



## Mahatma Jyotiba Phule

Both Mang and Arya enhance the beauty of human beings. The behavior of both of them is the same, yet why consider the distinction of high and low between them. Self-knowledge is the best among all types of knowledge. By understanding this superior philosophy, no one is corrupt, and it can be understood. (Ref. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule- Akhandadi Kavyarachana- Introspection . Page no. 13 )

A prominent social reformer, a renowned activist, a great thinker, and a noble 'Soul,' Jyotirao Govindrao Phule did his best to bring positive changes in education, agriculture, and the social caste system position of women etc. in the 19th century. He is admired and remembered for his selfless service to educate women and low caste people. He led a movement against the existing caste structure, revolted against the domination of the Brahmins, and fought for the rights of the peasants and others belonging to low castes.

Born on April 11, 1827, in the Satara district of Maharashtra, his father, Govindrao, was a vegetable vendor at Poona. He lost his mother when he was only nine months old. Since his father and uncles were 'Mali' by caste, they were known as 'Phule.' Because of their caste and profession; they were called "Phule" (Florist).

He was admitted to the Scottish Mission's High School, Poona, in 1841. There, he met Sadashiv Ballal Govinda, a Brahmin who became one of his best friends and remained close to him throughout his life. At the age of thirteen, he was married to Savitribai. He completed his schooling in 1847.

In 1848 was a crucial year for him, a turning point in his life. An event relating to his participation in his friend's (a Brahmin) marriage function and the insult and humiliation meted out to him by his friend's family members profoundly impacted his life. He joined the marriage procession as a member of the bridegroom's side. His friend's father and others did not like it. Humiliated and insulted, he left the procession. He took a vow to set right the caste structure, which was 'derailed' because of the arrogance and complexity of a few upper caste people. The event described above laid the foundation stone of a new era- an era free from caste prejudices and biases, social inequality, caste-based

exploitation and humiliation, untouchability, etc. He dedicated his life to the cause of Dalits who were deprived of all their rights as human beings.

Thomas Paine's book 'The Rights of Man' greatly influenced him. He strongly felt that all the problems of Dalits could be solved if the right and proper education was provided to them. Education was the key to their survival, success, and enlightenment.

He also had a firm conviction that women should have a voice in society, a power to influence the decision-making process, and revolt against injustice, deprivation, and exploitation. His stress on women's education propelled him to establish in 1848 the first girls' school in India. His wife, Savitribai Phule, who he educated, played a crucial role.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai were remarkable personalities for their times. He started women's education by educating his wife and trained her for school. Savitribai was the first women teacher in India. He started the first school for girls at Pune, in the year 1848. He advocated education for female students from the downtrodden (Shudras/ Atee Shudras) communities and adults. He established institutes like the 'Pune Female Native Schools' and the 'Society for Promoting Education for Mahar, Mangs'.

More importantly, he engaged in his education at home too. Jyotiba prepared his wife, Savitribai, to teach in the girls' school, to educate the women first to bring in the value of equality at home. Savitribai had to face bitter opposition from the orthodox society for teaching girls and people from the underprivileged groups in the school. Despite this bitter opposition, Jyotiba and Savitribai continued their work with sincerity. Jyotiba stressed women's education emancipation of women. He brought women into public life. He said equality and oneness are necessary for the development of the country. "To empower women, he opposed child marriage.

He initiated widow-remarriage and started a home for widows. At that time, widow remarriage was banned, and child marriage was widespread among the Hindu society. Many widows were young, and not all could live in a way the orthodox people expected.

Some widows resorted to abortion or left their illegitimate children to their fate by leaving them on the streets. Realizing the dangers of a widow giving birth to the child conceived in unfortunate circumstances after her husband's death, he opened a home for newborn infants in 1863 to prevent infanticides and suicides." Phule vehemently advocated widow-remarriage and even got a house built for upper-caste widows during 1854. He requested people send their children to schools he opened for the oppressed and women. Phule suggested compulsory, universal, and innovative education. Education of women and the lower caste, he believed, deserved priority.

The Phule couple opened girl's first school in India in August 1848. Only eight girls were admitted on the first day. Steadily the number of students increased. Jyotirao opened two more girls' schools during 1851-52. He also started a school for the lower classes, especially for Mahars and Mangs. Thus, the pioneering work done by Phule in the field of female and lower castes education was unparalleled in the history of education in India. Phule was the first Indian social reformer who repeatedly urged the alien government to pay attention to primary education which was neglected. All the time he was making people aware of the education and compelling the British govt to arrange education of all people of India. He fought for the right of education equally for all the people regardless of their caste and class. He knew once the people were educated, they would fight themselves for their rights without any help and support. He said that progress of individuals was possible only with education.

Jyotirao says in the introduction to the book "The whipcord of Cultivatos (Shetkaryacha Asud)":

Without education, wisdom was lost;

Without wisdom, morals were lost;

Without morals, development was lost;

Without development, wealth was lost;

Without wealth, the Shudras were ruined;

So much has happened through lack of education.

He said, "Education is that which helps the ordinary people to prepare themselves for the struggle of life, which brings the strength of character, the spirit of benevolence and the courage of the lion brings proper education is what enables it to stand on one's own feet. Phule made a powerful plea to abolish untouchability and the entire caste system. He revolted against the unjust caste system under people who had suffered for centuries. The Dalit at that time did not have any political, social, educational, or economic rights. He condemned the dual morality of the Brahman system. He said equal opportunity should be for all people. He said by birth; all are free and equal. All human beings have natural rights. He was a militant advocate of human rights to the oppressed.

He protested against man-made inequality, rooted in the Hindu caste system and varna-vyavastha. He struggled fearlessly to implement the reforms in the Hindu society. He tried to remove the inferiority complex from the minds of the people. He made Shudras aware of it. He advised them to take education and acquire power, and they are not slaves but human beings. Adv. T. L. Joshi said, "Jyotiba 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 Jyotiba 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 modern Western civilization."

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule established the Satyashodhak Samaj, which sowed the seeds of development of the masses and propounded the spread of rational thinking. The movement carried on by the samaj was the first of its kind to reach the remote villages. He carried on the social reform movements based on social equality. Phule believed in the equality of men and women. For Phule, equality in society was meaningless without the equality of men and women in the family. He propagated universal humanism based on values of freedom, equality, and universal brotherhood.

He criticized the caste system through the books "Gulamgiri" and "Brahmanache Kasab". He established the Satyashodhak Samaj. He sowed the seeds of the development of the masses. He was bestowed with the title of Mahatma on May 11, 1888, by a Maharashtrian social activist Vithalrao Krishnaji Vandekar. Mahatma Phule died on November 28, 1890.

(The importance of the work of Mahatma Phuleji should be underlined, that is why caste has been mentioned in the article as inevitable)

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