

Role Of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule In The Battle Against Marginalization

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Abstract: Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890) initiated a battle against marginalization in India. The nineteenth century was an era of social criticism and transformation that focused on nationalism, caste and gender. Jyotiba took up the issue of gender and caste. He revolted against the unjust caste-system under which millions of people had suffered for centuries. His revolt against the caste system integrated social and religious reform with equality. He emerged as the unchanged leader of the depressed classes in Maharashtra and was recognized as a leader of downtrodden class in all over India. He was influenced by American thinker Thomas Paine's ideas of Rights of Man. This paper is an attempt to discuss Jyotiba Phule's role in battle against marginalization. Jyotiba Phule was the first Dalit leader who fought a battle against inequality and casteism. Jyotiba Phule played a role of torch bearer for other social reformers.

INTRODUCTION : In general the term marginalization describes the over actions or tendencies of human societies where people perceive to under reliable or without useful fiction are excluded, i.e. marginalized. The people who are marginalized are outside the existing system of protection and integration. This limits their opportunities and means for survival. The term defined marginalization can be in the following ways:

- 1) Peter Leonard defines - "Marginality as being outside the mainstream of productive activity."
- 2) Latin observes - "Marginality is so thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity as well as for physical security marginal peoples can always be identified by the members of dominant society and will face irrevocable discrimination."
- 3) The encyclopedia of public health defines - "Marginalization as to be marginalized is to be placed in the margins as thus excluded from the privilege and power found at the center."
- 4) Merriam Webster's online dictionary defines the term marginalization as "To relegate to a un important or powerless position within a society or group".
- 5) Ghana S Gurung and Michael Kallmair mentions, "The concept of marginality is generally, used to analysis socio-economic, political and cultural spheres, where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access to resources and full participation in social life. In other words marginalized people might be socially, economically, politically and legally ignored, excluded or neglected and therefore vulnerable to live hood change. In India the main base of marginalization is Indian caste system. The Indian caste system refers to the social stratification of people into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation, based on the underlying notion of purity. Usually the caste system is described as a more than 2,000-year-old Hindu tradition geographically originating from early civilizations on the Indian subcontinent. The system divides people into four larger caste categories with their traditional set of inherited tasks (much resembling the four estates of pre-20th century Swedish society); *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriyas* (rulers and

soldiers), *Vaisyas* (merchants and traders), and *Shudras* (laborers and artisans). A fifth category falls outside these larger categories and consists of those known as "untouchables" or Dalits as they call themselves ("broken people"). The casteless group have earned their status "untouchable" from the tasks and labours they inherit which are often too polluting to grant them inclusion in the traditional caste system. In performing these labours they become physically untouchable by the other castes and expelled from certain parts of everyday social life. Basically the caste system is a pyramid and Dalits are at the lower end. Jyotiba Phule played an important role against caste marginalization.

Early Life and Carrer of Mahatama Jyotirao Phule : Jotirao Phule was one of the foremost exponents of modern humanitarian thought in India, though there have been several others such as Raja Rammohun Roy in Bengal, Swami Dayanand in Gujarat, etc. Tradition had made Indian society inert and devoid of dynamism or energy. These reformers went to the root of the problem and preached an ideology that would create a new and integrated social structure. As a result of modern education in the nineteenth century, the youth had begun to be acquainted with ideas that challenged traditional beliefs and constraints. Jotirao had the courage to be inspired by modern thought. He was one of the first Indians to forcefully introduce the values of freedom, equality and fraternity, as proclaimed by the French Revolution, into the Indian way of thinking. He introduced the notion of 'slavery' which was an integral part of the ancient social system, but had never found a foothold in India. One of the characteristics of the slave system was that the master enjoyed complete personal and physical authority over a slave. One does not find this feature in the ancient Indian social system. However, India had another social evil, which allowed no scope for social progress or development, and that was the caste system which determined the social standing at birth—the highest caste being the Brahmins and the lowest, the untouchables or the Mahars, Mangs, Chamars, Dhers, etc. The Brahmins formed the priestly class, who imparted religious instruction with the help of religious texts known as Srutis, Smritis and Puranas. A Brahmin was considered the most holy person. The remaining castes came between the two extremes of pure and impure. According to Jotirao, the Brahmins arbitrarily took upon themselves the right to govern society, and the society accepted this right. Jotirao challenged this right with his concept of slavery and warned in his writings that the Indian mind could achieve all-round progress only if it freed itself from the shackles of this particular form of slavery. The biography of Jotirao is the biography of a great man of action.

