
A STUDY OF “INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY CONTRIBUTION OF MAHATMA JYOTIBA PHULE”

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Jyotirao or JyotibaPhule is considered a central figure of the movement for social change in Modern India. He was originally from Maharashtra – a state with great cultural heritage and also the land of social thinkers and reformers. Along with social reform, the intellectual and literary contribution of JyotibaPhule was also invaluable. In this research paper, a humble attempt has been made to see the intellectual and literary contribution of Mahatma JyotibaPhule.

Mahatma JyotibaPhule had written many books and play like- TrityaRatanNatak', 'PawadaChhatarpatiShivajika', 'Ishara', 'Gulamgiri', 'ShetkaryachaAsud', 'SarvajnikSatyaDharm' etc. It is important to note that he liked to write about public interest in public language only So, most of his compositions are in Jan Bali - Marathi. The literature composed by Jyotiba Phule explains deeply the Indians socio-cultural, religions and economic conditions. as well as social evils of his time. Besides this, through his literature, he has shown the problems and exploitation of neglected lower class. Mahatma Phule has also condemned the bigotry and evils of the then society through his literature.

KEYWORDS: *Satyashodaksamaj, Gulamgiri, Ishara, Renaissance, Marathi Powada, Trityaratan.*

INTRODUCTION

The 19th century holds its own special historical importance in the socio cultural history of India. This century is considered as "Era of Indian Renaissance".¹ In this century, on one side a new intellectual class influenced by western education was originating and on the other hand many social-religions reformers were also born. Especially the name of Mahatma²JyotibaPhule is notable among these thinkers and reformers, who tried to bring awareness against social religious oppression. Along with social reform, the intellectual and literary contribution of Mahatma Phule was also relevant.

If we look at the family background of JyotibaPhule, It is known that he was born in 1827 AD in Satara district of Maharashtra. He belonged to the 'Mali caste'. His mother's name was Chimnabai and father's name. Govind Ram phule.³ From childhood, Jyotiba was of sharp intellect with the passage of time, he became famous as a social reformer as well as a thinker and writer. It is important to mention that JyotibaPhule thought was somewhat different from other

reformers of the 19th century.⁴ In this Connection scholar L.G. MeshramVimalKirti writes that, "JyotibaPhule started his work and thinking by criticizing the orthodox religions class and then launched a massive public awareness against it."⁵

It is known from the available sources that the spirit of social reform and social thinking arose inside JyotibaPhule when some such surprising incident happened to him, which forced him to contemplate that the majority of the people of the country were facing injustice in the name of caste and religion.

JyotibaPhule himself faced humiliation by some influential people of the contemporary society.⁶ That is why he was forced to think rationally that a child is classified as Brahmin and Shudra as soon as he is born, while he does not know anything about the world. What kind of justice this one who does not know anything, is declared a Brahmin, Shudra, Christian, Muslim etc. without his consent. Then JyotibaPhule logically felt that social Slavery is more dangerous than imperial slavery.⁷ And casteism is the enemy of unity and cultured life. In this way, the spirit of a reformer and progressive thinker had blossomed inside JyotibaPhule.

JyotibaPhule is not only considered a central figure of the movement for change in modern India but we also found his Contribution towards literary and intellectual area was also invaluable. He had written many books.

The first literary work of Mahatma JyotibaPhule is the Play "TritiyaRatan". This Play was written in 1855 in Marathi language.⁸ After that Jyotiba continued to write upto 1890 A.D. In this work, JyotibaPhule has tried to show how the priestly class cleverly takes advantage of the ignorance of the lower class castes like "Mali and Kunbi". Besides this, he also tried to highlight the importance of education for both men and women.

The second important creation of JyotibaPhule is "PawadaChatalpatiShivaji Raja Bhosle ka".⁹ In this, he has shown the heroic story and struggle of Maratha ChatarpatiShivaji. It has eight parts. And it is written in simple Marathi language. Another important literary work of JyotibaPhule is "BrahmanancheKasab" which also depicts the oppression of the lower class by the dominant priestly class. In this work Mahatma Phule has also suggested to the then British government that why it is necessary to educate the neglected class.

The most important literary creation of JyotibaPhule is "Gulamgiri",¹⁰ which is published in 1873 A.D. It is known from the available sources that some ten years before this, the American civil war had been fought, leading to the end of slavery in America. Mahatma Jyotiba dedicated his book to all those Americans who had fought to free slaves; thus establishing link between the conditions of the lower castes in India and the black slaves in America. Mahatma Phule believes that here in India, the Condition of Shudras was worse. But at the same time he also says that due to the coming of the British in this Country there has been a lot of change in the condition of the Shudras. Although the Shudra people are slowly getting free from the slavery of the influential section, however, still on this the British government has adopted an irresponsible approach in making the Shudra educated and aware. Similarly, JyotibaPhule in his another literary work 'Ishara' has pointed out to the innocent lower class people to avoid the conspiracies of the clever priestly class.

