CHAPTER 1
INTERROGATING CASTE, GENDER AND PATRIARCHY: TRACING HISTORIES OF THE ANTI-CASTE MOVEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA

This chapter underlines the revolutionary struggle of the anti-caste movements in Maharashtra drawing out its phases and mapping the ways in which the counter-cultural practices of these movements interrogated caste, gender and patriarchy. This is an effort to outline the ways in which the counter cultures of the political struggles of Jotiba Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Babasaheb Ambedkar fashioned a path for anti-caste feminism—which in retrospect may be called Phule, Ambedkarite feminism.

Section I: Rise of an Oppositional Culture - Jotiba Phule

The 19th and 20th century Maharashtra witnessed a major social transformation with several reformers raising the issues of women such as child marriage, age of consent for marriage, sati, widowhood, education and so on.1 There were two groups in the Maharashtrian society—the progressive and the conservative. In order to reform the Hindu society, the progressive group formed various organisations like Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarathana Samaj etc., under the rubric of Hinduism. However, the conservative group remained within the social space of Hinduism.2 The two groups emerged as a response to the Christian missionaries. Hence, the Christian missionaries successfully unveiled the

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hierarchy that existed between man and women in general and the caste system in particular.³

For instance, the 15 November 1854 edition of Dnyanodaya⁴ newspaper described the differences between Christianity and Hinduism as thus.

**Christian Religion:**

a) Faith in the sole and universal God is considered the bedrock of Christianity.

b) God is cosmopolitan and has a kingdom. He has no limits and boundaries. He is powerful enough to govern his autonomous regime.

c) He is free and exists as a master of the flora and fauna of the entire universe. He is above the domination of others.

d) God created the entire elements of the universe.

e) God exists as a cosmopolitan entity.

f) God protects everyone. The entire flora and fauna is dependent on God.

g) God stands for virtues.

h) God is the living spirit.

i) God is the epitome of divinity.

j) He stands as a symbol of innocence. God exists beyond the tactile sensations.

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⁴ *Dnyanodaya*, 15 November 1854.
k) God is against sinners and he believes in the destruction of sin. As a part of that mission, he sent his son to earth.

Hindu Religion:

a) God who gives you everything exist in thirty-three crore forms.

b) God believes in the illusion and desire called women. The ramification of it is part of the entire world. Inscriptions (Shatras) show the powerlessness of Hindu Gods.

c) God is determined out of rituals. Those rituals are under the control of Brahmin priests.

d) Hindus gives the form to their God.

e) God is confined within the boundaries of temples.

f) God is festooned with jewels but he is incapable of protecting it.

g) Hindu cosmos (Brahma) abound with vices.

h) God is lifeless and carved out of stone.

i) God is silent like incarnation of Buddha.

j) Hindus clean their God everyday. It becomes impure through the touch of lower caste.

k) Gods are involved in the proliferation of sins.

However, scholars like James Mill take a theoretical position and draw attention to the fact that in a barbaric society the status/location of women had always been degraded. He argues that a woman achieves the highest status in

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progressive and civilised societies. He cited a number of examples from the *Manusmriti* and Hindu *Dharmashatras* in which some rules were imposed only on women. For example, it prescribes that a woman should not eat food before husband has eaten, should not acquire knowledge, should not have a share in the property of father etc.\(^6\) Therefore, he says that the laws/rules of these texts constructs the dependency of women upon man and provides the legitimate rights to man.\(^7\) These debates raised the role of religion that foregrounds linkages on gender, caste hierarchy and patriarchy in public and private sphere. The women who created spaces for themselves belonged to the high caste/class Hindus; they were able to establish an autonomous organisation by emphasising on education. Moreover, they not only challenged the religious ideas of the dominant society but also overcame the barrier of religiously-sanctioned norms of a patriarchal society.\(^8\) However, the issue of untouchable women remains unaddressed in every sphere.

On the other hand, lower caste women brought out the liberating and vibrant ideas by directly attacking the patriarchy/masculinity in the public and private domain.\(^9\) For example, Tarabai Shinde in *Stri-Purusha Tulana* (1882) problematised the comparison between men and women. While comparing them, she pointed out that faults commonly ascribed to women, such as superstition, suspicion, treachery and insolence were found to ever more

\(^{6}\) Ibid, pp. 447-49.

\(^{7}\) Ibid, p.449-50


\(^{9}\) Phule in his writing used the word Shudra for all caste communities’ women and Ati-Shudra for untouchables.
common in men. 10 She also brought out a polemic on the practice of remarriage and the opposition of other castes towards it. The nature of colonial aesthetics that redefine the dress code and social body of male and female is a subtext of her work. Such premise of argument links it with the exploitation of native artisans and the cultural onslaught of colonial aesthetics. A kind of paradigm shift was achieved through the deconstruction of patriarchy that determines the sexual division of labour and role reversals of the women. The symbolic violence of dominant Hindu scriptures-regulated life worlds of those women are undermined through this work.

However, the basic roots and cause of this discourse began with Jotirao Phule who debated the Shudras 11 and Ati-shudras. 12 Jotirao Govindarao Phule was born on 11 April 1827. He belonged to Mali caste. His family name was Gorhe. His ancestors lived in the village named Katgaon. 13 According to Manusmriti, if a Shudra acquires property, it must be handed over to a Brahman. Jotirao's grandfather Shetiba had a confrontation with the Kulkarni of the village who demanded property. He moved to Pune. He had three sons Ranoji, Krishna and Govind. Govind, the father of Jotirao, was the youngest of the three sons. Since the family was poor, the three children, for an amount of one paisa 14 , worked as shepherds. 15 Since the Phule siblings were industrious, over a period of time, they were recommended by their superiors to work under the regime of Peshwa.

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10 Tarabai Shinde (1882), Stri-Purush Tulana, Poona, translated by Rosalind O'Hanlon, “A Comparison between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India”.
11 This word was used by Phule to mean the caste such as Mali, Kunbi, Tali etc., throughout his writings. In the present context, all these castes are considered as Bahujan.
12 This word was used by Phule for women and untouchables.
14 Paisa is a Marathi word, which is use in English, for money.
They worked as florists in the Durbar. That was how their old surname Gorhe became Phule.\textsuperscript{16}

According to O'Hanlon, Phule attended his first school between 1834 and 1838.\textsuperscript{17} The Peshwa regime was against the education of the \textit{Shudras} and \textit{Ati-Shudras} because the social mobility of them (\textit{Shudras} and \textit{Ati-Shudras}) would have led to the challenging of the regime through power and knowledge, which was historically denied to women and untouchables.\textsuperscript{18} Hence, the Brahmin servant who worked as a clerk in the shop of his father persuaded him to discontinue the education of Phule. But, Guffar Beg Munshi and Mr Leggit encouraged his father to send Phule to school. At the age of fourteen, in 1841 Jotiba Phule restarted his schooling again. He was admitted in the first standard of an English school.\textsuperscript{19}

One of the incidents that left him shaken and made him think about the inhuman attitude of Brahmans towards Shudras took place during the marriage ceremony of his Brahman friend. In the ceremony, some Brahmans, after coming to know of his caste identity, began discriminating him.\textsuperscript{20} This harsh experience provoked him to read the Hindu scriptures. It dawned on him then that the scriptures were mere ideological tools to govern the \textit{Shudras} and \textit{Ati-Shudras}.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} The name is derived from the Marathi word 'Phul' which means flower
\textsuperscript{17} O'Hanlon (1985: 110).
\textsuperscript{18} Pandharinath Sitaram Patil (1927), "Biography of Jotirao Phule", pp. 3-4 & 6, from the personal collection of Gutum Shinde.
\textsuperscript{20} Patil (1927), \textit{Biography of Jotirao Phule}, p. 9; Also see Dhananjay Keer (1974), \textit{Mahatma Jotirao Phooley}, Popular Prakashan, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 11.
Therefore, he initiated a counter culture through the subversive potential of knowledge; he established schools for the *Shudras* and *Ati-shudras*. In the 15 September 1853 edition of *Dnyanodaya*, Phule explained the reason for his eagerness to start schools for girls. In it, he acknowledged the role of the mother in imparting knowledge to the child. He, however, argued that to bring about prosperity and to build a strong nation, it is imperative to improve the status and condition of the women by emphasising education for women.\(^{22}\)

Jotirao founded the first school for girls in 1848 at *Bheedewada*.\(^{23}\) In doing so, Phule was confronted with the harsh fact of not having any *Pantoji* to teach the children. This was because all the Brahmans in the city of Pune were against education of women and untouchables.\(^{24}\) Consequently, during the course of his struggle against the hegemony of Brahmans, Phule decided to train his wife Savitribai as a teacher. At Normal school under Madam Michal and Miss Farrar, Savitribai completed her course as school instructor/teacher from Ahmadnagar and Pune, and became the first women teacher in the history of Maharashtra.\(^{25}\) Hence, one can argue that Jotiba Phule was instrumental in imbuing political consciousness in the personality of Savitribai and thus drawing the lines of gender equality.