Jotirao's ancestral lineage can be traced back to one Shetiba. The native village of his ancestors was Khanavali in the Purandar division of Pune district. Shetiba had three sons: Panoji, Govinda and Krishna. Their original family name was Gorhe but after they started a florist's business they began to be known as Phule. In the latter days of the Peshwa rule, Jotirao's ancestors supplied flowers and various articles made from flowers: flower mattresses, pillows and garments to the Peshwas. The latter gifted them with a garden and 35 acres of land. Prior to this Jotirao's ancestors were greengrocers. Jotirao's father, Govinda or Govindrao married a girl called Chimana, daughter of one Zagde Patil from Dhanakwadi near Pune. They had two sons, one of whom, Joti, was born in 1827. During Jotirao's father's time, the power and glory of the Peshwas had ebbed considerably. In the latter days of the Peshwas, the rulers had given up

governing in a just manner. The Brahmins were the favoured caste. Merit was not considered while giving them high posts. For many crimes, the Brahmins were given milder punishment instead of the severe ones as stipulated by law. They would manage to get their land tax reduced by half or even less. During the time of Bajirao the Brahmins were especially showered with alms and given lavish feasts. In contrast, the farmers were miserable, caught as they were in the grip of money-lenders, who were mostly the Brahmins. The Brahmins reigned supreme owing to the blind acceptance of their caste superiority. So deep-rooted was this belief in the caste system that a Hindu felt polluted even if the shadow of an 'untouchable' fell on him. It was believed that one could cleanse one's sins by giving alms to a Brahmin or by drinking the water obtained by washing the feet of a priest. The latter custom still prevails in some regions of India.

The Brahmin community ensured that women remained uneducated and illiterate. In the last days of the Peshwas, even the religious beliefs had become debased. Worship of shakti had taken deep roots even among the respectable Brahmins of Pune. The majority of the higher officials of Bajirao were Brahmins and they practised shakti worship. This worship comprised acceptance of five M's— madya (alcohol), mansa (meat), matsya (fish) maithuna (coitus), and mudra (consumption of roasted or puffed rice). The Maratha kingdom established by Shivaji had expanded under the leadership of the first four Peshwas. But, after the death of Shahu, towards the end of Peshwa reign, the Brahmins became all powerful. Shivaji's governing policy, which laid emphasis on justice and merit, collapsed. Justice and competence lost their place in the administration of the state. Lokahitavadi, who held a high place among the educated class which came into being during British rule, has drawn an excellent comparison between the rule of the Peshwas and the British in his book *Shatapatre (One Hundred Letters)*.

Raja Rammohun Roy was among the earliest social reformers to have welcomed the new, modern educational system established by the British. Some British officials believed that only Sanskrit academies were required, in keeping with the Indian tradition. But Rammohun Roy told them, "You are not needed to teach us Sanskrit. We are quite capable of doing it on our own. But we need you to set up institutions that will give us modern education." The products of this modern education system of the British were the social and religious reformers of the nineteenth century among whom Jotirao Phule holds pride of place. In those days even the upper castes were not convinced of the worth of modern education. The shastris (learned Brahmins) ran private schools in which Sanskrit, grammar, law, Vedanta, astrology; elocution, the code of Hindu law, etc. were taught. The children of merchants and the rich studied reading and writing. In 1836, the British government opened schools in some villages of Pune district, where reading, writing and arithmetic came to be taught. Before British rule, education was not the responsibility of the government.

The history of nineteenth century India is the story of the impetus for social reform, in which the introduction and spread of modern education was an important element. Schools which taught English language were opened not so much to educate the masses but to groom Indian staff to run the British government. Christian missionaries opened a Marathi school in Pune for the public. During this transitional phase, even though education was open to the masses, the common man was not aware of its importance. Notwithstanding this, Govindrao got his son Joti admitted to a Marathi primary school at the age of seven. However, on the advice of his Brahmin clerk, Govindrao thereafter withdrew Joti out of the school and set

him to work on his vegetable farm (Joti excelled in this work). Jotirao's mother, Chimanabai, had died when Joti was a child. His father Govindrao felt the loss deeply, but instead of remarrying, appointed a nurse to look after Joti. She brought up Joti and his brother Raja ram with great love and care. By the time Joti finished primary school; he could read and write well, and had learn accounting too. Lokahitavadi Gopalrao Deshmukh writes of this in Shatapatre in 1850.

