



JOTIRAO PHULE

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Mahatma Jotirao Phule was a well-known social reformer of Maharashtra in the nineteenth century. He worked ceaselessly for education of the women and the Dalits, for upliftment of the underprivileged and the Dalits, for upliftment of the underprivileged and the downtrodden, and for reform of the Indian social structure. He was revolutionary in his thinking and is a constant source of inspiration for the new generation of intellectuals.

Tarkateertha Laxmanshastri Joshi was a well-known Sanskrit and Marathi scholar and writer. He has written books such as *Vedic Sanskruticha Vikas* (Evolution of Vedic Society) and *Hindu Dharamchi Samiksha* (A Critique of Hinduism) besides editing the

Dharmakosha (Encyclopaedia of Hindu Religion) in Sanskrit and the *Vishvakosha* (World Encyclopaedia) in Marathi. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan for his literary contributions.

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Preface

1990 was the death centenary year of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, 1991 was the birth centenary year of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar—the two great men who died to free the Hindus from the curse of casteism.

For the occasion of Jotirao's birth centenary, the National Book Trust, India decided to publish this biography, and requested me in 1990 to prepare it. I present to the readers an abridged biography of Jotirao Phule.

The biography is based on the two books published by the Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Ani Sanskruti Mandal: *Mahatma Phule Samagra Varigmaya* edited by Y.D. Phadke and *Mahatma Jotirao Phule* by Dhananjay Keer.

September 1991 LAXMAN SHASTRI JOSHI

PART ONE

1. BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

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 learnt 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 fourteen-years 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.

2. EDUCATING WOMEN AND SUDRAS

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 ultra-conservative 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 Moreshwarshastri, Principal of Pune College, spoke at the function.

The movement to educate women began to spread to other regions of the country. A literary and scientific society for students was established in Bombay. The first four presidents of the society were Europeans. The society set up eight schools in Bombay on 1 October 1849. These schools were open to children of all castes. British governors and judges visited the schools. Describing the condition prevalent then, Lokahitavadi said:

The Brahmins have monopolised learning through unfair means. They have decreed that other castes should not be educated. Today, the Brahmins have captured all the means of livelihood. The Brahmin pandits have threatened to leave their profession rather than teach the holy language Sanskrit to non-Brahmin students.

The newsletter *Dnanodaya* wrote: "It is high time the Brahmins stopped entertaining such strange ideas." Between 1820 and 1825, a Brahmin *pandit* from Pune, Gangadhar Phadke, used to make a living by teaching Sanskrit to Europeans in Bombay. The Pune Brahmins ostracized him. Neelkanthshastri Bhat and five other *pandits* refused to teach Sanskrit to non-Brahmin students, for which they were transferred to the Oriental Research Institute on a lower salary. Pandit Dhondoshastri Dengvekar and Pandit Krishnashastri Rajwade were severely persecuted by the Pune Brahmins for teaching Sanskrit to non-Brahmin students.

Dadoba Pandhare, a contemporary of Jotirao, advocated the philosophy of social equality. He had deep faith in the Bible. Dadoba established the Manavdharma Sabha (Humanitarian Society) in Surat, in 1844, with the help of Gujarati teachers, and also the Paramhansa Sabha in 1848. Ram Balakrishna Jayakar was the president of the latter society, and to him Jotirao later dedicated his ballad on Shivaji. The Paramhansa Sabha movement has an important place in the history of social reforms in Maharashtra. The members of the Sabha were from the castes like Shenvi, Sonar, Prabhu, Bhandare, etc. Its aim was to abolish the caste system, oppose child marriage, encourage widow remarriage and bring about social reforms in Hindu religion. The Sabha had branches in Pune, Nagar, Satara, Dharwad, Belgaum and Calcutta.

In Bombay there were two social reformers, Jambhekar and Nana Shankarsheth, who were involved in the movement to reconvert those who had converted to Christianity. Jotirao, however, kept away from the movement to reform those who had 'fallen' from caste. The religion of a person did not in the least matter to him; he could be a Hindu, a Christian, a Muslim or a Jew.

All his attention was concentrated on making a success of the movement to educate the non-Brahmin masses. Hence great care was given to teaching girls and boys in his school. Some of Jotirao's associates were Brahmins who courageously and selflessly

supported the good work he was doing. The directors of some schools tried to avoid admitting the children of untouchables. According to law, this kind of discrimination was an offence, but implementation of the law was shoddy. The narrow-minded among the upper classes were apathetic to the problem. But Jotirao broke this barrier. He believed that if people from the lower classes were educated, they would be willing to struggle for the basic human rights.

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." Jotirao 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.

On 10 May 1857, there was an uprising against the British government. The battlefield for this agitation was outside Maharashtra, but the leaders were Maharashtrians. The cause of this uprising was strange. In a mischievous move the bullets of the guns were smeared with the fat of cows (held sacred by Hindus) and pigs (considered unholy by Muslims). The Indian soldiers revolted thinking that this was a plot by the British rulers to convert them to Christianity. This unorganised uprising was unsuccessful because of the superior discipline displayed by the British army. However, it was not an easy victory for the British. Jotirao's views on this incident were somewhat different; he was completely indifferent to it. He said he was happy that God was merciful enough to the Sudras to have crushed the revolt led by the Brahmin, Nana Phadnavis. He was aware that the British were there today and would be gone tomorrow; hence the need was for the Sudras to hurry and free themselves from the bondage of the Brahmins while the British were still around. He was certain that British rule would prove useful in introducing social reforms. In later years, another social reformer, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar said as much the same. The establishment of schools for women was the first step towards upliftment of the deprived and downtrodden.

3. SOCIAL REFORMS

After founding educational institutions, Jotirao turned his attention to social reforms by striking at age-old social traditions. Earlier, Rammohun Roy had fought against the practice of *sati* in Bengal which was subsequently abolished in 1829. The issue of widow remarriage was extremely sensitive and Jotirao was deeply moved by the plight of Hindu widows, in 1864 he got a widower of the Shenvi caste remarried. He founded an anti-abortion centre where widows could deliver their babies and have them cared for. This

was the first institution of its kind. It saved the widows from loneliness and from the killing of their infants.

Jotirao himself had no children. Although even his father-in-law advised him to remarry but Jotirao remained firm. He said, "If a woman cannot beget a child from her first husband, will she be justified in getting a second husband? This male practice of a second marriage because there is no issue from the first is an extremely cruel one." On the death of his father, Jotirao performed the last rites, but not according to tradition. He fed orphans and invalids. On his father's first death anniversary, he distributed food among the poor and books among students. His wife who was herself childless served the children in the anti-abortion centre with tender affection.

Had Jotirao opted for government service, he would have prospered but he chose public service as he considered it his moral duty towards society. He engaged in private business to support his family. When the government drew up a plan for the construction of the Khadakvasala dam, Jotirao along with his friend Sakharam Paranjape, acquired the contract for the supply of stone. In this line of business, Jotirao came into contact with workers and government officials, especially engineers. Concerned about the welfare of the workers, Jotirao fought for their rights. He impressed upon them the value of education for their children. He became a staunch critic of corrupt practices in such business enterprises. By and by, he undertook other jobs, like supplying lime for the construction of the Yerwada Bridge. His spare time he devoted to reading, especially poetry and books on history written by Christian missionaries.

In 1865, Jotirao published a book which created a stir. Called *Jatibhedviveksar*, it was written by his friend, Tukaram Tatya Podwal. In the preface to its second edition, the author says,

In the delineation of caste distinction in Hindu scriptures, one finds a corrupt form of caste distinction which has shackled the minds of the Hindus. There is no task more important than liberating them from the isolation resulting from such caste distinctions.

The Brahmins according to the author acquired superiority merely on the strength of their birth, even when they did not have a trace of learning or knowledge or righteous behaviour. Podwal says in his book that the *Puranas*, by promising happiness in the next world, subjected the masses to performing all kinds of services for the Brahmins. Caste distinctions were founded on the Brahminical notion that a Sudra can never be superior even if he is virtuous or has conquered his passions.

The whole world is under the control of the gods, the gods are under the control of *mantras*, the *mantras* are under the control of Brahmins and the Brahmins are my deity.

All the holy waters of the earth are contained in the sea and all the holy water in the sea is contained in the right foot of the Brahmin—such was the belief which formed the basis for the caste system. The first edition of this analytical book had earlier been published in August 1861 by Vasudeo Navarange, a progressive individual. He was a Shroff. In England, when his business failed he paid off all the money he owed to the merchants abroad and came to Bombay. Here, he participated enthusiastically in the activities of the Prarthana Samaj. In 1870 he married a widow.

In 1873, a Brahmin widow named Kashibai gave birth to a baby boy in the anti-abortion centre. The boy was named Yashwant. Jotirao's wife, Savitribai, brought up the

boy like her own son. Reformers such as Lokahitavadi, Bhandarkar, Madan Shrikrishna, Mama Paramananda and Tukaram Fodwal, specially commended this act.

Earlier in 1871, Madhavrao Ranade had become a follower of Jotirao. Impressed by Jotirao's success in running the home for babies, Ranade and a friend opened a similar home in Pandharpur in 1875. Meanwhile, Jotirao began to think of giving momentum to the issue of widow remarriage. Vishnushastri Pandit, who was a member of the educational institution, gave a helping hand in the work. He wrote articles on the issue of widow remarriage and had them published in the *Induprakash*. On 28 January 1866, Vishnushastri opened an institution to promote widow remarriage. Soon there were many branches of the institution. Invitations to the wedding of Pandurang Vinayak Karmarkar and Venubai were sent out, signed by seven *rishis* including social reformers and supporters such as Gopal Hari Deshmukh, M.G.Ranade, Vishnu Parshuram, and Vishnushastri Pandit (known as the Ishwarehandra Vidyasagar of Maharashtra). The social reaction to the marriage of Karmarkar and Venubai created a division in Maharashtrian society and set in motion a furious debate. Jotirao had set a personal example of his belief in the eradication of untouchability. Paying no heed to the orthodox dictates of Hindu society, Jotirao threw open the water tank near his house to untouchables, for whom the municipality had not made any arrangements for providing water. During summer, they had to walk long distances to fetch water. Jotirao's caste-fellows threatened to ostracise him. It was rumoured that he had converted to Christianity, because only Christian missionaries did not believe in being polluted by the untouchables. Jotirao showed exemplary courage in the face of strong social pressure. He believed that right was on his side.

4. OPPOSITION TO BRAHMINS 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 *pūja* 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 Krishanrao 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.

5. CRUSADE FOR FARMERS' AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

In the first half of 1877, thought-provoking lectures were given in the Satyashodhak Samaj Griha in Vithal Peth in Pune in order to inculcate a spirit of rationalism and a scientific outlook among the followers. One such lecture was on the problem of poverty in India. Elocution contests were held. Prizes were given at essay and speech contests. The same year Jotirao sent a notice to the members informing them that the Victoria Children's Home started by the Samaj for famine-affected children whose numbers were on the increase, especially in the villages of Idarpur, Maraj and Tasgaon, had started functioning.