Savitribai and Jotirao dedicated themselves for the amelioration of inequality of women and untouchables. They started the first school for untouchable girls in

\(^{22}\) *Dnyanodaya*, 1853.


\(^{24}\) *Pantoji* is the word used for a school teacher coming from the Brahmin caste.

1848. Phule established two more schools for girls, one each in 1851 and 1852. The school that opened at Nanapeth in 1851 was historical; Savitribai Phule had to face the day-to-day discriminations from the retrogressive Brahmins. They threw stones and cow-dung on her and several times accused her of being an immoral woman. Nevertheless, in the first school of 1848 the majority were Brahmin girls from the progressive Brahmins; Phule never brought in caste-biased insights while teaching these girls. One can argue that Phule theorised education as the only source of knowledge that will liberate women and untouchables from all sorts of exploitation.

For instance, Phule's student Mukta Salve wrote an essay "Mang Maharanchya Dukhavisatha (About the grief of the Mang and Mahar)." Her essay reveals the plight of Dalit women. Dalit women delivered their children in houses that did not have a cover up. She raised a very sensible question for Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular. Attacking Hindu religion she explains how Brahmins snatched the lands of the poor Mang and Mahar people and built their own huge houses on them. Incriminating Bajirao Peshwa's regime, she wrote that the Mangs and Mahars were tortured as though they were worse than dogs and cows.

If a Mang or Mahar crossed the Talimkhana (gymnasium), his body will be cut into two pieces as punishment. Then severed body parts were used as bat and

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26 The school was meant for the untouchable children as well.
27 It is important to understand that how the Brahmins of Pune tortured Savitribai, but Ranba Mahar, Lahuji Buva Ustad Salve, a Mang and Duraji Appaji Chamar always accompanied her as a bodyguard. Savitribai died in 1897 due to plague, which she caught while serving the lower caste specially the untouchables. For details see Patil (1927), Biography of Jotirao Phule, p. 7-22.
28 This essay by Mukta was written in 1885, originally in Marathi. Mukta was Mang Dalit girl in Phule's school. She was 11 years old when she wrote this essay. For details, see Mahatma Phule Gavrao Granth, Government of Maharashtra Publication, 1991, p. 747-48.
ball in a game. The head was the ball and sword the bat. But no one had the
courage to try and save them. If Mangs and Mahars managed to save their own
lives at all, Bajirao would ask, how dare untouchables save their lives? He further
sarcastically remarked as to whether the untouchables were expecting the
Brahmins to handover their jobs and duties. In this manner Mukta Salve
highlighted several prominent issues relating to class and caste. She posed
philosophical questions such as: which Dharma (religion) is ours (for
untouchables)? She critically analysed how Brahmins manipulated religion and
poor people, just to be able control the knowledge and power relations in the
society.

Moreover, Phule started the night schools and adults' school to meet the needs of
those students. During 1848–1852, Phule started around twenty schools in the
city of Pune. His critical views on education can be understood from his
'Memorial Addressed to the Education Commission'. Phule reflected upon the
need of education to empower lower caste and women, and appreciated the
philanthropy of colonisers in the field of education. By communicating with the
colonisers, he was able to convince them to look into the education of the
vulnerable sections. Thus, he succeeded in exposing the way the dominance of
Brahmins operates in the terrain of education.

On the one hand, Phule deployed the colonial forces to challenge the
Brahmanical hegemony. On the other hand, he also faulted the rulers for merely
implementing an education system without engaging the downtrodden masses.

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29 Ibid., p. 25.
30 'A statement for the information of the Education commission' mentioned in "Memorial
Addressed to the Education Commission", in Keer, Malase and Phadake (eds.) (2006), Mahatma
He advocated favourable policies and incentives like scholarships for students from the impoverished sections; he took a strong position on this issue by arguing that inclusion of children without supporting scholarships will create further exclusion because of their poor life chances. However, he was also aware of the discriminations within education institutions resulting in traumatic experiences for the Mahars, Mangs and other lower classes. The rampant nature of this undesirable situation can be observed in the contemporary writings of Dalit communities. In order to solve these problems, he had recommended construction of special schools for lower caste students. Phule argued that the dominant communities of Brahmin teachers are alienated from the social worlds of the marginalised students. So, only teachers from the lower caste can understand the existential problems of the students. Therefore, he recommended curriculum that incorporated areas such as vocational education, ethics, agrarian ethos and applied arts. He further argued that only trained teachers can produce the best education. He, hence, conceptualised education as a tool to create overall development of the marginalised sections, particularly women. However, modern India’s education system and institutions have failed to incorporate Phule’s approaches.

The problem of the Brahman widows was more critical in the 19th century. For instance, it was customary among the upper castes for widows to tonsure their heads. In fact, it was one of the ways of controlling the body and sexuality of the widows in the patriarchal society. Jotirao and Savitribai challenged this practice by asking barbers not to shave the heads of widows and organised successful

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31 Phule often uses the word "classes" to mean the downtrodden masses; probably he is influenced by the European epistemologies of the category like caste.
protests against it.\textsuperscript{32} Many a time, such women were exploited with many ending up becoming pregnant. Often, they would either try to kill the babies or commit suicide themselves. Phule founded a foundling house to give space to these women to deliver their babies.\textsuperscript{33} Phule also supported the remarriage of widows and established an organization called ‘Widow Remarriage Organization’.\textsuperscript{34} The first such remarriage took place in the year 1864 among the Shenavi caste, made possible by the courage of Phule. He also discussed the age of consent for marriage and sent a petition to British Government asking them to take serious notice of it. To understand Phule’s position on this issue, we must consider his views on the Malabari note.\textsuperscript{35} Malabari, a social reformer, in 1884, wrote a special note to the Viceroy Lord Ripen on the issues of child marriage and enforced widowhood. He demanded that legal incentives have to be taken to control child/infant marriages and enforced widowhood.\textsuperscript{36} While dealing with the question of gender and patriarchy in the case of Malabari, Phule voiced his opinion on infant marriage in India. Phule considered the case as a positive legal move that challenged an unfair Indian tradition.

According to Phule, a girl had to undergo different facets of exclusion. A girl becomes an outcaste because of the ingrained habituation and the reproduction of patriarchy. The metaphor ‘outcaste’ signifies the impeachable norms of caste and gender. The sexual and domestic division of labour enforces the

\textsuperscript{32} Vidhya Bal and Anil Parajale (2006), Savitribai Phule Kal aani Kartuthva, Government of Maharashtra, pp. 4 & 63.
\textsuperscript{33} O’Hanlon (1985: 119).
\textsuperscript{36} Lord Ripen sought the opinion of 68 leading people from Bombay region on the issue. Forty-seven reformers responded in the negative saying the law should not be amended. However, Phule took a radical position on the issue; his views are spelt out in the Malabari case.
subordination of women. Hence, Phule compared the labour of women to that of the labour of the Afro-Americans. Phule used the minor literature of resistance through the deployment of such metaphors.\(^{37}\) Those metaphors represent the parallels of subjugation that exist across multiple social systems. Phule suggested that the boys should be over the age of nineteen and girls over the age eleven during the time of marriage. Therefore, one can argue that the suggestions become a unified discourse in the life of Jotirao Phule, the organic intellectual. The atrocities taking place in institutions such as infant marriage are covered up through the networks of the girl's in-laws with the legal systems. Phule tries to articulate the multifaceted dimensions of oppressions that determine the marginalized location of a girl. Infant marriage also recreates the carnal and misogynistic aspects of the life of the woman.\(^{38}\) Phule welcomed the attempts of the literati from colonial Bengal against infant marriage. He, however, argued that the articulation of Bhadralok literati is an expression of their cultural capital, and the marginalised lower sections suffered because of their inability to articulate their problems in the public sphere due to their subordinate status determined by the caste system.

He linked the inequality with access to education and questioned the power that Brahmans had over the legal systems and concerned authorities. He also suggested that parents who support these traditional practices should be made to pay a penalty. The money obtained through such punishments should then be spent for the education of the lower classes.\(^{39}\) He also pointed out the spread of Brahmanical ideology through the Brahmin teachers. Therefore, he demanded


\(^{39}\) Ibid.
English education for the subaltern sections. His engagement with education and legal reforms were part of his endless search for modernity. In response to another case of Malabari on enforced widowhood, Phule argued that the system of enforced widowhood created vulnerability among the Brahmin women.