If a Brahmin were to come across a clerk of the Maratha caste or of a caste other than his own, he would get livid. The Brahmin would say that kaliyug was here, that learning (which had been held sacred) was being polluted by being imparted to the lower castes. Thus we see that the Brahmins held the belief that the other castes should not be imparted education; hence, the Brahmin clerk's advice to Govindrao to withdraw Joti from school.

As a result of acquiring a sound primary education, Jotirao became fond of reading. He would read in the flickering light of a sama (a tall brass lamp) before going to bed or while at his farm. There were two scholars among his neighbours. One of them, Gaffar Baig Munshi, was a teacher of Persian language; the other, called Lizit, was a Christian missionary. They advised Govindrao that Joti needed to study further. So in 1841, Govindrao admitted Joti to a school run by a Scottish mission. Joti was then fourteenyears old. He had got married at thirteen to the eight-year old daughter of Zagde Patil from the village Dhanakwadi, near Pune. At the government school in Budhwar Wada, Joti made friends with Sadashiv Ballal Govande, a Brahmin. He also had Muslim friends with whom he discussed the relative merits of Hinduism and Islam. In the Scottish Mission School Joti's other friends were two Brahmin boys, Moro Vithal Valvekar and Sakharam Paranjape.

In this school, Joti became acquainted with the concepts of human rights and duty. His reading of the biographies of Shivaji and George Washington aroused feelings of heroism and patriotism in him. Another important book to influence Joti and Govande was the Rights of Man by Thomas Paine; this book had created quite a stir in Europe and America. Realising that in order to fulfil their goals and lead a purposeful life, physical fitness was essential; the two friends took to sports which included fencing and target practice. Their guru was an untouchable from the Mang caste and was called Lahujibuwa. Joti excelled in dandpatta (wielding of stick). People flocked to watch him at it. Joti had a well-built, well-shaped body. Vasudeo Balwant Phadke, a well-known Marathi revolutionary, had his military training under Joti. English education thus opened a whole new world of learning for Joti and his friends. Valvekar says in his autobiography, "As students we lost faith in Hinduism and turned towards Christianity. Nevertheless, we did a comparative study of all religions and came to the conclusion that every religion has some aspects which can be believed in, if one has faith. Hence all religions have a few theories in common, which alone should be followed." With this thought the friends put off their plans to convert to Christianity. After all, all religions say that God is one and should be worshipped. However, it cannot be denied that Joti and his friends were influenced by the emphasis laid by Christian missionaries on public service and spread of education.

Joti finished his 'English' education in 1847. Drawing inspiration from the American struggle for independence, he thought deeply on humanitarian values of equality and freedom. The thought of driving out the British from India occupied his mind continuously. In Joti's student days there were a number of big and small revolts against the British, both in Maharashtra and outside; these included the agitations by Umaji Naik in 1826, the fishermen of Pune district in 1830, Bhau Khare, Chimanaji Jadhav and Nana Darbare in 1839 and 1846, Bapu Mangare and Radoji Mangare in 1848—all of which were suppressed by the British. The aim to overthrow the British and make the country free and strong, with the help of his friends, took deep roots in Joti's mind early in his very prime. He even records in his book *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) that his thoughts regarding freedom were conditioned by Brahmin students and teachers. After the decline of the Peshwas, a section of the Brahmin community in Maharashtra began seriously thinking about ways and means for overthrowing the British.