In 1875, farmers from Ahmedabad, Pune, Satara, Sholapur rose in revolt against the money-lenders who had been defrauding the poor by making them sign bonds worth more than the loan advanced. The government appointed a committee to investigate into the matter. On the committee's recommendation, the government passed the Deccan Agricultural Relief Act, with a view to improve relations between the money-lenders and the farmers. There were provisions to ensure that the bonds were bonafide and the rights of the farmers protected. Jotirao's weekly, *Deenbandhu* supported these regulations.

Jotirao participated enthusiastically in the work of the Pune municipality. He was deeply concerned about the rights of the citizens. Dr Ghole and Jotirao Phule wielded special influence in the municipality.

At this time the city of Pune witnessed a rebellion.

Vasudeo Balwant Phadke rose in revolt against the British regime. Phadke had acquired military training from Lahuji Mang in 1847. By 1849 the revolt had shaken up the whole of Maharashtra. Newspapers at home and abroad carried the news. Vasudeo Phadke was tried and sent into exile. He died in a prison in Aden on 17 February 1883.

People said that Jotirao had provided *bhakis* to Phadke's soldiers, but Jotirao has referred scornfully to Phadke in his book *Sarvanjanik Satyadharmā*. Chiplunkar called Phadke a dacoit and Ranade called him a fanatical patriot. Phadke and Jotirao had received military training from the same teacher. They knew each other very well.

Towards the end of 1879, Jotirao began to press the government, through the *Deenbandhu*, for introducing compulsory primary education. He persisted with his demand, but did not receive any response from the government. Compulsory primary education was started in 1870 in England, in 1889 in Ireland and in 1890 in Scotland. However, no action was taken in this regard in India.

Jotirao was deeply concerned at the workers' problems. His associate, Narayanrao, wrote on workers' problems in the *Deenbandhu*. He threw light on the working conditions of mill-workers who slaved for fourteen hours a day, with no rest or respite. The mill-owners claimed that workers could go out into the open by turns. The *Deenbandhu* pointed out that workers were fined four annas each if they left the mill premises, that they did not get any rest, and that their children worked endlessly in the mills. The government appointed a committee in 1875 to investigate into the matter.

Lokhande wanted that a workers' representative be appointed on the commission. Later he himself was elected as the representative.

Meanwhile, Jotirao's good work in the Pune municipality continued unabated. In June 1890, Hari Raoji Chiplunkar put forth the resolution that the election of the acting committee of the municipality should be held by a vote from all members, before the commencement of every working year. Jotirao supported this resolution. Conscious of the welfare of the public he believed that the resolution would prevent power from being concentrated in the hands of any one group. He displayed exemplary courage in his conviction when the municipality voted for approval of the expenses to be borne by it during Viceroy Lord Lytton's impending visit to Pune. A thousand rupees were to be spent on cleaning up the city to welcome Lytton. Out of the thirty-two members, all except one voted in favour of incurring the expenses. The sole opposition was from Jotirao. He opposed the expenses to be incurred on a citation for the Viceroy, saying that

the amount should instead be spent on the poor. He demonstrated by his opposition that office bearers had the right to oppose resolutions which were against public good.

Jotirao took a serious view of the widespread consumption of alcohol. On 18 July 1880 he wrote a strongly worded letter to Plunket, president of Pune municipality's acting committee:

The municipality has spent a vast amount of money on appointing staff and running the health department with the aim of maintaining public health. Pune city was not familiar with the sight of liquor shops. But now liquor shops are seen even in crowded areas, thus sowing the seeds of decline in public morals. This nullifies the municipality's aim to maintain public health. With the opening of liquor shops, alcoholism has increased, and many a family destroyed. The vice of alcoholism has gripped the city. To control the spread of this vice, at least to a certain extent, I suggest that the municipality should impose a tax on liquor shops in proportion to the damage they do. I believe no municipality has imposed such a tax, though the central government has done so. The municipality should make enquiries about this. I shall be grateful if my resolution is placed before the general assembly.

The letter created a stir. *Dnanprakash* lauded Jotirao and said in his support:

The issue to which Jotirao for the first time has drawn the municipality's attention is of great importance. He deserves to be congratulated for his action.

Jotirao received an acknowledgement for his letter from the president of the municipality. The letter was placed before the committee in the first meeting itself and the following resolution was passed:

The president should decide whether to put this before the committee or not. According to the resolution passed by the central government on 22 October 1877, no tax can be imposed on alcohol. But the assembly hopes that it will be possible to reduce the number of liquor shops in Pune.

The acting committee's resolution and the original letter were handed to Mr Ritchnell, president of the municipality, who sent them on 27th July 1880 to Henry Dickson, an excise officer, for his comments. Dickson returned them on 30th July with the following comments:

We humbly state that during 1873-77 there were four liquor shops in Pune. Since 1877-78, six new ones have opened, bringing the number to ten. The District Governor had given permission to open new shops because where there are no liquor shops, illicit liquor is prepared. The action was taken to discourage brewing of illicit, harmful liquor in Pune. In 1874, 15617 gallons of liquor were sold. In 1879 the sale went up to 22912 gallons.

The District Governor was convinced that alcoholism in Pune was rapidly on the increase. On 8 August 1880, Ritchnell assigned the case to the public superintendent who sent the following reply, on 27th August:

The reason alcoholism is on the increase is that previously the rich were not addicted to it, but now they are. It however may not be true that they have their fill of country liquor.

Ritchnell sent all the correspondence to the Pune municipality with the remark:

It cannot be claimed that alcoholism has increased on account of the increased number of liquor shops. The question is whether anything can be done to put a stop to the spread of this vice.

In its resolution regarding Jotirao's letter, the municipality expressed the desire to put in effort to reduce this vice from spreading. He was not the first to protest against alcoholism in Maharashtra. In 1852 the people of Satara had sent an application to the government to close down all liquor shops. In 1869 an officer named C. W. Bell published an account of the government's excise policy, which stated:

Towards the end of the Peshwa regime, alcoholism had gone up. Taxes earned from it had increased. Offenders were sentenced to severe punishment.

Influence of Jotirao's work and leadership began to be felt widely in Maharashtra. He became the mouthpiece for the grievances of the downtrodden. There was no leader quite like him. He paved the way for the new era of social activism.

6. REPRESENTATION TO HUNTER'S COMMISSION

In 1882, in order to examine the question of education in India, the government appointed a Commission under the chairmanship of Sir William Hunter. In pursuit of its aim to educate many, Hunter toured the country to meet important personalities in the public field. A committee was appointed in every province of British India to assist the Commission. The Commission interviewed experts to unravel problems regarding education in the provinces. Some experts, one of whom was Jotirao, informed the Commission of their views in writing.

In his representation to the Education Committee, V.S. Apte, superintendent of the New English School, suggested that the responsibility for primary and secondary education should be handed over to the people. He said in his representation:

The efforts of Christian missionaries to set up schools are not genuinely patriotic. Their intentions, too, are not strictly restricted to education.

Several learned and well-known personalities testified before the committee, but almost all of them were concerned only with the education of the upper castes of the society. Jotirao was the only exception. He bluntly accused the government of ignoring the education of the lower castes. In his representation of 19 October 1882, Jotirao described himself as a merchant, a farmer and a municipal corporator. He gave a detailed account of the schools established by him and his work in the field of education, the number of years that he worked as a teacher and his experience regarding education. He began by quoting some passages from his book, the *Gulamgiri*. In his representation, Jotirao Phule said:

The government is under the illusion that people from the upper castes will spread education among the lower castes. Clinging to this pipe-dream, the government squanders the taxes that it earns from poor farmers on educating the upper classes. Educational institutions educate children of the rich and help them achieve material success. But those who come out of these institutions have not done anything to assist in the upliftment of their underprivileged countrymen. The young men, armed with degrees from universities, what have they done for the common masses? What change have they

brought about in society, at home and elsewhere to educate their unfortunate and ignorant brethren? Then, how can it be claimed that it is essential to educate the upper castes to raise the moral and intellectual level of the people? The only way to know of the growth in national welfare is to determine the number of students in universities and the spread of university education. Just as passing a law against hunting or giving franchise to those paying ten pounds worth of taxes does not prove the efficiency of the Constitution, similarly churning out high-caste students from universities or appointing natives as deans and proctors does not prove that it is all in the interest of the nation. An obvious consequence of the government's education system for the upper castes is that all the senior posts in government jobs have been monopolised by the Brahmins. If the government really cares about the welfare of the people, then its prime duty is to look into this matter. Monopoly of education by the Brahmins should be gradually restricted by appointing people from other castes. It may be argued that this is not possible now, to this our reply is that if the government were to pay more attention to primary education, there would be no difficulty in training people who are morally upright and virtuous in their conduct. The upper castes can take care of their higher education themselves.

Jotirao further said:

Primary education has been neglected in Bombay district. Primary schools are not provided with the appropriate infrastructure. The government takes tax from farmers for the purpose of education but the money raised is not used for the intended purpose. There is no provision for primary education in nearly ten villages of this district, that is, for nearly ten lakh children. Farmers' poverty, their lack of self-reliance, their dependence on the educated classes, all is a result of the present sorry state of education. Farmers and people from the lower castes are unable to avail themselves of education. Very few of their children are to be found in primary and secondary schools. In any case, they do not continue for very long in school owing to their parents' poverty, and the pressing need to work. The government has not provided scholarships or prizes to induce these children to continue their education. So, I feel that primary education should be made compulsory. Muslims too have stayed away from education due to their indifference towards the Marathi and English languages. There are very few schools where their own language is taught. The Mahar, Mang and Ati-Sudra castes have been deprived of school education owing to caste prejudices. Their children are not allowed to sit next to the upper caste children. Separate schools have been opened for them, but they are all in the big cities. Pune, which has a population of over five thousand Mahars and Mangs, has only one school worth the name and there are just thirty children in the school. This does not speak well of the education department. Thus, I request the government to open separate schools in those villages which have a sizable population of the lower castes. In view of the present state of education, it is not right to base a teacher's salary on the progress made by the students. I say this from the viewpoint of spreading education among the poor and the ignorant because education has to percolate to the lower castes. It appears that no teacher will run a school on his own steam for these students because this way he will not earn enough to make a living. The education imparted in government schools should be sound and have practical utility for students. The terms and conditions of teachers' jobs should be made more favourable. Their salaries and status should be improved. Only trained teachers should be appointed in schools. Most of the teachers appointed in primary schools at present are Brahmins, some of whom have only passed

high school. Their salaries are meagre. Hence, their performance is also unsatisfactory. I feel that teachers employed in primary schools should be trained to the best extent possible and should be drawn from the farmers' caste to be able to empathise with the feelings and needs of the poor children and mingle freely with them. This will have a moral and beneficial effect on these children. The Brahmin teachers' religious prejudices do not allow them to mingle with children from the lower castes. Teachers from lower castes should not think it beneath their dignity to hold a plough or wield a carpenter's tool; hence, they can mingle more freely. Teachers should get training in farming and health. Those teachers who are worthy should be appointed even if they have not passed the teachers' training or other examination. To get better teachers, better salaries should be paid, at least not less than twelve rupees. They could additionally be given an accountant's job or that of the village postmaster or of selling stamps, and their status raised, so as to carry enough weight with the people among whom they move. Teachers from whose schools more children pass out should be given special additional remuneration apart from their monthly salary. The curriculum in village school should be practical and simpler than that in city school, and a model farm should also be run as part of the school activities to impart knowledge on farming. Books being taught in primary and vernacular schools should be revised. Lessons in technology, moral science and some useful arts should also be arranged. The education inspector pays no more than one visit to the school. Schools in rural areas should be inspected four times a year or more. It would be useful to pay surprise visits rather than notifying the schools in advance about the inspection. There is no point in relying on district or village officers for inspection. Their inspection of schools is usually superficial and shoddy. Supervision by European officers is essential, because that carries weight with the teachers. The number of primary schools should be increased. For this purpose, schools with qualified teachers should be given grants. Half the tax levied on farmers should be spent on primary education. The government should run schools, which are within municipal limits, at its own cost and pass a suitable law for the purpose. The government should collect grants to run municipalities from provincial or central funds so that the municipalities can run schools in their territories with their own money. But the municipalities should not be entrusted with the job of administering schools. Primary and private English schools run according to government rules should be given grants if the money is available. But the amount should be in proportion to the number of students who have passed.

