brahmins that if they would not bring changes within them then they will face problem. Here it seems Agarkar had observed the Satyashodhak Samaj’s activities, and their attitude towards Brahmins.

As regards who can be called true people, Phule wrote that “men or women who do not regard either themselves or their blood relations or their own kith and kin or their own friends and companions as the only 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.”⁷⁹ Though he emphasised on moral aspects of life, Phule blended spiritual life with practical life.

⁷⁷P G Patil, (translated by) *Collected Work of Mahatma Phule vol-2 Selection*, Government of Maharashtra Bombay. 1991. P.32.

⁷⁸*Ibid* . P.32.

⁷⁹*Ibid*. P.35.