Sir Richard Temple, the British Governor of Bombay, wrote to senior representatives of the British government in India that the Chitpavans did not seem content with the facilities given to them and these included education, salary, and promotion in government. On completing his education, Jotirao joined his ancestral florist business. Around this time, an incident occurred to change his desire to seek freedom from British rule. It so happened that Joti was invited to the wedding of a Brahmin friend. The bridegroom and his party were going in a procession to the bride's place. There were no non-Brahmins in the procession as had become the practice in Hindu functions. When it was detected that a non-Brahmin had joined their procession, a haughty Brahmin snapped at Joti, "Hey, what are you doing here, joining our procession as an equal? Off with you!" Joti was deeply humiliated. He returned home and told his father about the incident. His father advised him not to take the matter to heart and pointed out that each caste should keep to its own rank. The working of the Hindu social structure then became painfully clear to Joti at a young age. He realised that though all Hindus followed one religion, Hinduism had not succeeded in creating a spiritual life based on unity. On the contrary, it had given rise to inequality and discrimination; hence the need was for the doors of education to be opened to the non-Brahmins. He was simply thrilled at the prospect that introduction of modern education could help in bringing about an enormous social change.

Phule's Writings : Phule was not only a leader and organiser of the movement for the emancipation of lower castes, but he was also an original thinker who had revolutionary ideas which he expressed through his books. Some of his major works were *Tritiya Ratna* (1855), *Brahmananche Kasab* (1869), *Gulamgiri* (1873), *Shetkaryacha Aasud* (1883), *Satsar Vol I* (1885), *Satsar Vol II* (1885), *Ishara* (October 1, 1885) and *Saravajanik Satyadharma Pustak*. In all he worked for achieving his motive i.e., universal education, education for women and uplift of people who were ostracised by the caste system. In *Brahmananche Kasab* (1869) Phule exposed the exploitation being meted out by Brahmin priests. In *Gulamgiri* (1873) he gave a historical account of the slavery of lower castes. In 1883 he published a collection of his speeches under the title *Shetkaryacha Aasud* (The cultivator's whipcord) in which he analysed how peasants were being exploited in those days. We find a text of his philosophical statement in *Saravajanik Satyadharma Pustak* (A book of True Religion for All) published in 1891, a year after his death. From his writings we come to know that his thinking on social and political issues was influenced by Christianity and the ideas of Thomas Paine

(1737-1809) who was known for his religious radicalism in England. Phule himself has recorded that he was influenced by the ideas of Paine. As a recognition of his great work for the upliftment of the oppressed, Phule was conferred the title of 'Mahatma' in 1888. Phule wrote in Marathi language that was familiar to the masses.

Educating the Sudras and Women : Jotirao set himself to the task of seeking educational reforms. He was convinced that both the women and the Sudras from the Hindu community should avail themselves of modern education. At the time, even the Brahmins were opposed to educating their women. He decided to open a school for girls, for, if a woman were educated, the home could become a school where the educated mother could teach her children. Meanwhile his friend, Sadashivrao Govande took him to Ahmednagar, the centre of education run by Christian missionaries. They visited the mission school of Madame Farrar, who too lamented that education of women had been sadly neglected in India. She felt that each Indian male should take to educating his wife who could then help him in the spread of education. Accordingly, when Jotirao returned to Pune, he persuaded his wife to get educated; She did so and later started a school for girls belonging to the lower castes. The school began functioning in August 1848 at Bhide Wada in Budhwar Peth. Joti's associates, Paranjape, Hate and Govande, gave him financial assistance to help run the school. This school was open to girls from the untouchable castes such as Mahars, Mangs and Chamars. This was the time when Pune in particular was the bastion of ultraconservative Hindu leaders, who looked upon an institution which imparted education to Sudra and Ati-Sudra women as an offence against God, and against the Shastras, religion and society. According to these leaders, Hindu religion prohibited women and Sudras from learning, when in reality; it is only the Vedas which are prohibited to the women and Sudras, and not education. However, learning had been denied to women by leaders of various castes. The Brahmins and the caste leaders feared that the social edifice of the caste structure would receive a severe jolt if women became educated. They felt that a woman, if educated, could go astray and destroy family happiness. Those were the days when women were not allowed to use footwear or umbrellas or speak to their husbands in the presence of others; a newly-married couple could not converse with each other in the presence of elders; a woman could not sit down to a meal with her husband. Educating women was considered as bad as playing with fire, as it could lead women to cross the boundaries of family decorum and make elders lose their authority.