The municipalities should pass a law compelling schools to give such grants. Funds spent on education should be controlled by the director of education. Educated persons appointed on the committee can be allowed to handle the funds. Those appointed on committees at present, such as Patils and Inamdars, are not able to control the funds effectively. The primary schools are outdated and the Brahmins, who are not even familiar with the three R's, are entrusted with their functioning. There is no provision to train teachers for vernacular schools in rural areas. The government should continue to exercise complete control over the education department. Those who run private secondary schools do not earn enough to make a living. Their efforts cannot be of a lasting nature. If private schools run by people like Vishnushashtri Chiplunkar or Bhave are given grants, their schools will render valuable service. However, their strength is not likely to increase to such an extent as to make government secondary schools redundant. Secondary education at present is impractical and unsuitable for the common man. Its

only utility is to churn out clerks and teachers. Teachers and students are unduly obsessed with passing the matriculation examination. It does not equip them to face the future. Higher education should be accessible to all. Books on subjects selected for matriculation should be published by the Bombay government in the gazette, just as they are printed in the government gazette in Madras and Bengal. This will encourage private students and help in further spread of education in the country.

Commending Bombay University on its effort in the field of education, Jotirao said:

It is a big blessing to people that the Bombay University allows private students to appear for its exams. I hope the same blessing will be extended to higher education. If the university accepts private students for B.A. and M.A., then young people will really strive to study privately, and this will mean a step forward in the spread of education.

On the system of giving scholarships, Jotirao said:

Children from the lower castes who have not made much progress should also be given some scholarship. Despite holding competition for awarding scholarships, it will not help spread education among the lower castes. Due to lack of technical or practical education, educated people who do not get government jobs are not inclined to take up work that demands physical labour. The number of educated people is very small at present, but the day is not far when this number will increase hundredfold. Let us hope that this will encourage all to take up useful trades and not run after government jobs. Finally, I have one request to make to the Commission — it should find means to initiate girls' education in a big way,

In his book *Shetkaryacha Asood*, Jotirao said:

The Hunter Commission did not interview farmers. It relied solely on the discussions it had with Parsis, Christians and Brahmins and accepted their word as final. Hence, the report of this Commission will not benefit the illiterate and the poor.

On 30 October 1882, a proposal was presented to Pune municipality for opening a veterinary college. Jotirao suggested that since the Madras municipality had been running such a college, enquiries could be made from them regarding the financial implications entailed. Jotirao's suggestion was accepted. Another proposal which came*up for consideration before the municipality was to increase the number of scholarships given to primary schools run by the municipality. Jotirao, however, suggested the modification that no decision should be taken till the government had decided whether or not to relieve the municipality of the responsibility of running primary schools. The original resolution was passed.

On 4 December 1882, a proposal came up for discussion before the municipality concerning the need to construct the building for a market. Jotirao and Harirao Chiplunkar felt that a huge amount to the tune of three lakh five thousand rupees need not be spent on the building. Originally it was planned to spend one lakh rupees only. Jotirao opined that the amount could instead be spent on educating the poor. Three other amendments were suggested. But the majority passed the resolution that the building with two hundred shops and requiring about two lakh rupees should be constructed. The *Kesari* strongly opposed the resolution, saying that such an expensive structure was not required; the opposition was, however, brushed aside.

7. THE FARMER'S WHIP

Man's primary needs are directed at the production of food and clothing. Hence, it is important for the farmer community to be healthy and strong. Modern society has been built on the industrial revolution but it still requires the support to its foundation from the farmer community. From this sociological standpoint Jotirao wrote and published the book, *Shetkaryacha Asood*. While writing the book he would read out chapters from the manuscript to his friends and followers. In April 1883 he read out the entire manuscript in Bombay. Around the same time he met Sayajirao, the young ruler of Baroda, a man of great ability and deeply concerned about his people's welfare. Jotirao read out the chapters from the manuscript of *Shetkaryacha Asood*. Sayajirao gave him financial help and honoured him with a shawl and a turban. On 28 July 1883 Jotirao sent a copy of the manuscript to the viceroy. Sir Fredrick Hamilton Temple, Earl of Dufferin.

Jotirao says in the introduction to the book:

Without knowledge the mind was lost,
Without the mind virtue was lost,
Without virtue fortune was lost,
Without fortune wealth was lost,
Without wealth the Sudras sank;
Such was the havoc wreaked by wisdom's lack.

He continued:

At present there are three kinds of farmers—the Sudra farmers or Kunbis, the Malis and the Dhangars. Those who originally made a living from farming alone were the Kulwadis or the Kunbis; those who cultivated gardens apart from their farms, were the Malis; those who did both and raised sheep and goats in addition were the Dhangars. At present there is no intermarriage among the three castes, though there are other kinds of mutual dealings. From this one may surmise that the three castes must have previously been under the one Sudra caste. Later on, people from all the three castes were compelled to give up their original occupation and take up other trades to make a living. But most of them were illiterate, gullible and needy. Some of them like the Shindes and Holkars earned *jagirs* and *inams* for the martial service they rendered, and prospered. But today, their descendants, being ignorant and illiterate, have mortgaged their *jagirs* and *inams* and are deep in debt; some are even starving. Most *jagirdars* and *inamdars* have no idea of the strife and trouble undergone by their ancestors and are content to live off their inheritance. They keep evil company. The people around them, Brahmins and ministers, are selfish and cunning and do not let our princes taste the joys of learning and virtue. Hence, unaware of their true status and smug in the assumption that their ancestors had attained the kingdom only for their enjoyment, these princes have become totally dependent on Brahmins and their ministers, perform *gopradan* by day and indulge in revelry by night. The princes should have shown concern for their Sudra brethren's welfare, but, the thought never crossed their minds. Till they rid themselves of the false belief that Brahmins are their gods, they will never see sense.

The first chapter of *Shetkaryacha Asood* describes in detail how in the name of religion Brahmins were persecuting the Sudras from the cradle to the grave. There was no

limit to the religious rites and rituals imposed by Brahmins on the Sudras. The chapter also describes how the Brahmins who could not acquire higher education, under the garb of a *sanyasin*, exploited the ignorant and the uneducated.

About the British, Jotirao said:

Farmers have no money to educate their children. The English officials, engrossed in their own affairs, have no time to listen to the farmers' grievances. They go by the briefs of their Brahmin subordinates. The farmers do not have enough food to feed their families, nor clothes on their bodies. The British government is a highly expensive government run by officials earning exorbitant salaries, while the farmers are getting crushed under the indirect burden imposed by the huge salaries being paid to retired officials.

According to Jotirao there were several reasons for the extreme poverty of the farmers. Before the British came, kings and rulers of states had maintained huge armies in which people were employed in large numbers. Hence, the farmlands were not burdened. After the decline of the Peshwas, soldiers in the Maratha army were rendered jobless. They returned home and took to farming as a result of which pressure on the farmland increased. In peace time the population increased, too. Families were hard-pressed to support their families and livestock on the income from the divided land. The forest department, in turn, encroached upon pasture land. Land fertility declined. Divided farmlands were increasingly sold to big farmers who owned ploughs and oxen. The landless farmers began to wander in search of jobs as weavers, carpenters and ironsmiths.

But the weavers, carpenters and ironsmiths who were themselves small-scale tradesmen could not carry on as before, because they were unable to compete with the goods coming into India from Britain. Knives, scissors, sewing machines, thread, locks, keys, iron sheets, tar, bellows, various kinds of vehicles and cloth were imported from Britain into India without any custom duty. As a result, the local traders suffered. They were forced to sell their products cheap and were barely able to survive.

The subject matter of *Shetkaryacha Asood* is not restricted to farmers' problems alone. Jotirao also examines the restraints imposed on various castes which hampered progress. The Brahmins were responsible for the taboo imposed on overseas travel. As a result, Hindus lost touch with the outside world. The Brahmins, however, enjoyed the isolation. They had the Sudras to slave for them, work on their farms and weave their clothes.

Jotiba Phule was one of the first persons to rebel against the traditional social system in India. From where did he find the inspiration for this revolt considering that the prevailing social laws had taken a firm hold on the Indian mind for thousands of years? The answer is that Jotiba was a Satyashodhak—a seeker of truth—the moral truth of human life. The manifestation of that perennial truth was his belief in man's freedom in the universe, as upheld by modern western civilisation.

8. TRUE RELIGION FOR THE PEOPLE

Jotirao had to endure severe physical pain to write his book. His right hand had been badly affected due to a paralytic stroke. With strong conviction that it was necessary to complete the message, as set out in his *Gulamgiri*, he willed himself to write the book, *Sarvajanik Satyadharma* with his left hand. *Sarvajanik Satyadharma* is, in essence, a

manifesto for democracy, the inspiration for which came to him from modern western civilisation.

There are thirty-three articles in the *Sarvajanik Satyadharma*, which define the rules for the creation of a world-family based on basic human rights as well as the social and intellectual attitudes essential for it. The gist of these articles, in more or less Jotirao's words, is as follows:

All men and women should live together unite on this earth as one family, with honesty and without discrimination, no matter to which village, province, country, continent or religious beliefs they adhere to.

The Creator created man to be independent and capable of enjoying equal rights as others.

The Creator has given freedom to all men and women to express themselves freely, but without causing harm on account of their thoughts or views. This is known as true (righteous) conduct.

The Creator has endowed everyone with human rights. Hence it follows that an individual or a group cannot dominate another. To follow this principle is to practise righteous conduct.

The Creator has given all men and women religious and political freedom. One who does not harm another in any way and does not usurp another's rights is a practitioner of righteous conduct.

Conduct which will please the Creator is public truth (virtue). The honest behaviour of any human being towards his fellow human beings may be termed as morality.

If the Creator of this earth and the solar system is one, why are countries inimical towards one another and harbour deluded notions of patriotic pride? Then, also rivers from different countries of the world join the sea, then how can a particular river of one country alone be sacred? Although all human beings on the face of this earth are equal in the eyes of God, some have become superior by virtue of their birth; how did this come about? Is it not a fact that everyone is alike in birth and death and equally endowed with virtue and vice? Those who eschew any kind of distinction and engage in the task of uplifting the society in the course of their work, whether as Aryans or Americans, or as one considered lowly such as the Chandals, are all deserving of charity. Only if they receive charity will the Creator be truly happy.

