Chapter VI
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

When the pages of Indian history are turned, it is found that there is social stratification to many of the castes and Brahmanic domination in access to education, wealth and power was prevailed. Even few of the castes were neglected as they can’t able to access basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, education, etc. Of course, many of the rulers were made efforts to provide equal access of all these privileges to all the castes and sections of the society. One of such effort was made Maratha ruler Shivaji in Maharashtra. Maratha ruler Shivaji respected people from all castes and there were no discrimination in his empire in terms of caste. Similarly, many of the thinkers and philosophers were organized reform movements and even formed few of the associations such as Arya Samaj, Satya Shodhak Samaj, etc to empower the weaker sections including women. Though these reformers have engaged in different kinds of activities such as speeches, movements, agitations, writings, etc, their main aim was socio-economic, educational and political equality and curbing discrimination, exploitation, alienation, etc based on religion, race, caste, gender, etc. Mahatma Phule was the first of such social reformer who has emphasized equal human rights for all classes of the society.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was a visionary much ahead of his times. A pioneer in the field of women’s education, he is the one who opened the first
ever girls’ school in India. He was experienced many of insults and discrimination due to his caste and even he was observed the bitter experiences faced by Shudras, Ati Shudras and women in society due to their weaker castes and gender. As he had been born into a so-called lower caste family during those times, he had experienced the tortures and injustices rooting out of the caste system. An intelligent and idealistic man, he refused to tolerate any kind of social injustice and discrimination from others and set his mind on reforming the society for the better. He realized the truth that knowledge, wisdom and education are essentially needed for empowerment of weaker sections and women. During those days, female education was not allowed and even there were no girls’ schools and female teachers. Hence, after his marriage, he taught reading and writing to his wife Savitribai, so that she can teach the girls. Savitri bai, like her husband, was so cooperative and like-minded with Jyotiba Phule. Hence, Savitribai has been regarded as first woman teacher of modern India. She faced threats and bitter experiences as girls’ education was prohibited during those times. Still, Jyotirao and Savitribai were opened schools to educate girls. He was distressed by the inequalities and injustices prevalent in the Indian society and decided to fight for the right to equality for all irrespective of religion, caste or gender and to achieve this purpose, he formed Satya Shodhak Samaj with the aim of protecting the so-called lower castes from exploitation and injustices. He has also written few of the books, which revealed the social problems and practices during those times. His book
‘Brahamanache Kasab (1869) exposed the exploitation of weaker section by the Brahmin priests in the name of religious and caste practices. Another book, ‘Gulamgiri’ (1873) disclosed the slavery of lower castes and through blind faith imposed by Brahmins on lower castes in the name of religion and Brahmin’s exploitation of lower castes. As the farmers were facing many of the problems of exploitation from administrative classes, taxation, etc, realizing these problems of farmers, Phule has written a book ‘Shetkaryancha Asud’ (1883). He encouraged wisdom, knowledge and education based thinking rather than following blind faith and practices without any sound scientific thinking and he written ‘Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak’ (1891) emphasized scientific thinking rather than following blind faith. His another book ‘Asprushyanchi Kaifiyat’ (1893) revealed about the crisis in agriculture, backward classes and their problems. His unrelenting efforts to eradicate social inequalities earned him the title of “Father of Indian Social Revolution”.

The 19th Century was a period of social problems like Varna system, mythology, caste-system, ignorance about human rights, etc. In oppressed castes great-grandparents and grand-parents did their community work which involved hard menial labour. They were not permitted social mobility other permissible for them. They were not even aware of their rights; illiteracy was very high in the society. Phule shows the light of hope, to free from these problems of society. He revolted against the unjust caste-system and upheld the cause of education of women and lower castes. He started primary education
and higher education and fought for their rights. Thus, he ushered in primary education as a tool in perceiving the work of the oppressed castes as dignified labour that was exploited by society. Phule challenged the caste system and sought to bring the abolition of caste system.

Mahatma Phule had a vision of social justice through education, encouraging scientific thinking based on wisdom and knowledge. His initiatives towards bringing education for lower castes and women are significant aspects of his struggle against domination of Brahmanism. He emphasized the need of education for lower castes in order to gain the freedom and human rights. As observed by Mahatma Phule at the early 19th century, Dalits were so backward and underdeveloped and even facing many of the socio-economic restrictions, discrimination, exploitation, torture, etc in society due to illiteracy, blind faith and social neglect. As such, Phule realized that, education of these sections is the only solution for their empowerment to gain equality in society. For this purpose, education of weaker sections and women was his first preference. He remarked “Without knowledge, intelligence was lost, without intelligence morality was lost and without morality was lost all dynamism! Without dynamism money was lost and without money the Shudras sank. All this misery was caused by the lack of knowledge”. It revealed the importance of wisdom, knowledge and education of weaker sections in their lives to achieve empowerment and development.
As such, in spite of difficulties, problems and obstacles from forward classes, he started schools for backward classes including Shudras, Ati-Shudras and girls. His intelligence, education and dedication awarded him with many ideas and critical thinking to fight against the prevalent social injustices and Brahmanism.