Jotirao's father, Govindrao Phule, being a man of tradition, was deeply troubled by his son's actions. However, Govindrao's friends of the same caste convinced him that Jotirao was right in taking action against age-old Hindu religious beliefs. Jotirao argued with his father but to no avail. Govindrao in a fit of anger told his son to go his own way and ordered Jotirao and his wife to leave his house. Jotirao's wife, Savitribai, stood by her husband in this period of trial. Thus Jotirao and his wife moved out. Meanwhile the school closed down temporarily due to lack of sufficient funds. When the finances improved somewhat, Jotirao reopened the school in the space donated by his friend Govande in old Ganjpath. Soon, with the number of girls in the school increasing, Jotirao found a bigger place to run the school, which he took on rent from a Muslim. Major Candy provided books to the school. On 3 July 1851, Jotirao started a girls' school in Anna Chiplunkar's mansion at Budhwar Peth, where he taught for four hours daily without taking any salary. He set up an acting committee and handed over the management of the school to the committee,

which comprised of Keshav Shivram Bhavalkar, Anna Sahastrabuddhe, Bapuraoji Mande, Vishnu Bhide, Krishnashastry Chiplunkar and Vishnushastry Pandit. Vishnushastry Pandit later became famous as the supporter of widow remarriage. The school first began with merely eight girls on the roll; soon their number rose to forty-eight. Since the financial position of the school was not very sound, Jotirao's wife began teaching on an honorary basis; she also became its principal. Jotirao became an important figure in the promotion of women's education. He opened a second school for girls in Rasta Peth on 17 September 1851 and a third in Vithal Peth on 15 March 1859. The curriculum comprised of reading, grammar, arithmetic, geography, history, map reading, etc. Major Candy, supervisor of the school, said in a report: "I am happy to note the intelligence and progress of the girls."

On 17 February 1852 Jotirao's school was publicly inspected, following which there was a speech by Bhansaheb Mande. "It is a pity that the citizens of our country are not yet convinced of the need to educate women," he said. A judge named Brown was present on this occasion. In his speech he quoted Milton and said, "Educating women will strengthen family happiness and utility of the institution of the family." A fourteen-year old girl from one of Jotirao's schools for untouchables wrote an essay in which she said, "The Brahmins say that other castes should not read the Vedas; this leaves us without a scripture. Thus, are we without religion? Oh God, please tell us, what is our religion? God, by Your Grace, you sent us the kindly British government. This has brought relief and welfare. Before the British came the Mahars and Mangs were beheaded when they committed an offence against the people of higher castes. Earlier we were not allowed to move about freely in the bazaar of Sultekadi; now we can." Such was the freedom given to girls in schools run by Jotiba.

Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar was the supervisor of the local government schools. On 16 October 1851, he inspected the first school set up by Jotirao in Budhwar Peth. He remarked that it went to the credit of those who ran the school which had made such remarkable progress in so short a time. Meanwhile, Jotirao set up a library for his students, since he felt that a library is an important means of imparting education. The number of students in Jotirao's school grew ten times more than that in government schools. This amazing transformation was due to the excellent conditions present and the conducive atmosphere for teaching. On 16 November 1852 the government called a meeting of local leaders in Vishram Wada to felicitate Jotirao. On behalf of the government, Jotirao was honoured with a shawl—an honour hitherto conferred only on Brahmins. Apart from Bapurao Mande, Pandit Moreshwarshastry, Principal of Pune College, spoke at the function.

Although he was hard put to it to make both ends meet, he did not neglect the school work. His wife faithfully supported him. In 1855, Jotirao brought to light the beliefs and rituals practised in the name of God. Some educated Hindus too were fighting against superstitions in order to bring about new thinking. It was being realised that Jotirao's actions and teachings not only challenged the superiority of the Brahmins but struck at the very root of Hindu religion. Some fanatics, disturbed at this, sent some assassins to get rid of Jotirao. But when the assassins set feet in Jotirao's house, they entered into a dialogue with him. Jotirao asked them, "Why have you come to kill me? What wrong have I done to you?" The assassins replied, "We are going to be paid a thousand rupees each for the job." Jotiba replied, "Alright, then here is my neck. I

know it is your poverty which is making you do this.” Jotirao’s magnanimity impressed the assassins. They fell at his feet in repentance and became his slaves for life. One of them, Dhandiram Kumbhar, studied well and became the pillar of the Satyashodhak Samaj.