It is quite clear that these are the thoughts of one who believed in a democratic society. Jotirao borrowed the concept of the kingdom of God on earth from Christianity, although he introduced the new concept of human values. He was not a nationalist. In his opinion, the term 'nation' was to be interpreted as 'the community of a region, based on freedom and equality'. He says time and again that groups of communities bound by caste or religion do not constitute a nation. A religious community should always remain a constituent of the world community. Religious institutions have led to separatism. He warns repeatedly against blind beliefs in religion.

'Nirmik', meaning God, is the new term Jotirao has used for the Creator of the universe. He believed that terms hitherto coined for God, had grown out of practices and observances, of prayer or worship, which only created social rift amongst human beings.

Hence, he eschewed terms such as Ishwar, Allah, Brahma, etc, According to him, service to mankind or defending human equality and freedom was in essence the true worship of God.

9. THE LAST SEVEN YEARS

People from non-Brahmin castes gathered in large numbers under Jotirao's banner. One of the important programmes of the Satyashodhak Samaj was to ceremonially perform a religious rite, a marriage function, a house-warming ceremony, without the assistance of a Brahmin priest. A certain Balaji Kusaji Patil performed his son's wedding without a Brahmin priest in accordance with the rules of the Satyashodhak Samaj. The Brahmins held the marriage invalid since a Brahmin priest was not present. In Otur village of Pune district, a meeting of Brahmins from surrounding villages was held. They passed a resolution to the effect that performing a marriage without a Brahmin priest impinged on their rights; hence they filed a case against Balaji Patil. The judge, Mahadeo Govind Ranade, passed the verdict that it was wrong to perform a marriage ceremony without a Brahmin priest, especially the village priest, and even if the priest had not been invited to the wedding, he should still be given the *dakshina*. The verdict was eventually challenged successfully by Jotirao who stood up for Balaji Patil. Although the verdict had gone against Patil in the lower court, the higher court ruled in his favour.

Jotirao also started a novel farmer's movement to protest against the malpractices by money-lenders who did not allow farmers to cultivate their lands continuously for a year at a time. The government was compelled to pass the Deccan Agriculturist Relief Act. The Act enabled the farmer to not only get a loan at a lower interest rate but also not face the threat of losing his land on account of the loan.

Jotirao was hopeful that his movement would reach the various corners of the country. In 1884 he met Sayajirao Gaekwad who had recently ascended the throne of Baroda and was concerned about public welfare. Jotirao was very favourably inclined towards the young ruler. Jotirao had given lectures on his reforms in some important places in Baroda. As we have seen, he had read chapters from the *Shetkaryacha Asood* before the ruler. His lectures had a great impact on Sayajirao who immediately put a stop to the practice of serving *khichdi* (rice and lentil gruel) to Brahmins.

In April 1885, on *Gudhi Padwa* day, the leaders of the Satyashodhak Samaj took out a huge procession in Pune. A large crowd of activists and eminent persons took part in the procession, waving green and yellow flags. A band played at the head of the procession while the Mahars played musical instruments and sang songs at the rear. Behind the Mahars were leather-drum and wind-instrument players followed by a troupe of *dhol* (drum) and trumpet players. Among those who joined the procession were, Jotirao, Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru, Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Krishnarao Bhalekar, Dr Sadoba Gavade, L.K.Ghorpade, Deorao Thosar, H.L Navalkar, etc. The procession which started at four in the afternoon from the Vithoba temple reached Dr Sadoba Gavade's house at nine in the evening. Speeches were made by Jotirao, Ranade, Ayyavaru, and others.

The second annual Marathi literary conference was held on 24 May 1885 in the Sarvajanic Hall in Pune, under the president ship of Krishnashastri Rajwade, and

attended by nearly 300 litterateurs. Some forty-three letters from those who could not attend were read out among which Jotirao's letter came first. Jotirao's letter clearly expressed his ideology in short, succinct words. Hitherto a discussion on the problems of the poor had rarely been awarded an important place in Marathi literature.

In the monsoon of 1885 Sayajirao Gaekwad stayed in Pune for two months. Jotirao organised a big function in his honour, in which speeches were given by Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Dr Bhadarkar and Jotirao himself. The paper *Dnanprakash* lauded Ranade's speech but criticised Jotirao's. In response to *Dnanprakash's* criticism, Jotirao wrote a booklet called *Ishara* (Warning) refuting the points raised by Ranade. Highlighting the sufferings of the farmers during the reign of Bajirao II, Jotirao said that God took away Bajirao's crown and gave the Sudra and the Ati-Sudra masses an infinitely just, benevolent, virtuous, peaceful administration in the form of British rulers. Thus it was natural for the people to pray day and night to God to let the British government continue for a long time to come.

In the same year, he also published a booklet of dialogues called *Satsar* (Essence of Goodness). The booklet lauded Pandita Ramabai's religious conversion. Jotirao also raised the question: How was it that the Brahmins, though small in number, enjoyed supremacy and power over non-Brahmins who were ten times more in number? Then he himself answered with a counter-question: How did a handful of Mohammedans and the British become sovereigns over millions of Hindus? The last part of this booklet was in the form of a conversation between Jotirao and a Brahmin, in a somewhat blunt and bitter tone. Out of the 2,000 copies published, Jotirao's friends alone bought 1,050 copies of the booklet and distributed them in various villages.

Jotirao published the second issue of *Satsar* in October 1885, in which he attempted to prove to women how men had deceived them into thinking that they were being persecuted in every possible way under British rule. He fiercely attacked the unjust, tyrannical and prejudiced views contained in the Hindu scriptures regarding women and thus gave voice to women's woes. There were however no further issues of *Satsar* after this.

Jotirao then wrote a booklet called *Asprushyanchi Kaifiyat* (Case of the Untouchables), presenting an imaginary account of a Mahar and a Mang urging Queen Victoria, on a tour of India, to visit their locality. They invite her to see for herself if there has been any improvement in their lot during her reign. The Queen agrees to the visit. She is told that under the Peshwa regime the untouchables were treated most inhumanly and made to lead a wretched life. In the British regime their life had become more secure, but they still could not move about freely. Poverty prevented them from sending their children to school. The Queen promises that her government would look into their grievances.

Jotirao took an important step towards solving the problems of the untouchables by training activists from the untouchable castes. He taught them to write and give speeches and guided them in social work. Among these activists, Gopalbal Valangkar, a student of Jotirao, was the most prominent. He was an author, an expert activist and an excellent speaker. He held a job in the infantry, which he eventually gave up to devote himself to the task of eradicating untouchability. He wrote several scathing articles in the *Deenbandhu* and the *Sudharak*.

Jotirao wrote numerous books of prose and *abhangs* in Marathi in a persuasive style. He called his *abhangs*, *akhanda* (endless). He also composed *mangalashтакas* to be sung at weddings. These songs were included in the *Sarvajanic Satyadharmā*. An interesting feature of these *mangalashтакas* was that the bride and the groom sang them by turns and the guests present blessed the newly-weds by reciting one particular verse.

Jotirao continued to participate enthusiastically in the activities of the Pune municipality. In 1879 the municipality urged him to select a site where the garbage of the town could be deposited; Jotirao willingly obliged.

In order to set an example to farmers, Jotirao bought 200 acres of land to teach improved {methods of} farming. The farmers did not readily accept new methods and were not even keen to use canal water for irrigation. Jotirao showed them the method of irrigating through canal water a mango grove in the jungles of Manjri, near Pune.

Workers were organised into a team and lessons in self-improvement imparted to them under the aegis of the Satyashodhak Samaj. The guiding force was Jotirao. The problems of the workers were really that of the poor masses. The *Deenbandhu* continued to highlight their problems in a forthright manner. It was the mouthpiece of the Satyashodhaks who were devoted to upliftment of the workers.

In September 1885, Jotirao gave a number of lectures at various workers' colonies in Bombay. He also attended the annual function of the Satyashodhak Samaj in Thane. The followers, activists and leaders of the Satyashodhak Samaj collected in large numbers to welcome the leaders. Their enthusiasm was to be seen to be believed. It was decided at this annual function that Narayanrao Lokhande, who, as we have seen, was the founder of the workers' movement, was asked to publish a series of books called *Satyashodhak Nibandhmala* (Satyashodhak Series of Essays).

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, but Jotirao had no faith in its ability to redress the grievances of the poor non-Brahmin masses. He continued publishing critical articles in the paper *Deenbandhu*. His work for the public and his writings drew attention of Mama Parmananda, a social reformer from Bombay, who was also closely associated with Ranade, Telang and Bhandarkar.

In 1885 construction of the new market building was completed in Pune. It was named after the Governor of Bombay, Lord Ray. But traders could not set up shops in the building as they were unable to afford the high rents. Jotirao, as we have seen, had opposed the construction of the market at such immense cost. Today, by a strange coincidence, the very same Raj Market is known as Phule Market.

The Satyashodhak Samaj continued to perform marriages without engaging a Brahmin priest. Gunaji Bapu Patil of Talwane village in Junnar *taluka* performed a marriage in his house without a Brahmin priest. A barber's wedding was similarly performed, which created a rift between the barber community and the Brahmins.

In May 1888, the honorific 'Mahatma' (Great Soul) was conferred on Jotirao at a huge public function in Mandi, in recognition of his service to the Dalit community. In July 1888 Jotirao suffered a paralytic stroke and remained bedridden for four months. Meanwhile, his adopted son Yashwant got married to Radha, daughter of Gyanoba Sasane. As per the Satyashodhak Samaj rules, *mangalashтакas* were sung by other bridal couple after which they were blessed by the guests.

In January 1890, still struggling with paralysis, Jotirao achieved a major victory. A certain Balaji Kusaji Patil of Otur village had performed a wedding at home without inviting a Brahmin priest. No rites were performed except for the exchange of garlands by the bride and the bridegroom. It was around this time that the Chief Justice of Supreme Court, Sir Charles Sergeant, passed the verdict that the village priest had no right to the *dakshina* given in a wedding ceremony.

February 1890 saw another victory for Jotirao's movement against the forcible tonsure of widows, which papers like *Subodhpatrika* and *Induprakash* also roundly condemned. The barber community also lent its support to the move to end this practice.

On 27 November 1890, Jotirao's condition worsened. It became clear that the end was near. He sent for his wife and pleaded with her to have courage. He asked Yashwant to pray to God and then himself said a prayer. He was conscious till the end. His face was calm and happy when this greatest of men departed from the world at 2.20 a.m. on 28 November 1890.

The news of Jotirao's death spread like wild fire. By dawn people began to flock to pay their last respects to the departed soul. Hordes of Satyashodhak activists from villages around Pune rushed to the city. People of all faiths and castes—Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins, Mahars and Mangs, even women—joined the funeral procession. Newspapers paid rich tributes.

Mama Parmananda, well-wisher and close friend of Jotirao, persuaded Sayajirao, ruler of Baroda, to provide financial help to Savitribai and Yashwant. In February 1892 Sayaji Gaekwad donated a thousand rupees to Mama Parmananda. Savitribai was given fifty rupees out of this amount every three months. Mama Parmananda also set up a fund to raise a memorial for Jotirao. Barely six years after Jotirao's death, Savitribai and Yashwant died in a plague epidemic in Pune, in 1897.

