

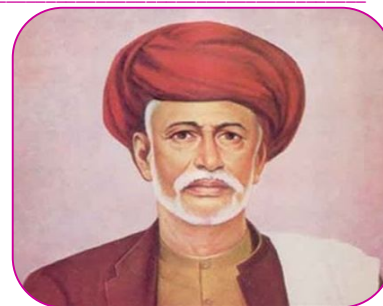


## SOCIO EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF JYOTIBA PHULE

Savita Shamarao<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Sarvodaya S. S.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research scholar Dept Of History Gulbarga University Kalaburgi.

<sup>2</sup>Associate professor Dept Of History Govt College (pg centre) kalaburgi.



### ABSTRACT

*In the social and educational history of India, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule stand out as an exceptional couple. They were engaged in a passionate struggle to build a movement for equality between men and women and for social justice. Recognising that knowledge is power and that the progress of women and lower castes was impossible without it, they dedicated their entire life for spreading education.*

**KEY WORDS:** social and educational history of India , social justice.

### INTRODUCTION:

In this module we first discuss the contributions of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule to the development of education in modern India. We will try to understand Phule's thoughts and ideas on education as an answer to the present challenges of education in India. His wife Savitri Bai Phule had the pride of being the first woman teacher. We will also look at the contributions of Savitri Bai Phule to the field of education.

### JYOTIRAO PHULE: AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHER

Among many thinkers and theorists one comes across in the field of education, Jyotiba Phule was the first who devoted his life for the cause of mass education, the education of backward communities and women (Bala and Marwaha, 2011). His thoughts and ideas were revolutionary. His single most concern was universalisation of primary education. He concentrated on such aspects as the need for primary education, the essential qualities to be possessed by primary school teachers and the curriculum of primary education. He gave importance to the upliftment of lower castes and women through education and took necessary steps for achieving this end. During Phule's time education for women and those born into castes considered untouchable was like a distant dream. In such a situation he launched a momentous struggle for the education of women and lower castes, in spite of threats to his life. For him education was not just literacy but a tool of social change in the real sense of the term. He was the forerunner of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as far as education of the down-trodden is concerned. For this reason Dr. Ambedkar considered Mahatma Phule his Guru. To Mahatma Phule education is the only panacea for eradicating social evils. It was his firm conviction that if social reforms are to be effective and lasting, persons at all levels should be educated. For this purpose he considered the spread of education as his life's mission. Without doubt we can say that Phule was the pioneer of revolutionary thinking. He was rightly called the Father of Indian Social Revolution in the modern age (Bala & Marwaha, 2011).

### EARLY LIFE

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule (April 11, 1827 November 28, 1890), also known as Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was an activist, thinker, teacher, educationist and social revolutionary from Poona. He lived and worked in

Maharashtra. His father Govindrao used to supply flowers to the Peshwa families and others in Poona. Since Jyotiba's father and two uncles served as florists under the last Peshwas, they came to be known as Phules. Jyotiba's mother died when he was hardly one year old. He was brought up by a close relative Sagunabai. The Phule family belonged to one of the backward communities called Mali (Gardner), which was forbidden from seeking education and other rights that were enjoyed by upper castes. The Malis belonged to Shudra Varna and were placed immediately below the peasant caste of Maratha-Kunbis of Maharashtra. The orthodox Brahmins used to preach that shudras and women are not allowed to receive education and if they did so it would be considered an act of sin. In this background in a city like Poona which was the centre of brahminical orthodoxy, Jyotirao was not given admission in an Indian school. So his father sent him to a missionary school where children from all communities were admitted. But due to threats from some Brahmins Jyotiba's father discontinued his education and he was assigned gardening work on the farm. Jyotiba was unhappy with the gardening work and he was extremely eager to continue his studies. Impressed by Jyotiba's intelligence and his love for knowledge, two of his neighbours, one a Muslim teacher and the other, a Christian gentleman, persuaded his father Govindrao to allow him to study in a secondary school. After completing secondary education in 1847, he decided not to accept a job under the government.