In his understanding, enforced widowhood had to be confronted like polygamy which is sanctioned through the Aryan institutions for males.\textsuperscript{40} The practice of polygamy itself affects different women and it results in moral turpitude of the system. Man becomes more nihilistic and tries to cleanse his sins through religion. On the other hand, a Brahman widow is forced to face discriminations in her day-to-day life because of the stigma associated with widowhood.\textsuperscript{41} The expression of desires outside the boundaries of monogamy was repressed as deviance. Thus, sexuality of women was subjected to the surveillance of the religious order and stereotyped as prostitutes by the community. He conceptualised this case as legal step to enlighten the English government to annihilate the dominant ideology that legitimised the practice of widowhood.

Phule established the Satyasodhak Samaj in 1873 and the Satyasodhak newspapers \textit{Din Bandhu} and \textit{Din Mitra} in 1875 and 1881 respectively. These two streams of actions was itself a subjugated knowledge that has a historicity of its own.\textsuperscript{42} As Gail Omvedt argues, \textit{Satyasodhak Samaj} confronted the traditional Hinduism and the constructed direct relationship of God and man.\textsuperscript{43} It was informed by the \textit{Bhakti} cult and rationality of Buddhism. However, the most foundational practice of Phule can be seen from his promotion of inter-caste marriages, which was

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid and also see Hari Narke(2006) "Dhyanajoti Savitribai Phule", in \textit{Mahatama Phule: Sahitya aani Chalaval"}, Government of Maharashtra,p.448.


\textsuperscript{43} Gail Omvedt (1976), \textit{Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Maharashtra, 1873-1933}, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, p. 137.
performed under Satyasodhak Samaj marriages.\textsuperscript{44} The marriage of Radhabai Nimbalkar and Sitaram Alhat in 1873 was the first registered marriage. Phule strongly resented the presence of priests and recital of Dashavtar verses; therefore, he composed the psalms of Satyasodhak marriages, which was based upon truth and equality for all human being.\textsuperscript{45} One of the most important interventions of Phule was to open the water tank for untouchables giving them mobility during that time. The writings and practical approaches of Phule had a remarkable impact on the lives of women and untouchables. Phule’s writings expose the forms of power, knowledge and exploitation that enslave the untouchables and women systematically in order to construct caste and gender inequality and further strengthen patriarchy.\textsuperscript{46}

Mahatma Jotirao Phule penned a play entitled ‘The Third Eye’\textsuperscript{47} in 1855, to challenge the symbolic capital of the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{48} It was an attempt to explore a different form of knowledge, which questioned the hegemony of the Brahmanical systems of knowledge. The play is based on the subjugation of an illiterate and conservative peasant family by a shrewd Brahmin priest, and explains their regaining of their consciousness through Christianity. Phule portrays Hinduism as a cultural code imposed from the dominant realm of

\textsuperscript{44} The marriage of Phule’s son Yashwant was an inter-caste marriage. But in his marriage Govind Ganpat Kale recited the Dashavtar. Phule did not like this idea of reciting Dashavtar. Later, he composed the verses from Satyasodhki style which denied any Hindu rituals. Thus, he broke the monopoly of Bhataji and Satji, created its aura in the lower caste and made history too. For details see Narke (2001: 179).


\textsuperscript{46} It is not possible to discuss all of Phule’s writings in detail. However, most of Phule’s writings attacked the opportunistic attitude of the Brahmins to exploit the marginal castes, classes and women through religion.

\textsuperscript{47} The play describes the oppression of the lower castes and its genesis of this oppression. For details see Keer, Malase and Phadake (eds.) (2006: 5-33). Also see O’Hanlon (1985: 122-28).

ritually high castes to survive through the priesthood. The main characters in the play are: a Brahmin priest, a poor cultivator and his wife, and a Christian priest. The joker represents the non-Brahmanical conscience of the play. The Brahmin priest visits the wife of the peasant. He uses astrological jargons to establish a rapport with her. He told her that the zodiac signs suggested that the life of her unborn baby was in danger. The priest suggested a macabre ritual to avert the impending tragedy. The husband and wife were told to conduct ceremonies and offer a feast to the Brahmins. The husband and wife considered this turn in their life as a result of Karma. They borrowed money from a moneylender and tried to fulfil the priest’s suggestion even in the midst of penury. The couple then met a Christian priest after serving the food for the Brahmin gourmets. In the ensuing dialogue, the Christian priest asserted that god did not exist in the pandemonium of organised religion. He argued that a true god is one who created the earth but is detached from the society’s hierarchical institutions. Through the Christian priest, the cultivator realised the nature of the exploitation by the Brahmins in the name of spirituality. The astuteness of the Brahmins was a means to extract everything from the poor and ignorant masses. The supremacy of the Brahmins is constructed through the recognition of the backwardness of the Shudras and Ati-shudras. The enlightened couple conveys their gratitude to the Christen priest and decides to join Phule’s school. The decision to join the school of Phule is a self-conscious style of narration to show the anti-Brahmanical ideology among the Shudras and Ati-shudras.

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
The play's historical relevance is its elaboration of how lower castes are subjected to the Brahmanical patriarchy and its related knowledge systems. The priest approaches the woman to spread the Brahmanical ideology. Thus, through exposing the strategies of the Brahmins, the play becomes a minor literature in nature.\textsuperscript{53} Phule brought about a textual revisionism of the meta-narratives of Hinduism that romanticised the dominant role of the Brahmins.

The play also tries to evaluate the colonial modernity that emerged with the advent of Christianity. He narrates how a Brahmin creates his social space by exercising the newly acquired knowledge upon \textit{Shudras} and \textit{Ati shudras}.\textsuperscript{54} Phule was vigilant about the presence and dominance of Brahmins in the native as well as colonial systems like schools of vernacular medium, English medium schools, judiciary, revenue department etc. The Brahmins perpetuated their domination through creating networks among their community and arranging for the induction of members of their own community in the different bodies of administration. To do away with the domination of the Brahmins in different spheres of society, Phule represented the Brahmin character as the epitome of organised hypocrisy. The \textit{Dakshina} prize committee rejected the play Phule sent for publication. Brahmins, along with Europeans, made up the selection committee. Therefore, it was not surprising that the play was rejected by the committee; the play's scathing attack on the Brahmins was there for all to see.

\textsuperscript{53} Colebrook, Gilles Deleuze, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 3.
Phule was a radical feminist by nature; this is readily evident from his Satsar I and II. On finding that women's existence or chastity was challenged and questioned in many ways, Pandita Ramabai converted to Christianity; this was criticised by the progressive Brahmins. Phule defended her, by taking the position that every individual is free and this can be practiced as the right to choice, even if he/she should remain under the hegemony of any religion. Phule creates fictional alter egos such as Brahmin and Shudras to contemplate his positions on the courageous act of Pandita Ramabai. The fictional space that is constructed through the Brahmin represents the ambivalent positions of the Brahmins. Through the Shudras character he challenges the knowledge that emanates from the power of Brahmins which despised her choice. Thus, he also shows us, how the priestly class interpolated the religious texts to suit their interest. In the second issue of Satsar, Phule examines the misogynistic attitude evidenced by the criticism of Pandita Ramabai; this attitude is an inherent representation of Brahmin culture. The print media, especially the newspaper, stereotyped women thorough the masculine consensus within society. The internalization of patriarchal ideology by the lower caste also made even lower caste male members of the Satyasodhak Samaj to oppose the conversion. For instance, Phule was willing to publish Satsar in the Dinbandhu newspaper, which was jointly created by Phule and Narayan Maghaji Lokande. However, Lokande and Bhalerao rejected his idea and condemned the conversation of Ramabai. They were not pleased with Phule's idea of attacking Hindu religion. Therefore, Phule shows us how multiple patriarchies operated even within his

56 Foucault (1980), Power/Knowledge, p. 83.
57 Maghaji Lokande is the first trade leader; he founded the trade union in 1891.
own organization and society. *Gulamgiri* is his one of his most important pioneering work; in it he tackled the issues of gender, caste and patriarchy.59