10. 'NIRMIK' IS GOD

Jotirao had written the *Sarvajanic Satyadharm* before his death but it was published posthumously. In the introduction to the book he said:

In this vast, boundless space of ours the 'Nirmik' (Creator) has created all living beings along with innumerable solar systems and their planets and satellites. By the grace of God, I have written this humble book for the good of humanity, to show to men and women what kind of conduct to adopt towards others, with His thoughts always in their minds and which will please Him. I ask of Him that this book be accepted by all and that all of us enjoy equally 'Nirmik's' kingdom of truth.

Although Jotirao rebelled against Brahminical scriptures, it appears that he could not dissociate himself from the religious view on the establishment of God's kingdom (not temporal power) on earth. He however discarded blind beliefs and customs, orthodox and senseless Hindu rites and religious ceremonies and simplified and cut short many of them. Most leaders of the Satyashodhak Samaj were in accord with him.

In his preface to Jotirao's book Dr Vishram Ghole says:

A false religion, idol worship and the caste system have together created havoc in India—this has been well portrayed in the book. How can one create an image of God

when one does not know how God looks, what his form is like, when no one has seen him? Everyone has come to realise that the caste system as it operates at present has been doing a lot of harm. All we have to say is that it is one of the most important causes for the decline of Indians, for increasing mutual hostility, for the numerous disputes and for the slavish attitude,

Dr Ghole further says:

For the past forty years or so Jotirao Phule has been speaking on religious and practical issues. Through debate he has removed illusions from the people's minds. He has written books and dedicated them to the people. He has discussed and continues to discuss these issues in newspapers. He has instructed the public through many poetic compositions. Apart from this he has given himself up to public service. He has inculcated in people the habit of inquiring into the veracity and cause and effect of religious matters. He has demonstrated what is right and what is wrong with respect to particular customs. He has disapproved the practice of idol worship and upheld monotheism. He has refuted beliefs that would cause harassment to people in matters of religion, duty and everyday activities. He has done a great service to the public with all his good work. The fruit of his labour of long years can be now seen everywhere and many people have gradually begun to believe in one God. The myth of religion has been exposed and people now recognise its weaknesses. They understand now that the *Puranas* are mere fiction.

Dr Ghole sums up Jotirao's philosophy as follows:

Worship one God, practise righteous conduct. Everyone should behave like brothers and sisters towards each other. All human beings, men and women, should have equal rights. There should be no caste discrimination. The evil customs of today, which are the offshoots of our religion, should be discarded.

Or Ghole expressed the confidence that the book would strike at the root cause of blind faith and fanaticism. He recommended that people of all religions—Jews, Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and others should have the book in their collection.

Jotirao begins the book *Sarvajanic Satyadharma* with the injunction that man could never be happy in the world unless his conduct was true (righteous).

Truth is the primary home of all,

The refuge of all religions.

All the happiness in the world

Is the offspring of truth.

Truth is the shelter of happiness,

The rest is all darkness.

Verily, truth reigns supreme,

It does away with spite and gall.

Those sustained by truth

Can verily rout the false-hearted.

On seeing the power of truth

The jester turns green with envy.
Real happiness is not for the actor
Who attempts to shun truth and God.

Joti prays to all the people,
Do not give in to untruth.

Jotirao further says in his book:

Of all the scriptures created by human beings none contains 'universal' truth from the beginning to the end, because every scripture contains some element of dogma in response to the dictates of time, thus creating divisions, envy and hate.

Thus gist of Jotirao's book is:

If the Creator is the 'Nirmik' of us all, then he should grant human beings mercy to suitably enjoy all the human rights that have been created. Since this does not happen, human beings have to undergo various kinds of unbearable sufferings. Feelings of enmity have flourished among the people of the nations of the world, giving rise to undue pride in one's country and religion. Rivers of numerous nations of the world join the sea. How then can any one river be termed holy? For even that holiest of holy rivers carries the excreta of a dog in its womb before proceeding to the seas. When all human beings are equal in body and mind, how can some acquire holiness by birth and thus attain superiority? They cannot escape life and death, just like the rest of us, and they are as virtuous as the rest of us. Man should not try to find out what the Creator is like or where He resides. The universe is bottomless and limitless. So it is impossible for an insignificant creature such as a human being to fathom the Creator. He is incomprehensible. Even Brahma, who originated from the lotus, had never set his eyes on the Creator. The Creator has created flowers and other beautiful things in this world for enjoyment by man. So there is no point in offering them in worship to Him. The flowers' purpose will be fulfilled if they are offered in the form of garlands in the name of God to those virtuous people who feed their families on the sweat of their brow, struggle day and night for the good of the world to free their ignorant brethren from selfish, opportunistic people.

Man will not gain anything by offering flowers to a stone idol or by offering prayers. One cannot gain vision of the 'Nirmik' by donning yellow silk, lighting incense, holding one's nose (as in a rite) and closing one's eyes (in worship). Repeating 'Nirmik's' name is not going to make our parents blessed. Those who do not earn their livelihood on the strength of their own labour, or do not strive for the good of the world, but in order to fill their own bellies resort to donning the garb of hypocritical mendicants, forever intoxicated with *bhang*, gorging on the delicacies offered by ignorant, simple-minded persons and indulge in meaningless repetition of God's name, expose themselves to the derision of the sagacious. With gratitude in one's heart for God and by treating one another like brothers and sisters, all human beings can be happy. God's regime will be established and His kingdom will come. All scriptures describe heaven, but it is imaginary. There is no region on earth known as heaven.

The 'Nirmik' has no need for offerings. One can earn the merit that one would have earned otherwise by being kind to pious men in their times of difficulty or by helping an invalid.

Between men and women, women are the superior sex. One can repay everyone's debt but never that of the mother who gives birth. A home is not a home without a woman in it. A woman selflessly looks after everyone. Being the weaker sex and with man being greedy and selfish, the woman has been subjugated by the latter. Men have even forbidden her learning so that she would not know her rights. The practice of polygamy is evil. The male's greed creates envy and hatred of all kinds. Men of vice betray their wives by making it with many women and in the process of satisfying their lust for them, succumb to various kinds of venereal diseases which then spread rapidly elsewhere. If an intoxicated man has intercourse with a woman in menstruation leprosy occurs, which also spreads to the offspring's. Widowers, who marry beautiful, inexperienced girls, ruin their lives. But if these girls are widowed, they are not allowed to remarry. They have to resort to abortion and infanticide. The Aryan Brahmins prohibited widow remarriage and simple-minded ignorant people, from the Kulwadis, Sonar castes followed blindly. In Vedic times, the Brahmin was permitted to sleep with his brother's wife and have children from her... There is one set of rules for women and another for men for their own selfish ends. One acquires religious merit when one does not hurt, mentally or physically, another for the sake of one's own happiness- Doing good unto others is meritorious; doing harm to them is sin. One cannot cheat the poor in the name of religion and expect to acquire merit for feeding Brahmins. One cannot indulge in physical pleasures and gluttony and expect to earn merit for encouraging untouchability. Religion does not consist in practising discrimination. Originally there was no caste system among the human beings. It is a fraudulent practice created by Brahmins for their own selfish ends. If one looks upon a sweeper woman's caste as low, then one has to say the same of the mother of one belonging to that caste and there is no man who can ever call his own mother lowly. Virtue and vice are not hereditary. The children of Brahmins are not always as virtuous as Shankaracharya. No just man can ever say that a Chamar's children, if virtuous, cannot attain the status of a great sage like Shankaracharya. There is a natural difference between human beings on the one hand and birds and beasts on the other; God has given intelligence to man to discriminate between good and bad. But the unintelligent birds and beasts are far superior to greedy humans.

A trade is not the same as religion. To shave is a barber's trade, not his religion. Washing clothes is the washer man's trade, not his religion. Taking bribes from the ignorant public is not the religion of a government worker; it is his skill in deceiving the government. To fill one's belly not by the sweat of one's brow but by cheating the ignorant is not the religion of the Aryan Brahmin; it is open cheating. It is not the religion of virtuous men to observe purity rites after indulging in revelries; it is impiety. It is not the religion of Mahars and Mangs to eat carcasses of animals to fill their bellies; it is their helplessness. It is the duty, not the religion, of the ruler to collect taxes from his subjects in order to protect them. Bairagis and Gosavis who live off the society are parasites.

'Nirmik' has created food, flowers and fruits for enjoyment of all humans. Men and women have not nurtured the sacred emotion of brotherly and sisterly feeling towards each other. This has resulted in the decline of truth in the world; there is unhappiness and misery everywhere. Men have treated their mothers, sisters, daughters, and daughters-in-

law like slaves. If they had not come in the way of women's rights, the kingdom of 'Nirmik' would have descended on earth, making all men and women contented and happy. Great sages have said that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The religion of the Aryans does not permit people other than Brahmins to enjoy equality. In the history of the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagwada* not all laws are true or trustworthy. If Havana really belonged to the non-human caste of Rakshasas, King Janaka would not have invited him to the *swayamvar* (marriage) of his daughter. In Islam, human beings, created by Allah, treat each other like brothers and sisters. All human beings are permitted to read the *Quran* and the Bible; read their dictates which are based on equality of human beings.

Ethics may be defined as truthful human conduct that will please the 'Nirmik'. It does not matter, then, whether the one who practises it is a Christian, a Muslim, a Satyashodhak or a Gavdekari.

The gods, Brahma's writings and the theory of meditation, destiny, fate, meritorious acts, are all figments of our imagination and completely false. Ramdas is wrong when he says that one reaps the fruits of accumulated merit. When a boy fails in his studies, people say it was not his destiny to study. When someone studies on his own initiative, they say it was his destiny to study. One fails in business only out of ignorance and unpreparedness; not because of anything else.

All are permitted to read the Bible and the *Quran*. But the *Vedas* are not accessible to all. People who have faith in the Bible or the *Quran* are not afraid, but those who believe in the *Vedas* are frightened because of the fear that their fraud will be discovered.

Brahminical scriptures are ostensibly based on religion but on deep study they are purely political. The *Vedas* are not fit to be known as God inspired universal truth.

11. RELIGION IS RIGHTEOUS CONDUCT

As we have seen Jotirao discussed an important aspect of religion in the *Sarvajanik Satyadharm* where he wondered as to who could be said to practise truthful (righteous) conduct! The following is in addition to the points alluded to in an earlier section:

Those who admit that men and women have been born independent from birth and are capable of enjoying every right, can be said to be practising righteous conduct. Those who do not worship the stars and stones, but have respect for the 'Nirmik' (Creator) of the universe, can be said to practise righteous conduct. Those who do not let other creatures enjoy all the things created by the Creator but offer them in empty worship to the 'Nirmik' cannot be said to practise righteous conduct. Those who do not torment in any way other living beings can be said to practise righteous conduct. Those who let others enjoy human rights and do not oppose them individually or collectively can be said to practise righteous conduct.

All men and women have religious and political freedom. Those who acknowledge others' rights and do not harass or harm them can be said to practise righteous conduct. Men who consider all women except their wives as their sisters and women who consider all men except their husbands as their brothers can be said to practise righteous conduct.