Battle against Brahmanism and Untouchability : Jotirao was a poet too and wrote poetry well. He published a book of povadas. A magazine, called Vividha Dnanavistar, published his poems, although the intention was to highlight that Jotirao’s views were wrong. According to Jotirao, the Brahmins were the real Aryans who came to India from Iran and were responsible for the degradation of the original inhabitants of this country (the Kshatriyas), whom they looked down upon as the Sudras. He painted an authentic picture of the social conditions of the time. The government earned tax from the farmers, but the farmers’ children did not go to government schools. In his povadas, Jotirao sent a petition to Queen Victoria:

Please save the farmers from the Brahmins’ clutches.

Please appoint clerks and teachers from other castes.

Inspired by Jotirao’s message, young non-Brahmins took to education and acquired government jobs. Jotirao’s spoke in his povadas against the upper caste, especially the Brahmins. However, his exposition of history did not appear to be convincing and is not available in print today. The povada that Jotirao wrote on Shivaji was published in 1869. It runs into forty-five pages. As composer of the povada, Jotirao describes himself as kulwadibhooshan (a credit to the Kulwadis, i.e. the Kunbi caste). In the povada, according to Jotirao, Shivaji ‘planted the flag of the Hindus’ with the blessings of his mother and the help of his brave and loyal associates. He also mentions that Shivaji made Ramdas his guru, and “the beloved child of Jijabai became a messenger of death for the Mohammedans. I sing the ballad of Shivaji. The ornament of the Kunbis sings the ballad of the Bhosla of Chhatrapati Shivaji.”

In his collection of poems called Brahmanache Kasab (The Cleverness of Brahmins), Jotirao says that the ignorant and gullible farmers perform religious rites according to the dictates of Brahmin priests and mendicants, blissfully unaware that they are being exploited. He ruthlessly attacked this kind of religious naiveté and custom, the details of which he gave in the poem. When a farmer’s wife delivered a baby, the farmer had religious rites performed which according to the Brahmin priests prevented untimely death. For every reading of the scriptures, the Brahmin stood to gain money. It was in the hands of the Brahmin priests to make or break marriages among the common folks, for horoscopes had to be studied and unfavourable planets propitiated. On the occasion of a girl reaching puberty, the Brahmins apart from friends and acquaintances had to be fed a special meal. On the construction of a house, a house-warming ceremony had to be performed in which the Brahmins were fed and given alms. Carpenters and masons were also invited to the feast. On every possible occasion and religious and cultural function, a puja had to be performed by Brahmin priests for one to receive the good grace of God. When the common man fell ill, not only the physician but also the Brahmin profited. The Brahmin read scriptures such as Shivilamruta, Pandavpratap, Harivijay and Ramvijay at the bedside of the patient and made money. He would recite mantras and perform various homos and abhisheks. In the event of a death, the religious rites would continue for over ten days; Brahmins were given alms, relatives were fed and gifts such” as shoes and umbrellas were

given. In the performance of acts of charity, the Brahmin priests supervised the rituals. They were needed on the occasion of an eclipse, *sanskranti* and the *shraddha* ceremony.

Jotirao published this collection of poems himself. He requested the education department to buy copies of the book, but, they would not prescribe such a book for general reading let alone for their schools. On 31 March 1867 the *Prarthana Samaj*, which believed in introducing moderate forms of reforms, was founded in Bombay. It was a counterpart of the *Brahmo Samaj* of Bengal. Learned men like Dr *Atmaram Larkhadkar*, *Waman Abaji*, *Modak*, *M.G. Ranade* and *R.G. Bhandarkar* were the members of the *Prarthana Samaj*. At first they held discussions on social reform but subsequently turned to religious contemplation. The members were monotheistic and admired the work of Jotirao; the latter however chose not to be a member of the *Samaj*.

On 2 April 1870, the *Sarvajanik Sabha* (People's Society) was founded. It was headed by *Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi* alias *Sarvajanik Kaka* (Universal Uncle) and *Sadashiv Govande*. The aim of the society was to publicise and place public grievances before the government. Jotirao's friends, *Moro Vithal Valvekar* and *Sakharam Yashwant Paranjape*, were to present to the government, on behalf of the *Sarvajanik Sabha*, a memorandum of people's grievances and problems. They also formed an organisation of Indian newspapers to fight the ordinance, passed by Lord *Lytton*, against the freedom of the press and against the use of Indian goods instead of foreign. Prior to the *Sarvajanik Sabha*, a political institution, known as the *Deccan Association*, had been founded in Pune in the first half of 1852. Progressive-minded and educated people were involved in its activities, which aimed to put before the British the grievances of the people. The *Poona Association* was founded in Pune around 1867. Jotirao, however, had no faith in such institutions as he felt that they were merely concerned with the grievances of the upper castes. They did not bother to understand the grievances of the lower castes or represent their case to the government.