The text of 'Gulamgiri/Slavery' explored the signs linked with slavery. It shows us the endless displacements that are associated with the discourse of slavery; these are analysed to bring out the post-foundational premises of slavery. Thus, Phule dedicates this work to the good people of America who had abolished slavery. The dedication itself leaves an open-ended analysis related to slavery. It also demands the attention of the colonizers to abolish the dominance of Brahmins.61 This particular construction of the dedication tries to transcend tradition and appropriate colonial modernity. A critical dialogue emerged through the consensus and conflict between the colonizers and Phule. These ideological and meaningful contraries are his defensive mechanism to challenge his native elite/other/Brahman.62 The suppression of the egalitarian Shudra king *Baliraja* by the Brahman connotes the beginning of the Brahmanical power. The dialogue between Phule and the fictitious character Dhondiba deals with the absence of humanity among the Brahmins. He observes that the Brahmin bureaucracy created social capital through their constructed and epistemic priorities related to knowledge. Brahmins emphasise their authority through the


62 Ibid.
dominant stereotypes like Parasurama. The patriarchy associated with their scriptures is pregnant with these fictional manifestations. He tries to unveil the authenticity of the Hindu texts like Bhagavat where he contrasts it with Aesop’s fables and argues that latter are more credible than the former.\(^{63}\) This contrast is symbolic of the irrational textuality that abounds in the corpus of Hindu religion. Phule tried to associate the existence of the dominant ideology in different aspects of the subjugation of the Shudras and Ati-shudras.\(^{64}\) Phule constructed counter spaces of dissent through organisations, print and visual media to articulate the subjugated voices of women, peasants etc. Brahmins are portrayed as arrogant and inhuman in nature.\(^{65}\) Thus, Phule tries to foreground caste, gender and patriarchy through the knowledge and power associated with Brahmins and their seminal text Manusmriti. Phule questioned the history of the Aryans and projected the history of the native Shudras and Ati-shudras.

Phule’s writing and approaches restructured the history that was based upon the critique of categories of ‘self’ and ‘other’. During his lifetime, Phule developed alternatives models and methodologies to eradicate caste, gender and patriarchy. As Keer rightly pointed out, Phule was a social revolutionary.

\(^{63}\) For further exploration, see Slavery of Phule.
Shahu Maharaj was born in 1874 as Yeshwantrao Ghatge. He was the eldest son of Appasaheb Ghatge. Anandibai, widow of Maharaja Shivaji IV of Kolhapur, adopted him in 1884. Shahu as a king assumed the responsibility of the State in 1894. He ruled from 1894 to 1922. Shahu Maharaj introduced a number of reforms for the welfare of his subjects in general and the untouchables in particular. Throughout his life, his aim was to remove social inequalities and bring about gender justice. For that, he introduced laws and orders and implemented them. Therefore, one can assert that Chhatrapati Shahu carried forward the legacy of Mahatma Phule’s Satyashodhak movement with full dynamism and rigour.

In 1894, after being invested with ruling powers, Shahu Maharaj saw that the maximum numbers of office bearers in the State were Brahmins. Other backward castes and lower castes did not have any representation in the state services. This was because they had been systematically excluded from the education system. To challenge this system, Shahu took the first radical step in 1896-97 by founding five special separate schools for the one hundred and sixty eight low caste students.

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67 Ibid., p. 125.

Apart from this, Shahu’s policy of affirmative action was remarkable, with 50 per cent of the posts in State services reserved for the Backward Class candidates.\textsuperscript{69} This pioneering order of 26 July 1902, reads thus: “Since the date of this order 50 per cent of the vacancies shall be recruits from among the backward classes. In all offices in which the proportion of officers of the backward classes at present is less than 50 per cent, the next appointment shall be given to a member of those classes. All Heads of Departments shall submit a quarterly return of all appointments made after the issues of this order. For the purpose of these orders the backward classes shall be understood to mean all castes other than Brahmins, Prabhu, Shenavi, Parsees and other advanced classes.”\textsuperscript{70} However, education was made mandatory for all children from the age group of seven to fourteen, cutting across caste and religion. Moreover, during 1900–1905, Shahu had to confront the Brahmins in the Vedokta controversy.\textsuperscript{71} The Vedokta controversy occurred because Shahu’s priest servant Rajopadhaya refused to recite the Vedic hymns. Thus, he challenged the authority of Shahu as king and began to recite the Puranic hymns for him.

These events reveal the rigidity of caste system, which has a direct relation with power and knowledge. Nevertheless, the episode of Vedokta controversy strengthened Shahu’s resolve to break the hegemony of the Brahmins and spread education among the untouchables of Kolhapur. He founded an education society in 1908.\textsuperscript{72} The society secured an annual subscription amount of Rs 300; Shahu always provided help to it. The immediate purpose of the society was to

\textsuperscript{69} Karaveer Gazette of 26 July 1902.
\textsuperscript{70} Karaveer Gazette, 26 July 1902.
\textsuperscript{72} R.A.K.S. 1907-08, pp. 59-60.
help the promising boys studying in Rajaram high school and college to complete their secondary and higher education. It has a special coaching centre for the untouchables to train certain boys in vernacular studies.\textsuperscript{73}

Hence, the main motive of the society was to empower the lower caste students and inculcate in them self-pride and a sense of dignity. The society further promoted untouchable students by offering special prizes to them at Kolhapur.\textsuperscript{74}

In the same year Shahu started a hostel by name of 'Miss Violet Clarke depressed boys hostel'.\textsuperscript{75} Six students resided in it; two of them were boarders. The boarding got Rs 25 as scholarship and monthly grant; this amount was increased annually by Rs 25 beginning in 1911-12.\textsuperscript{76} Shahu was extremely conscious of caste hierarchy even among untouchables.

One particular incident reveals that Shahu understood this caste hierarchy. In 1915, one Tukaram Mang requested Shahu for an education scholarship. Shahu responded positively saying that Mang/Matang child are more backward; for one year rupees eight was to be given to Tukaram Mang.\textsuperscript{77} In the middle of the school term if anyone was to leave, the scholarship was to be transferred to Mang children. In addition, to continue the scholarship next year, the moderation systems had to evaluate the progress of the student. Thus, he had a special scholarship declared for the Mang students. His vision for the untouchables was

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Miss Clarke was the daughter of George Clarke, the Governor of Bombay. She had great compassion for untouchables. She has done much for the emancipation of the depressed classes in Bombay Presidency. Shahu and Miss Clarke were on the same mission. For details see the record of Karavir office, Shri Shahu's letter to Miss Clarke, 12 September 1908.
\textsuperscript{76} R.A.K.S. 1911-12, pp. 50-60
profound; he encouraged the education of the children of untouchables using various schemes. In a written resolution, he claimed that he understood the plight and poverty of untouchables; Karavir Sansthan was thus to provide books, slates, pencils and free expenditure at the cost of two hundred and five rupees for untouchable students. He arranged night schools for Chamars and Mahars; these schools were provisional in the early phases but over a period of time they became permanent night schools.

The social problems of untouchables were numerous. However, Shahu’s compassionate handling of their problems motivated them immensely. For example, Mahars from the Wadi Ratnagiri wrote a letter saying they had no access to drinking water. They demanded the Government to pay immediate attention to the digging of wells. His response was encouraging. Arguing that the concerned area had a major population of Mahars, he directed the Council to make a provision in which the state executive engineer were to spend one hundred and eighty three rupees from the shrine of Shri Kedar Linga for digging the well.

To eradicate ghettoization of Dalits due to the stigma of untouchability, Shahu provided dignified posts for them. For example, on 1 February 1917, Nanya Kedari Mahar Malgaokar, Nanya Gangaram Mahar Wadingkar, Rama Appa Mang Nagavkar and Keshav Mahabary Mang Kolapurkar were recruited in the

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78 Ibid., p. 41.
79 Ibid.
80 Kolahapur Daphter, Education Department, Notification Number 460, 06 November 1906.
82 Shahu used a part of donations made to this temple for social action for the welfare of the marginalised people. See Rajarshri Shahu Chatrapatincha Nivdaka Aadesh, (1988), p. 2.
army with a salary of five rupees. Another example is the resolution for the promotion of untouchable for the Talathi post.

Intelligent and brave untouchables were considered for promotion as Bhag Karkun and Avallkarkun. According to Shahu, the appointment and promotion in government services should be based on their courage and intelligence and caste bias should not be allowed to operate. In various other professions too, Shahu's actions had an impact on the lives of Dalits. For instance, he established the Satyashodak hotel for Ganagaram Kamble and a tailoring shop for Ganpat Pawar; he himself visited these places, ate there and had his cloths stitched. The year 1919 was a landmark in Shahu's anti-untouchability movement. He ordered the closure of all the schools meant exclusively for the low castes; through these administrative interventions he tried to do away with inequality. Setting the that year's Dasara as the dateline, Shahu commanded all separate schools for untouchables in the Karveer State (excluding Johagiri) closed forever; henceforth any boy from the untouchable community was to be admitted in Government schools like other boys of the higher community.

