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Maharishi Vitthal Ramji Shinde

If we turn the pages of the history of India, we can see that we may not have understood the work of Vitthal Ramji Shinde. He has done a lot of work to remove untouchability. His work for untouchability and the religious ideology he has told is unmatched. But we did not appreciate it seems.

The name of Maharishi Vitthal Ramji Shinde comes to the fore in the few people who have made efforts to run modern Maharashtra and Indian social reorganization based on prudence and justice. He was a devout man, but his thinking was that religious and socio-political work is one. Mahatma Phule started the work for untouchables in the middle of the nineteenth century, which was the beginning of an epoch-making work. At the beginning of the twentieth century, no one thought that untouchability stigmatized humanity in India. At such a time, Maharishi Shinde tried to establish the work all over India by establishing an organization to advance the untouchable class and eradicate untouchability.



It can be said that there were two significant periods to eradicate untouchability. One was the period of awakening, which Maharishi Vitthal Ramji Shinde led and the other period was of struggle, which Dr. Ambedkar led. In the context of social reform, Maharishi Shinde believed that

the prevention of untouchability, Hindu organization is not different. The unimaginable differences associated with the whole society are various symptoms of the same disease. That is why the issue of untouchability should not be handed over to Shastri's and pundits based on scriptures; he used to keep such views in front of everyone while opposing Mahatma Gandhi.

Maharishi Vitthal Ramji Shinde was born on 23 April 1873 in Jamkhandi village of Karnataka state. His father's name was Ramjibaba, and his mother's name was Yamunabai. He was the fifth child of his parents. At the age of nine, he married to Rukmini. When no one was coming forward to teach girls, his father Ramji Shinde did the work of sending Janabai, sister of Maharishi Shinde, to school. Ramji Shinde called his daughters 'AAI' (mother). Maharishi Shinde says that, like modern social reformers, he did not have to take any steps to not accept caste discrimination because his family members did not tolerate discrimination based on castes. Maharishi Shinde's father did not differentiate between boys and girls.

Maharishi Shinde says that a woman has immense power, and that is the power to endure. Through this power, she obeys the instructions of her husband, son, and father. Maharishi Shinde Ji believed that the compassion that arose in his mind for all the women was due to the respect and devotion he had for his mother, Yamunabai.

He was deeply saddened by the sudden death of his elder brother Parashurama and became the eldest of the siblings. Due to this, he became serious, thoughtful, and studious; then, his age would have been about twelve years. The place where he lived was huge, which provided enough space to study. Maharishi Shinde says From class III to VII, his home meant an undeclared school, a free library, a free hostel.

He passed his matriculation examination from the English School in Jamkhandi in 1891 and joined Fergusson College, Pune, in 1893 for further studies. Every month, he got a scholarship of ten rupees from 'The Deccan Maratha Association,' but that amount was not enough. Then he sought the help of Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda to complete his B.A. Maharaj Sayajirao approved and decided to give him a scholarship of twenty-five rupees every month. He was going to get this amount only through "The Deccan Maratha Association.' But the help was being received from Maharaj Sayajirao, so the Deccan Maratha Association stopped the ten rupees that the institution gave. In 1898 he completed his B.A degree. After getting first-class marks in the subject of law also passed the exam of LLB.

Immediately after Mahatma Phuleji, Kalaskar worked for the untouchables by sacrificing his selfishness in the late nineteenth century. Some work should be done for the untouchables; such inspiration must have been created in the mind of Maharishi Shinde after seeing the work of Kalaskar in his student life. In an article made famous in March 1909, he writes that, if a point in the history of all humanity on this whole earth, there would have been a widespread boycott. And what would have been reached in a complete visible form by going on from the olden times is the boycott imposed on the lowly considered castes in Bharatkhand! O people of India, forgetting our selfishness, this deadly and sinful self-extermination should be removed by considering humanity and God as a witness.

After getting the membership of Prarthana Samaj, Maharishi Shinde did the work of propagation of Prarthana Samaj. After completing his studies in London, The then Gaekwad government requested Maharishi Shinde to see the schools established for the Deprived classes in his province. After supervising the four schools of Baroda, he told his thoughts about them to Maharajji. Maharishi Shinde believed that for the progress of the deprived people, special awareness would

have to be brought in the people of the upper class. Till then, the people cannot understand how big the problem of the deprived people is. To fulfil this idea, took a donation of Rs. One Thousand from the then Vice President of Prarthana Samaj, Sheth Damodardas Govardhandas, and started a school for the untouchables on 18 October 1906. in Paral Mumbai. The school was inaugurated by the auspicious hands of Sir Narayanrao Chandavarkar.

Soon after that, Maharshi Shinde established Mission to the Depressed Classes in India. Sir Narayanrao Chandavarkar was elected as its President, and Sheth Damodardas became its Vice President. Maharishi Shinde believed that the condition of the untouchable class would improve through education; this is true. Still, without considering whether to touch or not to touch the people of this caste, this should be our main task for all to work together.

Maharishi Shinde also worked for Congress. Congress meetings were held in Surat, Madras, Calcutta, Lahore, Bankipur, and Karachi from 1907 to 1912. There should be a referendum to end untouchability, so Maharishi Shindeji planned independent counsels at all these places. And where possible, he also opened different branches of his Mission with local help. The direction or purpose of mission work was determined. In which issues like education, natural and personal reforms, industrial upliftment from time to time, and proper awareness of political rights were considered necessary by removing untouchability.

The Mission organized the first Council for the Prevention of Untouchability under the chairmanship of Sir Dr. Bhandarkar in Pune on 5-7 October 1912. In which 350 untouchables and 50 different upper-class people sat and ate food together. Six years after this council, on 22-23 March 1918, the Mission organized the second council in Mumbai. Lokmanya Tilak, Mrs. Besant, Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Narayanrao Chandavarkar, Namdar Paranjape etc. were also present. With the relentless efforts of Maharishi Shinde, Mrs. Besant, being the President, had passed the resolution of the removal of untouchability from the program list of the Congress.

By sacrificing his selfishness for the untouchables, Maharishi Shinde and his family did the work of bringing awareness across the country. The task of understanding the issues of the untouchables as a national question can also be considered his work. Maharishi Shinde can be called a pioneer of the work to abolish untouchability and advance the untouchables all over India. We can also see him as a thinker to makes whatever amendments about untouchability and brings his questions in front of everyone. For the advancement of the untouchables, schools, industries, hostels, and similar institutions were established by Maharishi Shinde. Maharishi Shinde put efforts to remove social untouchability through lectures, conferences, processions, various exhibitions etc.

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Reference: Maharishi Vitthal Ramji Shinde Life and Work-G.M.Pawar