Jotirao's chief aim was to strike at the social structure. Towards this end he was determined to remove ignorance, illiteracy, prejudices and caste-based beliefs among the lower castes and free them from the mental slavery resulting from centuries of Brahmin dominance. In 1872 he wrote the book, *Gulamgiri* (Slavery). In the first part of the book he invoked *Parshuram*, because the latter is considered to have lived for 432 million years, as stated by Brahmin scriptures. He published two manifestos under the title *Brahamani Dharmcharya Aadpadadyat* (Behind the Screen of Brahminical Religion). In them he asserted the ideals, proclaimed by the French Revolution, for freedom, equality and fraternity. Inspired by *Abraham Lincoln*, the champion of human freedom, who had abolished slavery in America in 1863, Jotirao dedicated his book to the Black population of America. He begins his book with the famous quote from *Homer*: 'The day a man becomes a slave, he loses half his virtue.' The book is in the form of questions and answers. It has 16 chapters. In the first nine which relate the history of Brahminical dominance in India, Jotirao asserts with confidence that: "The *Sudras* are the life of this nation. In times of economic and political crises the government should rely on them rather than on the Brahmins. If care is taken to ensure that the *Sudras* are kept happy and contented, the government will have no cause for doubting their loyalty"

Jotirao concluded by demanding that the masses should be educated.

We must remember that Jotirao was not a researcher or a philologist; he was a champion of social revolution; and his history of the Brahmins and the Aryans is purely imaginary.

In Gulamgiri, Jotirao explains his aim thus:

”I wrote the present book to warn my Sudra brothers that the Brahmins are exploiting them.”

After he finished writing the Gulamgiri Jotirao prepared himself to launch a mass movement. Even before the book was completed, he had expressed his views in public meetings and through pamphlets and booklets. To carry forward his crusade, Jotirao founded the Satyashodhak Samaj, the first social reform movement in Maharashtra. He was the first president and treasurer of the Samaj. N. G. Kadlag was the secretary. The goal of the Samaj was to make the Sudras and the Ati-Sudras aware of their civil rights and free them from religious and emotional slavery imposed by Brahminical scriptures. To become a member of the Samaj one had to take an oath before the deity Khanderao by picking up a bel leaf and swearing loyalty to the British government.

In 1911 the Satyashodhak Samaj published its resolutions comprising three guiding principles:

- a) All human beings are children of one God; hence, they are my brothers and sisters,
- b) Just as one does not need a mediator to meet one’s mother or to please one’s father, similarly one does not need a priest or a guru to pray to God. I do not feel the need for a mediator when I worship, pray or meditate. I shall exhort others to believe likewise,
- c) I shall educate my sons and daughters. I make this resolution with God as my witness. May God give me the strength to live my life according to these principles.

Membership of the Samaj was open to all castes. Brahmins, Mahars, Mangs, and others were members of the Samaj. Wherever branches of the Samaj were opened, meetings were held every week. In Somwar Peth in Pune, meetings were held at the residence of Dr Govande, to discuss ways and means of enforcing prohibition, compulsory education, use of indigenous goods, conducting ceremonies without Brahmin priests, performing weddings at minimum cost, freeing people from the clutches of fortune-tellers, soothsayers, spirits (of Brahmins) and ghosts, etc. Emphasis was laid on fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. Like the Prarthana Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj, the Satyashodhak Samaj was also a monotheistic sect. All the three institutions believed that all human beings were children of one God and held assembly prayers and meetings every week. Rammohun Roy stressed on prayer while Jotirao emphasised on the importance of truth. As we can see, Jotirao was not greatly interested in prayer or spiritual development.