Untouchability was abated in schools and students admitted without caste and religious bias. As official records show, Shahu had all 16 schools meant for the depressed class students closed forever. Having done that, he transformed all general schools for the benefit of the education of untouchable students. This action of his proved to be one of the most effective steps in removing the crippling conditions imposed on the untouchable students. A similar effort was

84 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
made in the case of medical institutions in the state; they were ordered to treat patients from the depressed classes like any other patients. Any officer, dresser or nurse who objected to this order was asked to resign from the post.\textsuperscript{87} Thus, this legal intervention democratized the Brahmanical spaces of the health support systems.

All authorities in the state, revenue, judicial, railway or general department must treat the untouchable government servants with equality. If anyone is found guilty of it he will forfeit his pensions.\textsuperscript{88} The Maharaja himself noted the callousness of the bureaucrats. Officials lost his order of 15 January 1919. Also his order of 1 January 1919 was not included in the gazette. He gave instructions that such irresponsibility of the bureaucrats be penalised.

Shahu noticed that untouchables were isolated from educational institutions and their entries to these institutions were considered as polluting by the concerned authorities. The State quarters of the Educational Bodies did not allot property to them to construct schools.\textsuperscript{89} Shahu believed in the liberating aspects of schooling for the impoverished untouchables to achieve social mobility. He recognised the democratic dimensions that is ingrained in education and imagined that education would bring about the social development of untouchables. He questioned the paradoxical situation of taxing the untouchables and then discriminated them on the basis of their lower caste identities. Shahu believed that educational institutions, both private and state bodies, which receive grant-in-aid or other infrastructural facilities like buildings, playgrounds etc., should

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 15 January 1919.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} New Palace Record Barmishi 4, Shahu's Order,18 January, Kolhapur State Gazette, 1919.
treat untouchables with respect and more generosity than touchables. 90 This was because touchables had already had their share in the field of education; untouchables, on the contrary, were underdeveloped and could enjoy the benefits accruing from the realm of education.

Shahu tried to assimilate the ethos of American Mission Schools in Bangalore. He also tried to design the institutions according to that style of functioning which avoided the practice of untouchability. 91 His order that State aided or funded educational institution should allow untouchable students to study with self dignity. Shahu's other revolutionary step was the abolition of forced/bonded labour by law. He issued the order abolishing forced/bonded labour on 3 May 1920. He questioned the feudal interests which reproduced unfree labour. One of his orders stated that, those Mahars who have converted their Inam lands into Rayatawa should be exempted from the service of Veth Veral. 92 Anyone found engaging these people to Veth Veral by force of any kind would be terminated from government service without pension. If any Patil asked a Mahar to do the service of Veth Veral or demanded a Mang to do the work of twisting a rope without any wage, he was to be punished. 93

This intimation was to be forwarded to every village worker (Gaon Kamagar) for further action. Shahu declared that the payment of Balute of all Watandars including the Joshis was unnecessary, and that if any service was required from them, the State would remunerate them in cash. 94 The Mahars, however, were

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 K.R.O. Huzoor Resolution No. 1042, 3 May 1920.
93 Ibid.
94 K.R.O. Huzoor Resolution No. 656, 23 February 1918.
excluded from this order of 22 February 1918, presumably, because he hoped to protect them through such reforms.

On 3 March 1919 he declared that a fine of up to Rs 100 or imprisonment for up to four days will be a punishment to those who practice the Balutdari system.95 On 28 March 1919, another order was passed declaring that the Ryots need not pay the Mahars any Balute as the latter were henceforth no longer liable to any compulsory service. This was an extremely constructive act of abolishing the Mahar Watan.96 By an order of 25 June 1918 he declared that the Ryots had no right to extract services from the Mahars and that the rent-free lands that Mahars held may be treated as Rayatawa or assessed lands. This experiment was a sincere attempt to free the lower castes from their traditional/inferior professions abounding with stigmas. His involvement was a right step in the right direction for the eradication of their traditionally-inherited profession. His commitment to, and sympathy for, the low caste people can be gauged from his statements. He stated that the Mahars, engaged in menial jobs of the rural and urban areas, were sincere but they continued to live in wretched conditions. According to him, a civilised society should be sensitive to their plight and try to educate them. Such statements are illustrative of Shahu’s wish to broaden the public sphere.

Moreover, Shahu abolished the system of Hajeri or daily roll call of all the criminal classes on 31 August 1918.97 According to this notification the Mahar, Mang, Ramoshi, and Baerad castes would reporting for the daily Hajeri. In fact,

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95 Ibid. The Balutdari system is a traditional system built up by Hindus to exploit the untouchables. This was banned by Shahu.
due to this daily roll call, the members of these castes had to face a lot of problems. For instance, even those who were not criminals were forced to attend the Hajeri. This stigma, put on them simply because they belonged to a particular caste, made them involve in more crimes. Therefore, by abolishing the Hajari, Shahu allowed them to live life with dignity. He also declared that prisoners who showed good conduct would be released after five years.

Shahu tried to do away with the concepts of the purity and pollution associated with commensality. At the Mangaon Conference, he invited Ambedkar to have dinner with him. He asked untouchables to sit near his dining table. Shahu also shared food with untouchables to help build confidence in their minds; he then challenged the caste-oriented behaviour of Brahmins. Shahu created a base for his reform through his day to day dialogue with the untouchables. The convivial and positive interaction between Shahu and Ambedkar started a new era in the political history of the Dalits. Shahu met Ambedkar in the year 1919.

Dr. Ambedkar expressed his desire to start a newspaper to air the grievances and demands of the untouchables. But, he did not have the financial resources to do it. Shahu offered him Rs 2500 thus helping him start the newspaper. This was how the first newspaper of the untouchables came into being; it was named Mooknayak which meant ‘leader of the silenced’. Shahu had high reverence for Ambedkar because his astounding scholarship challenged the intellectual superiority of the Brahmins. Shahu believed that only an intellectual from the

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
marginalised section could understand the plight of the marginalised communities. In his opinion, the untouchables should be led by leaders from their own community. The intellectual subordination of untouchables by a non-untouchable leader will only increase their miseries. He delivered a number of speeches to awaken the consciousness of Dalits and other marginalised communities at Nasik, Mangaon, Nagpur and Delhi. It can then be argued that the creation and implementation of laws had a tremendous impact on the lives of the untouchables.

**Gender and Patriarchy: Legal Lenses of Shahu**

Shahu Maharaj was responsible for the creation and amendment of a good number of laws. It will not be wrong to say that Shahu’s effort has redefined the discourse of gender relation in Maharashtra. Shahu was sensitive to the need for the education of lower caste girls; he, therefore, established an autonomous school for Chamar and Dhor girls, who were alienated from education within the caste. He declared an amount of rupees ninety-six to be spent on women’s education. The budget for a couple of years and some consolidated amount were kept aside for lower class girl students by order of Shahu. He gave fee concessions to girl students in Rajaram institutions.

In 1820, Shahu Maharaj reconstituted the Hindu Code Bill that consist of inheritance of property by women, conjugal rights of husband and wife, adaptation laws, adaptation process, rules and definition of joint families, and

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103 Ibid.
equal distribution of property. Also, for the upliftment of Murali and Jogtin, Shahu stopped their traditional customary practices with his new rules and regulations.\textsuperscript{105}

He asserted that the illegitimate child borne by Jogtin and Murali should not be treated unequal. Among the upper castes such as Kshatriyas, Vaishi and Shudras, children were given their share of the property. But in the case of the untouchables neither property nor inheritance was given to them. Therefore, it was a case of further discrimination among the untouchables. The law amended by Shahu stated that every child should get a share of the inheritance or property irrespective of the caste of the child. Meanwhile, the child while claiming property should be at least eight years old. And the various department of Karveer Sanstheen under the jurisdiction of the court investigated whether children of Jogtin and Murali were twelve years, as that was the prescribed age for their eligibility to inheritance or property. Thus, from the formulations of these laws, one can argue that Shahu sympathetic of the lot of the Jogin and Murali and their children.