It is important to mention here that in 1873 A.D. JyotibaPhule had established the Satyashodak Samaj¹¹ (a truth seeking society). It espoused a mission of education and increased social rights and political access for under privileged groups, focusing especially on Women & Shudras in

Maharashtra. From literary point of view, Mahatma Phule another literary creation 'Sarvajanic Satyadharma' is also important. This work has been written for the welfare of Mankind. In this, the issues of sin and virtue, women's conditions, Penance-rituals, and caste discrimination have been depicted through questions and answers. It is important to mention that the cover page of this book has been started with the words – "Satyamev Jayate". Through this work, Jyotiba Phule wanted to spread the message that the true religion is that which is for the betterment of the society and humanity. And the religion which is not in the wellbeing of the society that religion not true. So, Mahatma Phule tests the truth only on the basis of social interest. It is important to note here that "Gopal Hari Deshmukh", another social reformer of 19th century, had similar revolutionary ideas in the matter of religion. He also used to say that "If the religion does not sanction social reform, it should be changed". Similarly Jyotiba Phule in his another literary work – Ishara has pointed out to the innocent lower class people to avoid the conspiracies of the clever priesting class.¹²

From Literary Point of view Jyotiba Phule another work 'Shetkanyaca Asud' (The whipcord of the cultivators), which was published in 1881 A.D., is also very important.¹³ In this work, he has accurately depicted the condition of the farmers in the then society. It gives us information that at that time the position of peasantry was not good. Although the peasants class had been neglected and exploited since ancient times, but in the 19th century the condition of the farmers worsened. In this context, Jyotiba Phule writes, "It is definitely visible that the condition of ignorant, illiterate and native farmers in India is worse than the peasants of other Countries. Mahatma Phule gives some religious and some administrative reasons for the poor condition of the farmers especially due to the dominance of the conservative section in the society and also due to the luxurious attitude of the British government employees, the farmers were exploited.¹⁴ Not only this, Jyotiba Phule raises the question that why till today the peasants remained so ignorant and why they continued to be exploited. In response to this, he says that the main reason for this was that this class did not receive education. At that time very few people used to get education, due to which the dominant class used to exploit them and they used to behave like ignorant people. That's why Jyotiba has repeatedly highlighted the importance of education. Mahatma Phule also writes in the preface of this work that in the—

"Lack of education led to lack of wisdom,
Lack of wisdom led to lack of morals,
Lack of morals led to lack of progress,
Lack of progress led to lack of money,
Lack of money led to oppression of lower castes,
Lack of education led to such castes trophe.¹⁵

Not only this, Jyotiba Phule also considered education very important for the upliftment of women. And along with his wife Savitri Phule,¹⁶ he also tried for women's education, so that their position in the society become stronger and better.

In this work, Jyotiba Phule also explains that neither the dominant section of the society nor the British officials paid any attention to the sufferings of the farmers. Mahatma Phule also describes the circumstances of how the Portuguese used to convert the lower class peasant to Christianity.

These peasants adopted Christianity because they were oppressed and more exploited in their society. Besides this, Jyotiba Phule has also depicted the hard work of the farmers as well as many of their problems like the farmers had to face a lot of natural calamities in those days. Especially due to epidemics and famines, the oxen of the farmers used to die in those days and they also used to crave for food. Their condition kept getting worse and worse and they did not get help from anywhere. It is important to mention that even in medieval period farmers had to face similar difficulties and miserable conditions during famines.¹⁷ Persian and indigenous sources confirm this. Even in that period they did not get state aid and the same in this period as well. In this concern, Mahatma Phule had also appealed to the people of Maharashtra to help the people suffering from famines through a prayer letter.¹⁸ In such situation, Jyotiba Phule suggests that at least in those days the British Government should take a soft stand toward the farmers and also educate their children.

Apart from this, Mahatma Phule has also composed some poetical work. Among these 'Akhand Kavya' poetic composition is remarkable.¹⁹ Through this, he has also condemned social evils and bigotry.

No doubt, the intellectual and literary contribution of Jyotiba Phule was remarkable. The literature composed by Jyotiba Phule explains very deeply the Indian socio-cultural, economy and religious conditions of his time. Through his literature, Mahatma Phule has also shown the underprivileged class problems and their exploitation very well.

Overall, Mahatma Phule's social and literary contribution was invaluable. Pandit J.L. Nehru also once rightly said about Jyotiba Phule's rational approach that – "the era in which Mahatma Phule fought fiercely for the removal of untouchability, bigotry and for women's education, was very difficult period." It was impossible to get help from anywhere for such works. As the farmers and labourers progress in the Indian democracy, in the same way the charisma of Mahatma Phule will emerge more and more in History. Another important thing is that through this literature, Mahatma Phule has also notified the logical solution of these problems - Like he has repeatedly highlighted the importance of education through his literature and declared that exploitation can be avoided only by taking education. Last but not least, Jyotiba Phule has also attacked the bigotry and evils of the then society through his literature.

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