All men and women have been granted the freedom to voice, write and publish their thoughts and views on human rights. However, those who take care that their thoughts or views do not harm others can be said to practise righteous conduct. Those who do not condemn others for their opinions or political views and do not persecute them can be said to practise righteous conduct. Those who admit that men and women should get jobs in villages and civil administration in keeping with their ability and strength can be said to practise righteous conduct,

Those men and women who respect the aged wise men, and kindly inquire into and relieve the wants and pains of their old parents, can be said to practise righteous conduct. Men or women who do not imbibe intoxicants like opium, hemp or liquor without a physician's prescription and do not inflict any atrocity under their influence nor give refuge to those who imbibe them, can be said to practise righteous conduct. Fleas, bugs and similar insects, scorpions, serpents, lions, tigers, wolves, etc. like greedy men kill other animals or men. Those who do not kill other animals or men nor help others to kill, can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not tell lies for their own benefit or to harm others or to help those who lie can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not commit adultery nor aid and abet theft can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not for their own benefit, revolt against a just ruler or government or a representative elected by the people as their head, and ruin in the process millions of families or aid those who revolt, can be said to practise righteous conduct. Men and women who do not trust the deceitful who boast that a scripture has been prepared for the good of the world but put it away to prevent others from seeing it, can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not look upon their families, relatives and friends as superior by birthright and themselves as holy, nor deceitfully brand others as inferior, impure by birthright, can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not label some men as slaves by birth on the basis of deceitfully written scriptures of yore, nor respect those who do, can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women, who, if teaching in a school, do not discriminate against others' children in order to uphold their own domination and condemn those who do discriminate this way, can be said to practise righteous conduct. Men or women who, if in the judge's chair, are not partisan in punishing oppressors according to their crime and condemn those who do so can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not look down upon one who makes a living by working as a wage earner even if he is a cobbler and commend those who help in this task, can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not put on airs of meaningless religiosity nor put the fear of planetary influence in the minds of ignorant masses in order to loot them can be said to practise righteous conduct. Man's fate is not bound with the planets in the sky. The planets do not trouble great people. This is a fraud practised by self-seeking Aryan priests.

Men or women who do not, in order to cheat the gullible faithful, don the guise of holy Brahmins and give them holy ash or incense or help them in this matter, can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Men or women who do not discriminate in any way between men and women and do not impose restrictions in matters of food and clothing, but behave with them with a pure heart, can be said to practise righteous conduct. Those who do not discriminate among human beings but help, according to their capacity, lepers, invalids and orphans, or respect those who do, can be said to practise righteous conduct.

Great sages have written scriptures on this earth, all of which contain some truth or the other according to the beliefs of the times. Hence, in any one family, one of the women might read a Buddhist text and follow that religion if she so wishes. Her husband might read the Bible and their daughter, the *Quran*, and convert to Islam if she liked. Their son might read the book *Sarvajanik Satyadharma* and, if he wished, become a Sarvajanik. No one should hate another but, in the belief that everyone belongs to Nirmik's family, treat one another with love and courtesy so that they are blessed in the kingdom of God.

One is happy when a son or a daughter is born. A daughter's naming ceremony may be performed on the twelfth day and a son's on the thirteenth. If the mother has enough milk, then the baby should not be given any solid food till it is six-months old. Once the child starts speaking, the mother may make it utter short sentences and teach the alphabet while at play. At five the child may be sent to school.

Girls and boys may consult their parents, elders, friends and acquaintances and fix their own marriages after careful deliberation. At the time of wedding, they should pledge good conduct, distribute alms to the poor, the blind and the invalid regardless of caste or religion.

Those who have been immoral suffer at the time of death because of repentance. Men and women who, on being married spend their lives in behaving truthfully towards each other, with pure hearts give up their lives with a calm mind at the time of death.

On his deathbed, while he is still conscious, a man should exhort the youngsters in the family, including his sons and daughters, bid farewell to all the relations, friends and acquaintances and calmly pray as follows: 'You created me and gave me the power to think right. You know that I have conducted myself truthfully in this world, according to Your Will. Hence, I am sure you will accept me and so also all my brothers and sisters if they conduct themselves truthfully. May Your Reign of truth grow.

The dead body may be bathed, oiled, clothed and covered with garlands of flowers. The clothes should not be removed before disposing off the body. Before leaving the cremation ground, any old man, who follows the path of truth, may say a prayer. On the thirteenth day relatives, friends and acquaintances may be fed according to one's means and offered garlands. They may be given some money according to one's capacity and their school-going children may be happily gifted cows. The same feast may be repeated on the first death anniversary. Orphans and harmless children may be helped on that day.

Such was the religion propagated by Jotirao. That which sustains society is religion. Hence he named his religion the true religion for the people.

Epilogue

Jotirao's offensive against Hinduism, especially the Brahmin-dominated Hindu social system and culture, was in sharp reaction to a particular historical, social and political situation. There is no doubt that it was justified. Towards the end of the Peshwa regime and the subsequent British rule, the importance of Brahmins increased in Maharashtra and social inequality became more pronounced, causing much concern to other reformers too, like Lokahitavadi, M.G. Ranade, Agarkar and Tilak.

After Jotirao's death the Satyashodhak movement in Maharashtra was reduced to a Brahmin versus non-Brahmin conflict. Much of Jotirao's rationalism and belief in universal brotherhood was lost. In the post-Independence era, while democracy has been transferred into power in the hands of non-Brahmins, the threat of inter-religious conflicts looms large. Jotirao's ideology can diffuse this potential danger. His message that truthful (righteous) conduct is the only true religion stands as a powerful guiding light for all.

Among everything that has been written about Mahatma Jotirao Phule so far, Tarkateertha Laxmanshastri Joshi's essay *Jotinibandha* holds pride of place. This little booklet, published in 1947 by the Pradnya Pathshala of Wari, has also been included here.

Glossary

Abhang: A metrical composition in praise of a deity.

abhishek: Dropping, drop by drop (holy water, milk, etc.) over an idol, a king, an officiating priest, a sick person, etc. by way of ceremonial ablution.

avatar: Descent on earth of a deity in a human, or other form. Vishnu is supposed to have descended to earth ten times.

bel: A tree, sacred to Shiva, the leaves of which are gifted along with turmeric powder to a deity and to take an oath.

bhang: Intoxicating potion made from hemp.

bhakri: Coarse, unleavened bread.

dakshina: Money or presents given to Brahmins on special occasions.

dandpatta: Exercise with a fencing stick in one hand and the *patta* (a kind of sword) in the other.

dhol: A large drum.

garbhadaan: A purificatory ceremony performed after the first menstruation for purification of the womb and facilitation of conception.

homa: Burnt offering; the casting (of clarified butter, rice, etc.) into the fire as an offering to the gods accompanied with prayers or invocations.

inam : A grant in perpetuity without conditions.

inamdar: The holder of an *inam* (gift).

jagir: An assignment, by government, of land or revenue for the support of an individual or a family.

jagirdar : The holder of a *jagir*.

khichdi: A mixture of rice and pulses.

madi : A drink obtained from the coconut tree.

mangalashataka: Stanzas recited at marriages, etc. to bless the subject performing the rite.

povada: A panegyric or encomiastic piece in a kind of alliterative poetry recounting the achievements of a warrior, the talents and attainments of a scholar, or the power, virtues and excellencies of a person.

samadhi: The little edifice to contain the *tulsi* (holy basil) plant which is erected over the burial place.

samai: An upright metal lamp-stand with a flat oil container and a wick.

sanyasin: An ascetic who has cast off all worthy possessions and affections.

shraddha: A funeral ceremony observed at various fixed periods involving offerings with water and fire to the gods and of gifts and food to the relations present and the assisting Brahmins.

swadeshi: Made in one's own country.

swayamvar: The choice of a man by a female who she wants to be her husband.

teerth: Holy water; water in which a Brahmin or a *sanyasin* has dipped his feet.

PART 2

12. JOTINIBANDHA—AN ESSAY ON JOTIBA

The first man to revolt against social slavery in India was Jotiba Phule.

With British rule in India began the introduction of western culture and western reforms in the country. Westerners had come into contact with India on account of trade several centuries before the British rule began. But this confluence did not take place then. Commercial and political relations with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British had been established around the same time. The Portuguese had held their sway over the western coast of India for three hundred years. However, Indians had not yet been awakened by the sublime light of western culture and reforms, as happened with the advent of British rule.

British rule in India laid the foundation for western reforms, which deeply influenced Indian intellectuals, the impact of which has lasted to this day. The reaction occurred in two ways—one favourable and the other, unfavourable. The favourable reaction gave birth to a tendency towards introspection which in turn bred rationalism, scientific analysis, historical research, a desire for reform and a thirst for social and cultural restoration. The tendency to criticise tradition increased with the increasing hope for reforms. Several great reformers were inspired by the ambition to give a new direction to Indian society. As a matter of fact, history of the past two thousand years was against

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The scope of the Brahmin reforms did not extend beyond the limits of the higher castes. The practices and customs of Brahmins and other higher castes were not compatible with the new jobs and professions opened by the new British regime. They were not compatible with the change in technology and industry. Hence the reformists were all for changing them. It was found essential to change practices such as purity rituals and idol worship rules regarding eating, way of dressing, *shraddha* ceremony, mourning, etc., since these came in the way of the new job opportunities offered by the British.

The reform movement centred around the idea of effecting a major change in the joint family system. Jobs, trade and new means of transport in the British period disrupted the joint family system. In the changing situation, occupations like farming, money-lending, *bhikshuki*, etc. in the village no longer earned enough to support the joint family; hence,

men began to take up professions such as law, government service, medicine, teaching, etc. outside their villages. The old order which prevailed in the villages was thus of no consequence in distant places. Other issues became important in the newly emerging set-up. Higher education made it necessary that the marriageable age be increased. Naturally, the old custom of child marriage was undesirable in the new state of affairs. Moreover, the newly educated youth who had moved away from the joint family found that it was necessary for women, especially when they were losing the protection of the joint family, to be educated. Thus the issue of women's education acquired importance. The ideal of womanhood as depicted in the *Puranas* was no longer desirable and the revolutionary idea of women's freedom began to be asserted. In Indian tradition, dependence on the male has been considered as the ideal for womanhood. Reformers began to strike at the very root of the shackles imposed by the joint family system, by taking up the crusade of ending women's subjugation, such as the practice of *sati*, observing widowhood till death, tonsuring of widows, child marriage, prohibition of marital separation, absence of hereditary property rights, the custom of *purdah* (covering the face with the end of the sari), restrictions on women speaking with men, etc. Women's education was seen as the first step in the fight to bring about change.

Hindu religion remained a refuge for ancient customs, the caste system, untouchability, the law of hereditary rights, etc. There was a philosophical justification for all ancient traditions and conventions. Those who had acquired modern education realised that it was impossible to bring about social reforms unless Hindu religion itself was reformed, and they made conscious efforts in this direction. They founded the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and its branch, the Prarthana Samaj, in Maharashtra. They recognised the bigotry of all religious institutions and tried to check it by emphasising on the basic unifying principles of all ancient religions. They were quick to grasp that human civilization had reached a level where religious, national and international differences made no sense. One's conscience alone could be regarded as a touchstone for religion. It was no longer appropriate to accept a specific scripture, messiah or founder of religion as the only truth.