Shahu was greatly influenced by the Arya Samaj movement. Thus, he ordered that inter-caste marriages should be promoted among the Hindus and Jains

\textsuperscript{105} For details, see the Karaveer Gazette of 17 January 1920. Jogtin and Murali is a custom legitimized through Hindu religion. Jogtin and Murali are sacrificial offerings to the gods and goddesses. In truth, this is a custom to satisfy the carnal pleasures of the richest Hindu and Hindu priests of the village. This practice still exists in the rural areas of western Maharashtra in places like Jaisuri and Jat. Usually, the richest Hindu in the village as well as the Hindu priest of the temple sexually exploits them in the name of the gods and goddesses. In the process, these women become pregnant and the cycle continues. The children born are thus the children of the richest Hindu male and the Hindu Priest. The mothers and children are dependent on them for their livelihood. In Marathi, the richest Hindu male is called Janaka. Shahu successfully stopped this custom.
communities/religion. He declared that inter-marriages between these two religion/communities would be considerate legally valid. The main thrust of this order was the abolition of caste system through the promotion of inter-caste marriages. In his speech at Nagpur in 1920, he asserted that only exogamy can break the hegemony of Brahmins. He arranged his sister’s marriage with the royal family of Indur kingdom which belonged to the Dhangar community/caste; in doing so, he showed that he was all for abolition of caste system. Shahu also supported the ‘Patel Bill’ of 1917 proposed by Vittalbhai Patel. The bill dealt with issue of the legality of inter-caste marriages. Later, he introduced a resolution in the central law Mandal for the amendment of the inter-caste marriage act. This bill was denounced by conservative Brahmins such as B.G. Tilak, Shankaracharya of Puri and others. But, Shahu Maharaj supported him.

Another exciting law, which is applicable even in today, was introduced by Shahu. It was the law for ‘the suppression of cruelty to women.’ Shahu Maharaj argues that families are the most oppressive system for the subjugation of the women. The main reason is the lack of education in India, especially when compared to western countries. Hence, the attitude of the society towards women has been extremely narrow. Hindu religion has imposed limitations for women in the domestic spheres. Women were tortured within the family in many ways. As long as illiteracy persists, the retrogressive perception of women will remain as it is. Hence, brutal physical and mental harassments by husbands

106 She was a Kshatriya Maratha.
107 Indur kingdom belonged to the Dhangar community/caste. Dhangars are the shepherd communities in Maharashtra. This marriage was thus between a Maratha and a Dhangar.
109 For details, see the Karaveer Gazette, 2 August 1919; Also see Rajarshri Shahu Chhatrapatincha Nivadaka Aadesh, Archival Department, Government of Maharashtra, Volume II, 1988, pp. 47–49.
110 Ibid.
or family members are common in the family. Thus, Shahu was a keen observer of the family system and existence of class within it.

His fundamental argument was that even among high class communities the brutal treatment of women was rife. But these were never debated in the public sphere. Thus, the philosophy behind the promulgation of the law was that women should get justice. If anyone was found guilty, he would be punished with six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs 200. Shahu was truly a liberator and emancipator of women. The gazetteer of 1919 stated that a girl who had completed the age of eighteen years could decide for herself whether she wanted to get married. The right to choose her husband/partner was granted, and it was announced as a legitimate process. Uttam Kamble (2003: 21) argues that this particular act, which gives a woman the legitimate right to decide her marriage, was an absolute individual freedom especially for women. Child marriage denies women their freedom. Another progressive step for women was the Kolhapur Divorce Act of 1919, popularly known as Kadi Modane in Marathi. To control and regulate the monopoly of Jat Panchyat, Shahu introduced these laws. However, he made it clear that these laws would not apply to the Christians, Parsis and Muslims; they could practice their own laws. Arguably, Shahu made these laws to keep the procedures involved in divorce within the secular domain.

In 1917, Shahu introduced the re-marriage registration act. He pointed out that in the Hindu community, a widow's life was miserable. On the other hand a

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., p. 48.
113 Ibid., pp. 49–51.
widower could go for a second or even third marriage. Therefore, he argued that women should also get the right to live life with dignity and like any other normal human being. Shahu also supported the empowerment of women through legal provisions. Shahu was compassionate too. This fact can be gleaned from his treatment of a women prisoner who died while in jail. According to the jail resolution number 28, Fattu Kom passed away on 14 June 1907. She, however, left behind a two and half year old daughter. According to Shahu, since the husband of the dead woman was also in prison, the responsibility of taking care of the child fell on the jailer. In the ultimate analysis, it can one can argued that Shahu had built up a legal system that gave justice to women in general and the untouchables in particular. In doing so, the overarching goal was to get rid of patriarchy.

Section III: Radical Inversion of Caste and Patriarchy - Babasaheb Ambedkar

Ambedkar was the leading force for the emancipation of the untouchables and women. He was greatly influenced by Phule and Shahu; this can be seen in his relentless struggle during his lifetime and also while drafting the constitution of India. Ambedkar was born on 14 April in the year 1891. His father was a Subhedar in the Military camp. Over a period of time, Lord Kitchener closed the military services of the Mahars. As a result, his father migrated to Mumbai. His father came under the influence of Saint Kabir; he pledged himself as a devotee

115 Kom is word used after a woman’s name in those days.
of the saint at Satara in the year 1896. The father's devotion was passed on to Ambedkar, who too revered Kabir. According to his biographer Khairmodey (2002), his original name was Ambavadekkar. But, one of his teachers changed it into the name Ambedkar. Moreover, Buddhist values and western education provided him an insight into the liberal democratic values through which he addressed the question of liberty, equality and fraternity. Using the same framework, he developed his profound vision on caste, gender and patriarchy.

Ambedkar added a brilliant dimension to the movement of the untouchables. He deployed his cultural capital to challenge the recalcitrant practices of the Brahmanical order. He found democracy a potential terrain where he could address the issues of the untouchables. Zelliot (2004) pointed out that Ambedkar organised his first conference on caste at Saswad in the year 1903 with Janba Kamble. He also participated in two conferences of untouchables in 1920. He was the president in the first conference held at Mangaon in Kolhapur State. The second conference of the depressed classes was held at Nagpur in 1920, in which Shahu Maharaj was the president. Ambedkar in his speech argued that some of the reformers were willing to provide political nomination instead of legitimizing the election process. He further argues that caste Hindu reformers cannot understand the plight of the untouchables and therefore cannot represent them. In 1924, at Barshi of Sholapur, he organized the conference of the provincial depressed classes in which a resolution was passed to found the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha at Bombay.

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118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., p. 49.
120 See Eleanor Zelliot (2004), Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and The Untouchable Movement, Blumoon , p. 71.
121 Ibid.
During the conference a resolution was passed with the goal of taking up the cause of untouchables. From 1925 onwards a number of schools, hostels and boarding were established.\textsuperscript{122} Ambedkar’s first newspaper, Mooknayak, was started in 1920, while the second newspaper \textit{Bahishkrit Bharat} was started in 1927, which, however, did not last long. He then created \textit{Janata} in 1929, which lasted until 1955 when \textit{Prabuddha Bharat} came into being. In the 1920s Ambedkar organised the Bombay textile labour union. The \textit{Girani Kamgar} strike took place in 1929, in which Ambedkar endeavoured to establish a large union to fight the practice of untouchability in textile mills. According to Zelliot (2004), this labour union was unique; nothing like it had been organised in the history of labour union movement in India.\textsuperscript{123}

Ambedkar burned the \textit{Manusmriti} during the Mahad conference in the year 1927. The burning of \textit{Manusmriti} is symbolic of the destruction of the power of Hindu religion.\textsuperscript{124} The Mahad Satyagraha was an attempt to gain the right to the public water sources. As a symbol of rejection of the religious basis of untouchability, the classic Hindu law book, \textit{Manusmriti} was burned. By doing so, Ambedkar debunked the concept of purity and pollution associated with the rights of untouchables to drinking water. In his special speech for Dalit women at Mahad Satyagraha, Ambedkar advised them to share their solidarity with the anti-caste struggle. He also pointed out the need to give priority to the women who were denied access to the male-dominated domain of political spaces.\textsuperscript{125} Thus, he encouraged them to engage in the struggle to eradicate untouchability along

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 73.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
with Dalit men. He used the example of a family problem to make his point; he pointed out that the solution to a family problem lay in the negotiations between the male and the female members. Similarly, societal problems should be resolved with the equal participation of males and females.

He compared the privileged Brahmin women with that of the oppression of the Dalit women in the public sphere. This comparison was deliberately made to create aspirations among the Dalit women. He urged them to reject the stigmatized dress code, ornaments and occupations to eradicate the ideology of caste that was part of their day-to-day life. At the same time, he focused on the vital role of education to empower the Dalit women. Thus, Dalit women declared their affinity to the perspectives of Ambedkar by passing their resolution in that meeting. Ambedkar thus succeeded in evoking political consciousness among Dalit women to broaden the direction of the movement against caste.