After founding the Satyashodhak Samaj, Jotirao set out to put into practice the aims and goals of the Samaj. He invited applications for scholarships which he awarded to ten students; this was much acclaimed. The Samaj performed several marriages without availing the services of Brahmins. The bride and the groom were made to pledge loyalty to each other and the marriage party then blessed the couple. As can be imagined, a wedding without a Brahmin priest was at the time an-unheard-of event. One such wedding was that of Jotirao’s friend, Gyanoba Sasane, which created quite a stir. Meanwhile, several like-minded persons joined Jotirao’s movement. Newspapers reported the event.

Krishnarao Pandurang Bhalekar, a florist by caste and a poet, editor and excellent orator, helped to spread the message of the Samaj in many villages. In Bombay Vyanku Balaji Kalewar and Jaya Karadi Lingu joined Bhalekar. A contractor named Narsu Saibu agreed to help the Samaj. Kalewar, who lived in Kamathipura, donated a factory worth Rs 1,200 to the Samaj. Many wealthy people from the lower castes joined the Samaj. One such influential man was Polsani Rajanna Lingu from the Telugu florist community, called Kamathi, in Bombay; another was Vyanku Ayyavaru who joined the Samaj, as did the wealthy Ramshet Bapushet Urvane from Pune. Marutrao Nawate, an associate of Dr Anna Nawate, was a strong supporter of the Samaj. Dr Vishram Ramji Ghobe, honorary physician of the Viceroy, at the time, was also a benefactor. The first anniversary of the Satyashodhak Samaj was celebrated with great pomp and show. Narayan Tukaram Nagarkar was chosen as its secretary. Bhalekar and Urvane were nominated to the acting committee. Ramchandraro Dhamnaskar, Santuji Ramji Lad (the first man from the Dhangar community) and Narayan Meghaji Lokhande (leader of the labour movement) were others to make a mark in public life.

The work of the Satyashodhak Samaj drew the attention of many thinkers, inspiring them to act. But those with the courage to personally practise the reforms were very few in number. When Mahadeorao Ranade's sister was widowed, he said, "If I remarry my widowed sister, it will break my father's heart. Besides, the Pune Brahmins will ostracise me." To which Jotirao replied, "Then don't parade as a reformist." In October 1873, Ranade then aged thirty-two, lost his wife and married a girl of twelve. The reformers of Maharashtra were embarrassed by his action. Jotirao expressed strong disapproval and wrote a scathing article on Ranade in Vividha Dnanavistar. Similarly, another social reformer, Lokahitavadi Gopalrao Deshmukh, too surrendered to the conservatives and performed penance for having committed the anti-religious act of sending his son to England, in defiance of the scriptural ban imposed on crossing the seas. So did many other reformers back down. Only a very few reformers were there who practised what they preached. In July 1875, Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, was invited to Pune by Mahadeorao Ranade. Dayanand had successfully toured north India and Bengal, winning over several institutions and people. It was, however, difficult for reformers to accept Dayanand's theory that the Vedas contained all the knowledge, without, of course, advocating the caste system. Dayanand gave several lectures in Pune and also visited Satara. He was ceremonially taken around in a procession in Pune, which the conservatives tried to disrupt. The reformers sought Jotirao's help to conduct the procession, which was joined by many reformers as well as by non-Brahmins. Jotirao participated along with his followers, as did Ranade and other social reformers. The opponents to reforms took out a counter procession led by a donkey. A fight ensued; the police quelled it.

In 1875 the Satyashodhak Samaj celebrated its second anniversary. Dr Vishram Ramji Ghole became the new president and Ramshet Urvane, the treasurer. Ilayya Solomon, a Jew, was admitted as a member of the acting committee. Members of the Samaj met every Sunday evening. Every fortnight lectures on philosophy were organised. The Samaj activists were also trained to give speeches. In the same year, in November, the Prince of Wales visited Pune. In a meeting of the Satyashodhak Samaj, Dhandiram Kumbhar and Krishnarao Bhalekar sang songs in praise of the Prince. Meanwhile in the Satyashodhak Samaj

weddings were performed without a Brahmin priest. A lawyer named Raghavendra Rao opined that these weddings were legal. The Samaj also conducted essay contests on topics such as whether there was any need for idol worship and caste system. Prizes were awarded. The activists of the Samaj made efforts to spread education in the villages. They opened a school in Hadapsar which became a major centre for the Samaj. Membership of the Samaj went up to three hundred.

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