Jotiba Phule was born within ten years of the end of Peshwa regime and the beginning of British rule, near Pune city. Hence he could not escape the influence of the western reforms in Pune. Born in the educationally backward Mali caste, he had to face many obstacles on the way to education. But possessed as he was of a sharp, mature mind and an inquiring, discerning intellect, he had no difficulty in grasping the social change afoot. Few had understood, as Jotiba did in his time, the true meaning of the revolution that had come in the wake of the establishment of British rule. Only those who help themselves by being able to take stock of their situation can gain freedom and make progress. You need to develop your faculties to achieve something in life. Those who have no knowledge or no proper understanding of their place in society, remain no more than mere slaves. Jotirao Phule was the first to instil a sense of self-awareness and introspection among the non-Brahmin masses in Hindu society. He was the first from among the Hindu non-Brahmins to experience or recognise the social slavery of the non-Brahmins. Those who do not admit of their enslavement can never be free of it. The Hindu masses, who for long centuries had been afflicted by ignorance and poverty, owe much to Jotirao.

There are historical reasons for the fact that such a man was born in Maharashtra to rise in revolt against God, religion, places of pilgrimage, priests, scriptures and the entire

body of hitherto sacrosanct tradition. Jotirao has himself expounded on the historical reasons which were responsible for the shortcomings in Hindu society, such as Brahminical domination, rigid observances of caste hierarchy, the prevalence of ignorant and incredulous beliefs supported by religious institutions and senseless customs born of blind faith. These flaws still exist. Their background can be traced to the latter decadent half of Maratha rule. During this period the Brahmin Peshwas reigned supreme, and the rot inherent in the system spread its roots. The inherent flaws in the Hindu social structure became more manifest. The law was as obscure, unwieldy and unscientific as ever, and as regressive. The methods of collecting tax, recovering debts and employing labour were too harsh on the farmer. Jotirao has painted a vivid picture of the situation in an essay entitled *Ishara* (Warning). He says:

Just in the recent past, till the reign of the last of the Peshwas, if a farmer was a little lax in paying taxes, he was made to bend in the hot sun, with a big stone placed on his back or his wife was made to sit on his back, and he was made to inhale the smoke of hot chillies. The rulers looked upon their subjects as some kind of animals, whose only utility was to grow food, weave clothes, slog in fair or foul weather and provide all items of luxury to the king and his kind, his wives and children. Now with the new (British) government, the people are finally free from the atrocities of the previous regime. Earlier, farming activity was heavily dependent on the rains. So if the monsoon failed, the farmer was hard put to repay his debt. The situation has not changed much since, but then the government was totally on the money-lender's side—that put the debtor in a difficult situation. He often came to the brink of losing everything he owned. In those days, money-lenders had no complaints against the government for they had the government at their beck and call. They treated the debtor as they pleased, thrashed him, snatched away all his goods, sold off his cattle, and inflicted all kinds of torture on him..... For a debt of as little as seven rupees, a debtor lost his land, cattle, well, farms and would finally have no other option but to flee or commit suicide.

During the Peshwa rule the caste system became even more rigid. The vanity and hypocrisy of the Brahmins had reached the point of no return. Several instances of this have been cited and they contain more than a grain of truth. Jotirao cites an example:

If a Sudra were washing his clothes on the river bank and a Brahmin happened to go there, the Sudra would have to gather all his clothes and take them for washing to such a corner from where even a drop of water would not be sprayed on the Brahmin. If at all a drop were to reach the Brahmin, the latter, ablaze with anger, would fling his utensil at the Sudra's head. Bleeding profusely, the Sudra would fall to the ground in a faint. On coming to, he would weakly gather his blood-soaked clothes and trudge homewards. There was no way he could complain to the government which was monopolised by Brahmins. It would rather be the complainant who would be punished in such a case.

The condition of untouchables was more wretched than one could possibly imagine. They had to take care that even their shadow did not fall on the Brahmins. So when the shadows were long in the morning and evening, they would not dare to stir out of their houses. If they had to walk on the road on which the higher caste Hindus and the Brahmins walked, they had to tie a pot around their neck. Moreover, they were permitted to walk on the road only if they tied the branch of a tree to their wrist. The branch served the purpose of sweeping the earth and erasing their vile footprints! Their condition was

worse than that of animals. The Brahmin caste enjoyed the rank of godhood while the other castes were the lower rungs of the social ladder. Jotirao has registered his strong protest against the fact that during Peshwa rule, huge amounts of money from the government coffers were spent on feeding and giving alms to Brahmins. He has rendered a heart-rending comparison between the avaricious and nepotistic Brahmin class on the one hand, and the non-Brahmin masses ruined by poverty, on the other. He has cited several instances of the savage cruelty perpetrated by the local legal system. Those who committed criminal offences were given corporal punishments. Punishments like cutting off limbs was pretty common. However, this was not a peculiarity of the Brahmin supremacy, but a popular practice all over India in the past centuries. Corporal punishment and intense torture followed by capital punishment continued under the Peshwas too.

In the British rule such cruel practices were stopped. When one makes an impartial comparison between the old and the new rulers, it is but natural for one to find the British law more progressive and based on fair principles. Moreover, there was no discrimination on the basis of caste under British law which followed the principle that all human beings were equal. On the other hand, during Peshwa rule the rulers considered it their duty to regard caste inequality and discrimination as the law and enforce it strictly. However, although caste discrimination was not legal under the British, it was socially as rigid as it was during Peshwa rule. Hence Jotiba knew exactly what it meant to be lowly and unfortunate, since he himself was born of a low caste.

Realising that the people of India, being bound in social slavery, were in a material and spiritual decline, Jotirao decided to motivate the people to rise up against slavery and free themselves from its shackles.

Although a progressive British government had been established there were no signs that the characteristics that defined Indian society for hundred of years—the caste system, ignorance, poverty and blind beliefs—would be immediately eliminated. The arrival of the British had given rise to the elusive hope, in the initial period, that western culture and liberal ways of thinking would uplift the people. But social reforms did not spread as expected; this troubled Jotirao. The liberal values introduced by the British made a deep impact on him and the contemporary reformists who pondered deeply on the social degeneration spreading in Indian society. When Jotirao analysed the situation, he found that the root of the social decline of Hindu society could be traced back to the social slavery of thousands of years. He discovered that the root cause of this slavery was the religion founded by the Brahmins; hence he titled his first book, *Slavery under the Cover of Brahminical Religion in Progressive British Rule*. Inspired by western democratic philosophy, he dedicated the book to the people who were fighting to abolish Black slavery in America.

Referring to the conditions prevailing at the time, Jotirao says in the book:

Although we are being ruled by the British, it is chiefly the Brahmins who actually look after the administration. This causes the non-Brahmin masses, who are illiterate, to suffer in every way. Caste discrimination is practised to the hilt. Even in a city like Pune, non-Brahmins are not allowed near the river or the tank from where Brahmins fill water. Educational institutions are dominated by Brahmins. In the prescribed text-books, flaws in the scriptures written by Brahmins have been glossed over. The non-Brahmin masses

in the villages, especially the farmers, cannot avail of education. Being poor, they cannot afford education. Being illiterate, they suffer losses in transactions and the educated are ever willing to dupe them in various ways. Being superstitious, their hard-earned money is spent unwisely. They are either unaware of the injustice being done to them or even if they do become aware of it, they cannot get redressal owing to ignorance and poverty. No one takes heed of their grievances.

Jotirao has described, in his book *Gulamgiri*, the mental slavery of the non-Brahmin masses:

The common man is enslaved and does not desire to be free. The slaves themselves are on their master's side. In America, the free whites were more concerned about abolishing slavery than the Black slaves. In Konkan, British officials set up a system whereby the *ryots* could complain against the landowners. The land-holders/landowners made their *ryots* sweat and slave round-the-clock. In return, they gave them just enough food to subsist. They even thrashed them. In spite of this, when the *ryots* gave their testimony, they sided with their master. So, it is essential to educate the public to free them from superstition and blind beliefs. Modern education is essential.

Jotirao believed that with the help of modern education, the common man could benefit from the legal system and scientific reforms of the British government, and regenerate itself.

There was some promise of hope in the British administrative system, but it did not contain the seeds of revolution which could bring about the necessary fundamental transformation. The British government operated, after all, within the traditional social system. They could not bring about financial prosperity to alleviate the sufferings of the common man. The non-Brahmin masses continued to remain poor, ignorant and backward as before. The much needed agrarian revolution did not take place. There are after all three necessary factors in an agrarian revolution. The first is eradication of the system of landownership and with it, the feudal system; secondly, farmers should get the maximum return for their labour; thirdly, to ensure maximum returns, land should be cultivated in India by modern scientific methods. During British rule, landlords, rulers of princely states and feudal lords flourished. The money-lending practice continued and methods of cultivating land remained medieval and backward. Jotirao had grasped the necessity of modern scientific methods of cultivation. He also raised his voice against the oppression by moneylenders, but did not realise that the British were incapable of rooting out the old social, religious and financial traditions.

When Jotiba was a young man, in 1857, north India was ablaze with the sepoy mutiny which, it was suspected, could well dismantle the huge, newly-erected edifice of British rule. But the mutiny was unsuccessful. The British came out unscathed; in fact, they emerged stronger and even flourished, especially in the immediate aftermath between 1858 and 1885. Around this time Jotiba launched his Satyashodhak movement. Many educated Indians were opposed to British rule. They had been roused to patriotism as a result of western education. They were unhappy over the failure of the mutiny of 1857. They began to raise their voice against the British government, either privately or through newspapers. On his part, Jotiba was not unhappy at the failure of the mutiny of 1857. His opinion might appear strange at first glance, and even today it will not be normally accepted. But from the viewpoint of India's political history, it is essential to recognise

what his opinion stood for. His reasoning was quite convincing from a purely scientific point of view. He said:

If the British government had lost in the mutiny, then history would have repeated itself. The Peshwa regime of the Brahmins would have been resurrected. The Hindu culture of the scriptures, *Smritis* and *Puranas* would have regained strength and the hope of emancipating the Sudra and the Ati-Sudra masses—a hope born as a result of the advent of British government— would have been lost forever. Social injustice is thousands of years old; its roots run deep. The main issue is how to get rid of social slavery. The origins of this social slavery are in the Brahminical religion and the scriptures created by the Brahmins.