His temple entry into Amraoti and Kalaram was based on idea of human right of untouchables. The two Satyagraha were launched in 1927 and 1930 respectively. Ambedkar justified this Satyagraha by asserting that it was an examination of the attitude of Hindus towards the modern notions like right towards equality.126 From 1930s onwards Ambedkar gave up his traditional approach of sanskritization in favour of a more radical method of breaking the Brahmanical hegemony. In 1928, Ambedkar had demanded the abolition of Mahar Watan Act.127 According to him, the Mahar Watan Act destroyed the self esteem of the

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126 Ibid., p.181.
127 Mahar Watan Act was the hereditary act of Mahar. A Mahar would hold a certain post, and work there day and night. And in the absence of the Mahar servant, his father, mother or any other family member was bound to provide the service to the government. For this work they were given a piece of land as watan, corn and money which was negligible.
Mahars and unjustly tied them to traditional jobs. The British government, however, was not interested in increasing the land. Nor were they bothered about the remuneration which failed to meet the day to day needs of the Mahars.

One of the issues concerning the political rights of untouchables, discussed by Ambedkar, was the struggle for separate electorate. He appeared before the franchise committee. He stipulated separate electorates as well as reserved seats for the depressed classes according to their population. Ambedkar emphasised that representatives of the untouchables must be elected by the votes of the untouchables. The committee opposed the untouchables' claim to separate electorates. However, it allowed communal representation to Muslims and nomination in the case of depressed classes. Ambedkar was part of the Bombay provincial committee which worked for the Simon commission on 3 August 1928. He was lampooned as a British stooge for his cooperation with the colonizers. He defended himself by asserting that depressed classes do not have any links with the Hindus and that they should be treated as a unique and autonomous community.

He was against the nomination of one or two members from depressed classes to the legislatures. Instead, he demanded that seats should be reserved for the untouchables in the legislatures. He further demanded that twenty-two out of one hundred and forty should be allocated to the untouchables in the Bombay

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128 For details, see Changdev Khairmodey in Marathi (2002), Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Volume IV pp. 17-72 and Volume V, pp. 1-70, Sugava Publication.
129 Ibid., Volume IV, pp. 73-174.
130 Ibid., pp. 171-74.
legislative council. He also demanded adult suffrage along with reservation of seats. He had differences of opinion with the committee and refused to sign the report of the committee. He submitted a separate report on 17 May 1929. The Congress party conducted All-Parties conferences in February as well as in late May, 1928. A committee was appointed under Pandit Motilal Nehru to draft the constitution for India. The report, however, did not have a reference to the representation of depressed classes in the legislature. Ambedkar strongly criticized the report as an attempt to strengthen the domination of caste Hindus and Brahmanical reign in society.

Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan represented depressed classes at the Round table conference in London in 1930. It was convened to frame the constitution of India. In his speech, he questioned the lackadaisical attitude of the British government towards the question of untouchability. He also added that depressed classes should be treated as a separate community for the purpose of elections. He demanded common citizenship, free use of common rights and adequate representation in the legislatures, government bodies and the cabinet. During the second session of the Round table conference, which began on 7 September 1931, Ambedkar pointed out that irrespective of the proportions, power should be shared by all the communities. He also presented a supplementary memorandum to the minority committee on the demands of depressed classes for special reservation. He emphasised separate electorates. The renowned representatives of Muslims, depressed classes, a particular group of Christians, Europeans and Anglo-Indians collectively submitted the

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131 Ibid., pp. 128-149. For details of the debate, see BAWS, Volume IX, Titled "What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables", pp. 304-6.

132 Ibid., pp. 145-89.

133 Ibid., pp. 190-221.
memorandum. This is popularly known as the minority pact. However, Gandhiji was disturbed by the pact. He commented that he would not mind the conversion of the untouchables to Christianity and Islam. But, he asserted that he would oppose their political rights by his life. Ambedkar did not reply to the criticism by Gandhiji. He did not sign the requisition of the members of minorities committee authorizing the British premier to settle the communal problems. Ambedkar demanded provincial autonomy in the provincial-constitutional sub-committee. He opposed the Rajah-Moonje pact based on joint electorates with reservation of seats. It was also disclaimed by the All India depressed classes congress held at Kamptee in May 1932. Ambedkar differed with the education commissioner under the government of India and Southbourough Franchise committee for broadening the term for aboriginals and criminals. But, the Lothian committee declared that the term should be used only to untouchables. Ambedkar had to struggle for the proper use of this term for the untouchables.

The communal award and related discourses was an epoch in the history of the untouchables. The communal award was a provisional scheme of minority representation announced by Ramsay Macdonald on 17 August 1932. It determined the number of seats in the provisional legislatures at approximately double the number in the existing councils. The depressed classes were now recognized as a minority community entitled to a separate electorate. It created a number of specially-reserved constituencies for the depressed classes. It also

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134 Ibid.
135 Ibid., pp. 128-49.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., pp. 221-31.
138 Ibid., pp. 108-27.
139 Ibid., pp. 162-262. 

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provided them an additional right to contest seats in the general constituencies with the provision that separate electorate and reservation of seats would trail off after twenty years.\textsuperscript{140}

Untouchables achieved different rights because of the inexorable struggles of Ambedkar. He argued that communal award provided a fixed quota of seats to be elected by a separate electorate of untouchables. It also provided double vote—one to be used through separate electorate and the other to be used in general electorates.\textsuperscript{141} He also added that separate electorate is not to annoy the Hindu society, but to grant the untouchables autonomy. Ambedkar opined that separate electorate, adult franchise and fundamental rights in the constitution would provide social mobility to the untouchables.\textsuperscript{142}

The debates that emerged as a response to the Poona pact are the major assertions of the untouchables. Gandhi was against the Poona pact, considering it as a move that leads to divisiveness.\textsuperscript{143} However, Ambedkar dismissed the fasting of Gandhiji against the Poona pact as a political manoeuvre. Gandhi suggested the application of the penal system to all the seats. Ambedkar accepted Gandhiji's suggestions. He demanded one hundred and ninety-seven seats for depressed classes in the Provincial assemblies but the leaders reduced the number to one hundred and twenty-six. He also added that the system of primary election should terminate at the end of another fifteen years.\textsuperscript{144} The question of the total number of seats was decided by granting one hundred and

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Changhdev Khairmodey (2002), Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Volume V, Sugava Publication pp. 1–42.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
forty-eight seats to the depressed classes in the provincial assemblies. It was also decided that ten per cent of the seats of the Hindus from British India in the central assembly should be given to the depressed classes.

The separate electorate granted under the communal award was debated and leaders among the depressed classes agreed to have elections in two phases. Four candidates would be elected from separate depressed class electorates and subsequently the general electorate would select one of the four candidates. The agreement was signed on 24 September 1932.\textsuperscript{145} These incidents were the backdrop of the Poona pact. Ambedkar signed the Poona pact on behalf of depressed classes. It resulted in the nullification of communal award of Macdonald according to the interests of Gandhiji. Ambedkar argued that the second vote given by the communal award was a great privilege. The Poona pact increased the fixed quota of the seats. But, it resulted in the forfeiting of the right to double vote.\textsuperscript{146} The pact was given recognition by both parties and was embodied in the government of India act, 1935. Ambedkar argued that the defeat of the scheduled caste candidates in the general elections was due to the voting system of the Poona pact.\textsuperscript{147} He started a resolution in the executive of the scheduled caste federation demanding separate electorates for the depressed classes. He argued that the Poona pact has resulted in the disenfranchising the 60 million untouchables.\textsuperscript{148} Ambedkar also realized his failure in the general elections in 1952 was due to joint electorates. He was critical of the Poona pact and related incidents as a threat to the autonomous streams of the depressed classes. He was also disappointed by the deliberations of the cabinet mission.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., pp. 42-56.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., pp. 60-63.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
basic idea behind Poona pact was to treat the untouchables as a minority. In one of the constituent assembly speech, he opined that minorities are potential agencies and can challenge the state. He criticised the minority for accepting the role of the communalized majority. In other words, the minorities failed to challenge the domination of such communalized majority. He also commented that it is not a political majority. Ambedkar also argued that the majority should realize their duty not to discriminate against the minorities. He emphasised that if the majority looses the habit of discrimination against the minorities, then the minorities will never remain as the minorities. The profound vision of Ambedkar on the issue of majority and minority is a relevant episode in the history of the untouchables.