In 1848 Phule began his work as a social reformer. Interested in education of boys and girls of lower castes, he started a school for them. Since no female teacher was available, Phule asked his wife Savitribai to teach in the school. He opened two more schools for girls in 1851. He was honoured by the Board of education for the work he did for girls' education in 1852. Phule established a school for untouchables and a night school in 1852. By 1858, he gradually retired from the management of these schools and entered the broader field of social reform. He supported the movement for widow remarriage in 1860 and in 1863 established a Home for the prevention of infanticide. In a memorial addressed to the Education Commission popularly known as the Hunter Commission in 1882, he described his activities in the field of education. The government appointed him a member of the Poona Municipality in 1876. He continued as a member till 1882 and fought for the cause of oppressed.

### PHULE'S WRITINGS

Phule was not only a leader and organiser of the movement for the emancipation of lower castes, but he was also an original thinker who had revolutionary ideas which he expressed through his books. Some of his major works were *Tritiya Ratna* (1855), *Brahmananche Kasab* (1869), *Gulamgiri* (1873), *Shetkaryacha Aasud* (1883), *Satsar Vol I* (1885), *Satsar Vol II* (1885), *Ishara* (October 1, 1885) and *Saravajanik Satyadharm Pustak*. In all he worked for achieving his motive i.e., universal education, education for women and uplift of people who were ostracised by the caste system. In *Brahmananche Kasab* (1869) Phule exposed the exploitation being meted out by Brahmin priests. In *Gulamgiri* (1873) he gave a historical account of the slavery of lower castes. In 1883 he published a collection of his speeches under the title *Shetkaryarcha Aasud* (The cultivator's whipcord) in which he analysed how peasants were being exploited in those days. We find a text of his philosophical statement in *Sarvajanik Satyadharm Pustak* (A book of True Religion for All) published in 1891, a year after his death. From his writings we come to know that his thinking on social and political issues was influenced by Christianity and the ideas of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) who was known for his religious radicalism in England. Phule himself has recorded that he was influenced by the ideas of Paine. As a recognition of his great work for the upliftment of the oppressed, Phule was conferred the title of 'Mahatma' in 1888. Phule wrote in Marathi language that was familiar to the masses.

### VIEWS OF JYOTIBA PHULE ON PRIMARY EDUCATION AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

The submission by Jyotirao Phule to Hunter Commission is a document of immense importance in the history of educational reforms in India. The document contains ideas such as free and compulsory education to all now enshrined in the Constitution of India. It is probably the first document of its kind that speaks of creating a taste for education among the masses and making it accessible to all.

Jyotiba Phule had expressed his views on primary education and primary school teachers in a statement forwarded to the Hunter Commission. In his view, it was necessary to bestow prime importance to primary rather than higher education as it was the urgent need of the masses. The British Government which was gaining revenue from taxes paid by commoners did not in return providing any resources for giving primary education. Phule's argument was that amounts received from the masses should be invested on their education in proportion to what the government was gaining and that education was to get priority in government expenditure. The need of the public was to receive an education that helped them perform their jobs and also carry on their day-to-day activities.

The concentration of the British Government was on higher education rather than on primary education. Though Jyotiba Phule was not against higher education, he was of the firm opinion that the common masses were less connected to higher education. Their urgent need was primary education that had relevance to their lives. He wanted educated persons of high vision and intellect to direct their attention towards ensuring humanism in education. He was against the traditional view that education should be used as an instrument for mass exploitation.

Jyotiba Phule was a visionary who was also interested in educational policies. Therefore, in a statement presented to the Hunter Commission, he argued: The present number of educated men is very small in relation to the country at large and we trust that the day may not be far distant when we shall have the present number multiplied a hundredfold all taking themselves to useful and remunerative occupation not looking after service (Hunter Commission 1882). Through education Phule was not just interested in temporarily raising the standard of living for a few persons. He was, in fact, thinking of the future of education for an independent India. His goal was to give Indian society an education that would not only have a permanent value, but also cultivate in the people a free mind and liberty of action.

Jyotiba Phule concentrated on the fact that the two important needs of an effective system of primary education were quality teachers and a good curriculum. In his view a primary teacher plays a pivotal role in the education process. According to Jyotiba Phule a primary teacher must be a trained person receiving sufficient salary. He wanted teachers to be drawn from lower castes so that they could be given employment opportunities. Phule was also of the view that efficient primary school teachers should be paid more salary than others.

### EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF MAHATMA JYOTIBA PHULE

Jyotiba related education with access to justice, equity and growth for lower castes and women and asserted that only through education growth could be possible. Phule's thoughts on education can be summarised as follows- Lack of education leads to lack of wisdom, which in turn leads to lack of justice. This leads to lack of progress, which leads to lack of money and results in oppression of the lower castes (See Natarajan and Ninan, 2011).

Mahatma Phule was fully conscious about the importance of education as a tool of social justice and equality. In fact he saw education as the harbinger of a social revolution. The essence of the educational philosophy of Mahatma Phule was that education is a human right. He was indeed the protagonist of the ideas of universalisation of educational opportunities. Universalisation of education basically means accepting and extending facilities of education to all irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex and physical or moral disability. Article 45 of Indian Constitution is the symbol of victory for the philosophy of equality of educational opportunity propounded by Mahatma Phule. He also worked for education of women and virtually laid the foundation for opening up opportunities for women to seek formal education. This was especially true of women from the marginalised sections. For achieving his aims, he opened a girl's school in 1848 at Budhwar Peth in the residential building of Tatyasaheb Bhide. He opened two more schools in 1851 among which one school was for girls of backward class. He had revolutionary ideas about different aspects of education.

### SALIENT FEATURES OF THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF MAHATMA PHULE

- Since all human beings are equal, access to education must be uniform. Monopolistic controls over education must be curtailed. Universalisation of opportunities and compulsory education must be ensured.
- While educating individuals, religion, race, caste and sex should not be considered. Education should develop humanistic values.
- The education of women and other deprived groups must be given top priority for establishment of social justice. Education must serve as a binding force in society
- A primary school teacher must be a trained person and sufficient salary should be paid to him/her.
- Curriculum must be utilitarian and practical so as to cover the needs of the society. Preliminary knowledge about agriculture and health should be included in the curriculum. There should be a differentiation between the curriculum of rural and urban schools.
- Values that stand the test of time such as freedom, equality, fraternity, kindness, self-respect, devotion to one's nation and internationalism should be developed through education.
- Professional ability and efficiency should be developed so that knowledge may be properly linked.
- The downward filtration theory advocated by Lord Macaulay is not philosophically sound as it ignores the common masses.
- Practical knowledge is superior to bookish knowledge. Hence primary knowledge in Modi (a special Marathi script) accounts, history, grammar, agriculture ethics and health should be imparted.
- Though quantitative growth in primary schools is important, it should not be at the cost of qualitative growth.
- The government must formulate the scheme of scholarships and rewards for deserving students and those in need of support (Marwaha 2010).

Phule's bold efforts to educate women, Shudras and the untouchables had a deep effect on the values, beliefs and ideologies relating to the movement for social justice through education. His efforts unleashed the forces of awakening among the common masses. Education made women more knowledgeable. They became conscious of the differences between the right and the wrong and could analyse these differences with a scientific approach. They began to question the age-old customs which degraded them. Similarly, Shudras started claiming equality with upper castes in all areas of life. In short, Jyotiba Phule launched a movement for liberating women and Shudras from the control of vested interests and laid the foundation for a Backward Class Movement in India.

### RELEVANCE OF JYOTIBA'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY TODAY

In today's educational scenario Phule's thoughts on education are very relevant. As we know, today education has been mostly reduced to information transmission. There is always a fear of examination because of bookish education. But for Phule knowledge was not just information. It involves questioning, understanding, critiquing and interpreting knowledge. As early as in the 19th century Phule had given alternative education models. For him, Education is the power to think clearly, the power to act well in the world's work, and the power to appreciate life. For Phule knowledge matters because it can question, change and transform the individual and society. Education can empower and make society more democratic. It can help in reconstructing, rethinking and in interpreting tradition. This thought of Phule is extremely relevant in the paradoxical context of caste in contemporary India- where despite constitutional provisions, caste discrimination is widespread.

### CONCLUSION

Jyotiba Phule was the first Indian educationist whose pragmatic views on education were honoured by the British rulers in India. He was a practical man with a profound philosophical background. The Indian educationists of his period and after were deeply impressed by the richness and originality of Phule's

thoughts. His educational ideas and principles especially in the field of women s education and universal, free and compulsory primary education are most relevant in modern Indian society as elsewhere. It is not an exaggeration to say that the history of women s education in India would be incomplete without making a reference to the contribution of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. He is rightly called Mahatma.

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