In *Gulamgiri*, Jotirao for the first time endeavoured to define how Brahminical thoughts, institutions and castes had come to dominate Hindu society for thousands of years. He felt that it was an important prerequisite of social reforms to delve deep into history to find out when and how Brahmins established their supremacy over Hindu society. This story could be reconstructed from the stories related in the *Srutis*, *Smritis* and *Puranas*. Therefore, he essayed an historical interpretation of these stories, and concluded that in the stories of the ten *avtars* (incarnations of God) the story of Parshuram's incarnation tells the story of the Brahmin's seizure of power. He has summed up the stories as follows: 1) The Aryans came twice from Iran to India by the sea route, and conquered the local inhabitants who were cultivators. 2) This fact was the basis of the story of the *matsya* (fish) and *kachchua* (tortoise) incarnations of which both are aquatic creatures. 3) The Aryans from Iran could not achieve complete success; therefore they had to use the land route for their invasion. These invasions are narrated in the tales of *varaha* (boar), *namsimha* (lion-man) and the *vamana* (dwarf) incarnations. Around the time of the *vamana avatar*, the Aryan Brahmins completely succeeded in establishing their sovereignty over India. In order to make it last forever, they massacred the Indian warriors, that is, the brave Kshatriyas, and even killed pregnant women to end their lineage. 4) The Aryan Brahmins ruled the people of India, directly or indirectly, and to secure their sovereignty, inculcated in the people ideas and beliefs that would render them stupid and ignorant. The *Purana* stories display the cunning and conniving nature of the Brahmins: The caste hierarchy was created only to create a permanent rift among the various non-Brahmin masses. The Brahmins being smaller in number than the people they conquered could dominate the masses verily by dividing them. They introduced the practice of untouchability to punish those who had fought them (the Aryans). In reality there is no social difference whatsoever between the untouchables and the Hindus.

In the last century several western scholars undertook research on how the Vedic Aryans, especially the Brahmins, came to assume dominance in Hindu society. According to them, the Vedic Aryans came to India from outside, fought with the natives, conquered them and established social, religious and political supremacy over them. Jotirao Phule's theory runs on similar lines. Undoubtedly, there are numerous stories in the *Puranas* regarding *avatars*, which in prehistoric times attempted to publicise the supremacy of the Brahmins and the religion created by them. Jotirao ventures to build up a detailed history from the stories. It cannot be said that he succeeded in the task for, the stories are full of improbable and strange facts. They describe a God who takes on the forms of a fish, a tortoise, a pig and a lion-man. Jotirao sees them as metaphors. He imagines that *matsya* and *kachchua* were some kind of boats that the Aryans from Iran

crossed in to invade India. But there is nothing to support these theories. Besides, even the theory that the Brahmins or the Aryans came from a foreign land to invade India is not very probable. There is no definite evidence for it, or for the theory that the Brahmins of India were racially different from the rest. Hence there is insufficient proof to substantiate the theory that Brahmin domination resulted from the clash between different races or the natives and the foreigners.

When differences in occupations, economic inequality and social status take root and persist generation after generation, they can give rise to class and caste distinctions within a particular race. Brahmins and Aryans on the one hand and non-Brahmins and non-Aryans or Sudras on the other must have been pitted against each other in prehistoric India for the sociological reason cited above. The theory that people from foreign lands invaded the original inhabitants of India, resulting in the Brahmin/non-Brahmin or Aryan/Sudra distinction owes its origin to instances of invasions in British or Mughal history. Jotiba claims that Brahmins invaded India, whereas western scholars say that the invaders were Vedic Aryans as a whole, including Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. His theory owes its origin to the contemporary social structure in Maharashtra.

The Brahmins in Maharashtra and around south India believed that there were only two castes—the Brahmins and the Sudras. In north India there were castes which called themselves Kshatriyas and Vaishyas whom even the Brahmins accepted as Aryans. Jotiba's conclusion of a Brahmin invasion, based on his reading of the two-caste system in south India, is not convincing. However, it should be remembered that the Parshuram *avatar* story bears out Jotiba's contention, for the reason that Parshuram was a Brahmin and is said to have massacred Kshatriyas twenty-one times. From this Jotiba may have surmised that the Kshatriyas did not belong to the Aryan race of Brahmins.

But it cannot be denied that his attack on Brahminical scriptures was justified. He rejected the belief that the four castes were born from various parts of Lord Brahma's body. It must be acknowledged that he was right to explode the myth of sanctity surrounding the Brahmins. For example, no scholar can deny that Brahmins in Vedic times ate the flesh of horses and oxen and drank *soma* (wine). Jotiba's criticism of the scriptures is harsh and acerbic; but he has failed in his attempts to study the etymology of Sanskrit and Marathi words. He need not have ventured into a subject which is a linguist's territory; a point which the late Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, a champion of orthodoxy, made to attack Jotiba. However, he failed to disprove the basic arguments put forward by Jotiba.

Jotiba's interpretation of the non-Vedic gods of the non-Brahmins is highly significant from the Indian sociological point of view. Even the Brahmins seem to have adopted the important deities and related practices from amongst the non-Vedic scriptures. In many instances the religion founded by the Brahmins of Vedic Aryans seems to have blended completely with the original religion of the non-Brahmins. Hence, it becomes very difficult to trace the original religious practices, ideas and deities of the non-Vedic non-Brahmins. Jotiba held that the Dussehra and Diwali festivals and the sanctity attached to Sunday, the gods Khandoba, Jotiba, Bhairoba, Mastands, etc. were part of the original religion of the non-Brahmins. The Brahmins made attempts to ruin the superior culture, religion and political system of the non-Brahmins and created a birth-determined

hierarchy, imposing belief in superstitions, slavery and a philosophy that put an end to equality among human beings.

Jotiba launched a crusade against the Brahminical religion by founding the Satyashodhak Samaj. He was confident that his movement would be successful as it was based on exemplary principles which were superior to those of the Hindu religion founded by the Brahmins, or, for that matter, to any other religion in the world. He declared that every established religion in the world harboured some injustice or the other and concealed some portion of truth. Religious differences in the world today come in the way of brotherhood of man and mutual cooperation. Mankind is divided by love for one's own religion and intolerance to another, thus permanently sowing the seeds of enmity. Religious chauvinism has often resulted in bloodshed. Unity of mankind is the supreme truth but religious chauvinism circumvents and destroys this truth. It has brought about the decline of mankind when it should have brought about progress and upliftment. Nationalism or patriotism too is no better than religious zeal, leading to wars and laying waste man's ability and talents. Nations are compelled to be ever-prepared for war and tend to spend enormous amounts of money for the purpose. There is an unnecessary burden in the form of taxes on the citizens of the country, especially the farmers. Jotiba advocated end to warfare, and to religious zeal.

Jotiba presented his new, constructive principles in his book *Sarvajanik Satyadharma*. He held that the great truth as opposed to religious and national discrimination was that all men and women should have equal rights. No man or group of men had the right to dominate or tyrannise another. God had given all human beings religious and political freedom by birth. Those who encroached on it were enemies of truth. To consider a person superior or inferior on the basis of his political or religious outlook and to persecute him for that reason was to betray truth. Everyone had an equal right to enjoy as he pleased the earthly life and the things on earth. Occupations such as farming, artisan-ship, labour, etc. did not lower a man's dignity; they rather demonstrated man's greatness. To learn about nature's law of cause and effect and use it to satisfy human needs was the basic right and duty of man. In the world created by God, all men could achieve glory through effort. To help one another in this effort was not only man's prime duty, but a true worship of God. God needed no devotional songs or repetition of his name in prayer or counting of the beads of the rosary, for He was master of the whole universe. He did not need man's praise, prayer or devotion. If man practiced only what Christ preached he could undoubtedly prosper.

Jotiba distilled the essence of the culture and knowledge born of thousands of years of sustained effort. He discussed the means and criteria of knowing truth. If truth was not to be found in scriptures, in holy men, in gurus, in incarnations and in God's prophets, then where else could it to be found? "In men's conscience," he said. Man's inherent reasoning powers were given by the Creator Himself! God had not given us the scriptures; He had not come down to the earth as an incarnation; He did not show Himself and preach to holy sages and saints nor did He generate divine inspiration in some fortunate ascetic's heart. He bestowed only one divine gift of realisation, and that was reason.

Jotiba's thoughts were undoubtedly inspired by noble, lasting human values. The language he used to express these thoughts was infused with the ardour of fiery emotion.

His genius had the power to transcend the present and to look into the remote past and the very distant future. One can see in it a burning ambition to challenge the Brahmins and the Brahminical Hindu religion; an ambition which arose out of an intense anger against injustice and oppression. But the learning required for a better expression of his thoughts was woefully inadequate. However, he himself was not responsible for this drawback. For, in his times there was very little inclination for education. His writings contained obscenities and abuse, and his language was unwieldy and coarse, for which reason his works could not gain respectability among the educated. "His writing," said the late Annasaheb Shinde, "was like some wild fruit," meaning it was not very tasty but had many medicinal properties. Drawing on Jotiba's thoughts on the ancient social history of Hindus, Shinde, Bhaskarrao Jadhav and Dr Ambedkar too wrote books and essays on sociological history. This shows how far native intelligence can go even without learning.

Jotiba laid the foundation for the non-Brahmin movement in south India. The movement, which lasted till 1935, is on the wane today. One may say that the movement's social utility is over, and the aim with which it was started has not been achieved. If it is claimed that the aim of the movement was to overthrow Brahmin domination in government institutions and higher occupations, it may be conceded that the aim was fulfilled with the Constitution of 1935; but, if the aim was to usher in an era of rationalism and end the social, cultural and economic slavery of the people, then one finds solid evidence to the contrary in our social life.

History tells us that the Satyashodhak non-Brahmin movement was defeated by its extremely casteist leadership, prompted as it was by a narrow-minded sense of rivalry against Brahmins, and not inspired by the noble aim mentioned above. After the Montague-Chelmsford reforms and the Constitution of 1935, non-Brahmin representatives constituted a majority on the local boards, municipalities and law commissions everywhere. Similarly in the last thirty years the government policy has been to recruit backward classes in huge numbers in government jobs. This has pleased the leaders of the non-Brahmin classes. The responsibility for curbing the non-Brahmin movement must also be shared by the Congress party and the movement for a national struggle against the British regime. The Congress and the national movement obliterated the non-Brahmin movement which could not affect a democratic revolution or create widespread awareness of the concepts of basic human rights and democratic values. This failure was exploited by the nationalist movement which protected the rights of capitalists and the dominant classes. The nationalist movement wrongly interpreted that the British government was responsible for all the ills, and once the British were gone, the sons of the soil would be able to live amicably as brothers. The masses were led to forget the true meaning of the freedom movement and hence were led to participating in a movement that concentrated power in the hands of the native upper classes. Jotiba had clearly seen this danger, and hence spoken against the notions of patriotism and nationalism. To him the very idea that the British and the Muslims were aliens was an evil one." All mankind is one," he said again and again and that the real war was against social and political slavery, and for human freedom.

It is as unlikely for a rock to sprout a green shoot as it is for the national movement to usher in a farmers' and workers' government. There is a fundamental difference between the way of thinking or philosophy required for the movement of a farmers' and workers' government and the philosophy of a national movement. The former is founded on the

principle of human equality and freedom while the national self-government is founded on the concept of traditionalism and the notion of a deceptive harmony between the upper and lower classes. The farmers' and workers' government cannot come into being until tradition is done away with and the class hierarchy in the country abolished.

My job is only to sound a warning bell. I heard that warning bell in Jotiba's thoughts, so I have recapitulated his thoughts. It is a more important and difficult task to make the public think, rather than to stir its emotions. If provoked into thinking, the public will break the fetters of thousands of years to bring about human freedom which is divine and magnificent. Sadly, there are no teachers for this purpose. Once these teachers make their appearance, the sun of freedom shall rise and will never set. And in its light the image of Jotiba, the great thinker, shall shine for ever.

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