Ambedkar draws a line of argument in his ‘Castes in India’, 149 that shows us the co-relation between the three important stratifications of caste, gender and patriarchy. Ambedkar argues that by not paying attention to the mechanism of caste, the community of social scientist created a void in the field of social sciences. He traces the absence of the recognition of caste as a consequence of the cultural unity of India. However, this unity emerged out of the homogeneity of India. Thus, caste is embodied within the diversity of culture and to delineate it is a herculean task. The complexities that are inherent in the cultural fabric of India are intricate because of its relation to the caste.150 The idea of pollution is adhered to in the discourse of the priestly class who exercise their superior caste-based identities and regulate the caste system. This has links to the exclusiveness that keeps caste alive. The exclusiveness has been aggravated by the prohibition

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150 Ibid.
of the inter-marriage and closure of the membership. Indians are fragmented in an unnatural manner through endogamy.\textsuperscript{151} The persistence of endogamy from time immemorial reveals the primitive mosaic of Indian society.

Exogamy prevents marriage within the same caste and further de-legitimises the caste system. Thus, exogamy has been viewed as a taboo in the social systems of India.\textsuperscript{152} Hence, the dominant sections have kept up the surveillance to prevent exogamy. Those who violate endogamy are oppressed through the repressive sanctions. Therefore, caste was maintained by promoting endogamy and preventing exogamy.\textsuperscript{153} The numerical balance between the sexes, adequate for marriage, is also pruned to protect the system of endogamy. This preservation of endogamy will be torpedoed by the sudden demise of the husband and wife. The existence of such males and females becomes a surplus agency that becomes a cultural burden for the institution of endogamy.\textsuperscript{154} The community, which survived on the values of endogamy, also found a mechanism to neutralise those men and women who may challenge the endogamy by remarriage or incest. Women who remarry are mistreated in number of ways by their caste. She is either forced to commit suicide or asked to remain a widow.\textsuperscript{155} However, the male has been treated differently after the death of his wife due the patriarchal ethos of the society. The man is not burnt like the women because he is considered an essential member for the existence of his caste. He is induced to undergo self-imposed celibacy after the demise of his wife.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
This is to keep him away from the activities of the group because he may disrupt the order of group by rejoining it. Thus, celibacy also becomes a numerical balance that keeps the realm of power between the man and the woman. He is allowed to marry a girl who is not of marriageable age to him by mainstream standards, to pre-empt the above-mentioned crisis related to the numerical balance. Ambedkar further argues the caste is an extended and closed form of class, which is defended to justify the interests of the dominant sections. Caste is also practiced through the imitation of endogamy among the dominant castes by the lower castes. This is how caste influences the dynamics of gender and patriarchy.

Another pioneering work by Ambedkar in the context of gender is “The rise and fall of the Hindu women: who was responsible for it?” He argues that Brahmins treats women and Shudras as inferiors and hence not eligible for the Sanyasa. The egalitarian gender relations of pre-Manu era changed after the entry of Manu. He codified the Brahmanical ideology to create an organised and hierarchical social order. Hence, the Buddhist tradition that gives representation to the women was deplored as a heretic move by Manu. He thus condemned this act of Manu by structuring the Hindu code bill for women in the post-independent period.

The debates on the Hindu code bill signify the horrendous impact of the dominant Hindu culture in the discourse of the post-colonial political elites. The

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156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
bill was an attempt to codify the rules of the Hindu law, which remained as scattered elements in the decisions related to the high court.

The Hindu code bill deals with the law related to the rights of men or women who die without making their will.\textsuperscript{160} It provides guidelines to the heirs to form order related to the succession of intestates. It also addresses the law of maintenance, divorce, marriage, adoption, minority and guardianship. The inheritance of Hindu law is codified on the basis of the diverse laws such as Mitakshara and Dayabhaga. As per the law Mitakshara, the property of Hindu is not considered as his individual property.\textsuperscript{161} The coparcenary, which consists of father, son, grandson and great grandson, has the right to that property. When any member of the coparcenary dies, that property is transferred to other members within that group. But, it is not transferred to the heir of the diseased member. This process is called as survivorship. The Hindu code that is inherent in this bill considers Dayabhaga rule in which heir is endowed with complete right over the personal property. He can either hand over it as a gift or by will according to his choice. The bill universalises the scope of the Dayabhaga to replace the rule of Mitakshara. The heir-ship in the Dayabhaga is related to the blood relation of the diseased person. The bill prefers the perspectives of the law Dayabhaga.\textsuperscript{162}

The bill also supports the equal distribution of inheritance to the widow, daughter and widow of the pre-deceased son. The recognition of more females as heirs is very much ingrained in this bill. The discrimination of the female heir is

\textsuperscript{160} Changdev Khairmodey (1987), Dr. Ambedkar aani Hindi Code Bill, Sugava., pp. 4–62.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid
abolished through the positive statements of the law. The bill differs slightly from the law Dayabhaga which gives preference to the father. On the other hand, the bill gives preference to the mother. The conversion of Streedhan is also converted into one rule of succession rather than two categories through this bill. This bill assures the equality of son and daughter in the case of property. According to Hindu law, women are only allowed to enjoy the income of the property called life estate. She is not allowed to deal with the property. It prescribed the handover to the reversioners of her husband after her death. The bill abolishes the right of the reversioners on the property of the widow. The bill also treats the dowry as a trust property, which can be claimed as a property when she comes to the age of eighteen. The bill prescribes that dependents of the deceased are entitled to claim maintenance from those who inherit the property under the will. The women who are divorced from the husband can claim maintenance and through such radical reform, the bill gives autonomy to the unmediated other i.e., women. She can claim maintenance from her husband on the grounds of his ancestral relationships, cruel nature, abandoning her for two years, his conversion to other religion etc. The recognition of the sacramental marriage and civil marriage is also one of the positive aspects of the bill.

Hence the Hindu code bill is a radical discourse in the intellectual and political life of Ambedkar that deconstructed the patriarchal authority of the Hindu

163 Ibid.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
religion. The critique of the patriarchal Hindu legal systems converted the women and untouchables as agencies with a different voice.

Ambedkar was extremely conscious of the status of Dalit women. For instance, Ambedkar delivered his speech on 4 July 1936 at Mumbai, Kamatipura Vasti which is densely populated by Murali, Jogtin and Devedasis women. He argues that the women who are involved in these professions are not able to live life with dignity. Therefore, he urged them to give up these traditional occupations and try to work hard to live life with dignity. He said that those who had self respect would live life with dignity and pride. He asserted that “This meeting is hundred times important in my life than any other meeting which I had addressed earlier”. He also said, “You must stop selling your bodies and work hard to come out from these professions”. Thus, Ambekar advised these women to convert to Buddhism to discard the sex work which is sanctioned through the Hindu religion. He assured that that conversion would help them give up stigmatized job and provides them self respect. On the other hand, in the second session of the All India Depressed Classes women’s conference conducted on 20 July 1942 at Nagpur, 25,000 Dalit women delegates participated. There, Ambedkar argued that the progress and development of Dalit community can be measured from the women of Dalit community. Ambedkar expressed his solidarity towards the politicisation of Dalit women. He pointed out the importance of moral order for the Dalit community and urged them to abstain from all forms of vices. He advised the Dalit women to educate

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170 Ibid.
171 See the Report of Scheduled caste federation about the All-India Depressed Classes Women’s Conference, Second Session, held at Nagpur, on 20 July 1942, pp. 53-66.
their children and nurture aspirations among the Dalit children.\textsuperscript{172} He emphasized the cultivation of self respect for the growth of the Dalits. He also pointed out the burden of marital obligations and consequent duties on the Dalit women. The control of population was also suggested to provide security for the Dalit women. He emphasised equality of women in the institution of Dalit family.\textsuperscript{173}

In the year 1956, Ambedkar, along with his followers, embraced Buddhism. The conversation itself was a form of counter culture to challenge the exploitative Hindu religion.\textsuperscript{174}

In conclusion it was Jotirao Phule who first formulated the vision of feminism based upon equality and analyzed the roots of subordination of women. He rightly argued that education is the only medium for the empowerment of women and the untouchables and to bring those agencies out into the public sphere. His views were forcefully carried on by Shahu Maharaj who emphasised legal discourse for the eradication of caste, gender and patriarchy. And finally, it is Ambedkar who brought forward the democratic approaches which stand for the struggles of Phule and Shahu, and provided the platforms for the women in general and Dalits in particular through constitutional measures.

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Eleanor Zelliot (1996), \textit{From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement}, New Delhi: Manohar, p.220