Jyotiba’s activities were extended beyond the field of education. The drinking water tank in his house was thrown open to untouchables. This would be considered a brave act even today. He has inculcated in people the habit of inquiring into the veracity and cause and effect of religious matters. He has demonstrated what is right and what is wrong with respect to particular customs. He has disapproved the practice of idol worship and upholder monotheism. He has refuted beliefs that would cause harassment to people in matters of religion, duty and everyday activities. A false religion, idol worship and the caste system have together created destruction in India. Hindu culture and the caste system rested upon Brahmanism. Phule aimed for the complete destruction of caste, superstition and inequality, linked thought with a movement of opposition to the Brahmin elite.

Phule’s contributions towards empowerment of women are much appreciated and he is really liberator of Indian women from the conventional shackles. Child marriage of girls with middle aged men was prevailed during those times, which was resulted in increasing number of young widows. Sati
practice was prevailed, though it was banned at the early 1829. Even widows’ remarriage was not allowed by few of the castes. Hence, Phule condemned Sati practice and emphasized the evils of Sati practice in society. He encouraged widows’ remarriage and enabled dignity to widows.

The orthodox Brahmins of the society were furious at the activities of Jyotirao. They blamed him for vitiating the norms and regulations of the society. Many accused him of acting on behalf of the Christian Missionaries. But Jyotirao was firm and decided to continue the movement. Interestingly, Jyotirao was supported by some Brahmin friends who extended their support to make the movement successful.

In India, Human Rights organizations and newspapers tell countless stories of Dalits who have been beaten, unlawfully detained, tortured, raped, killed and had their homes burned in caste violence. Human rights violation takes place in the form of women right violation, caste right violation and other types of violations. Rape, assault, molestation, brutal killing, abduction, dowry death, domestic violence, etc are very important violations against Dalit women. Untouchability, ill-treatment, of temple entry, non entry to common places, filing of false case, cheating assault, robbery are some important violations against SC/ST people and terrorism kidnapping, custodial death, poverty, corruption, environmental problems are the other types of violations.
Jyotiba Phule’s social thoughts are based on humanism. It is based on the values like equality, Justice and tranquility. He spread value based system through his work and thought. During those days, there was no idea of human rights in India. But, the principles propounded by Mahatma Phule highlighted human rights of weaker sections and women. Phule emphasized socio-economic and political equality of women and backward classes, which is basic human right given by the United Nations. Equality of educational opportunity is also human right, which is stated by Mahatma Phule. Rights against discrimination and exploitation are condemned by Phule, which shows the human rights of the modern society.

Many of the social evils such as dowry, forced widowhood, illiteracy, etc were associated with women’s life. Mahatma Phule observed that education and increasing knowledge and wisdom of women is solution to solve the problems of women. As such, he was started educating girls by opening schools with cooperation from his wife. Untouchability was major curse faced by Dalits and he was fought against untouchability and allowed them drinking water from his well located besides his house and emphasized Dalit education, so as to liberate them from caste based restrictions. In June 1873, Phule published book ‘Slavery’ and included a manifesto which declared that he was willing to dine with all regardless of their castes, creed or country of origin. It is significant that several newspapers refused to give publicity to the manifesto because of its contents. His book ‘Slavery’ was severely criticized for its
‘venomous propaganda’ against the Brahmins. After tracing the history of the Brahmin domination in India, Phule examined the motives and objects of cruel and inhuman laws framed by the Brahmins. Their main object in fabricating these falsehoods was to dupe the kinds of the ignorant and to rivet firmly on them the chains of perpetual bondage and slavery which their selfishness and cunning had forged. The severity of the laws as affecting the Sudras and the intense hatred with which they were regarded by the Brahmins can be explained on no other supposition but that there was, originally between the two, a deadly feud arising from the advent of the soil while the Brahmins argued that the Sudras were the sons of the soil while the Brahmins came from outside and usurped everything that was possessed by the Sudras. He also claimed that what he had described in his book was ‘not one hundredth part of the rogueries’ that were generally practiced on his ‘poor, illiterate and ignorant Sudra brethren’. He was first social reformer to oppose untouchability in society.

Mahatma Phule do not want be a religious thinker, religious guru or a philosopher of religion. He was also not interested to prove the existence of God, relation of God and the world etc. His intention was to show the dilemma created by religious authorities, who bound man in religious rituals and made peoples enemy of each other. His thinking was that Hindu religion not only give spiritual knowledge to man, but also bound his social and personal life in religious bigotries. He wants that religion which gives man a true freedom to
grow socially and spiritually. Phule believed in one God (Nirmik). He regarded God as a creator of this world and all men and women his children. There are thirty-three articles in the Sarvajanik Satyadharma, which define the rules for the creation of a world-family based on basic human rights as well as the social and intellectual attitudes essential for it.

The Sarvajanik Satyadharma of Phule contained the great thoughts of Manav Dharma’ (Humanitarian Religion), which have been presented for the common people. ‘Manav Dharma’ advocates. The abandoning of rigid and outdated religious orthodoxy, accepting ethical thoughts based on equality, fraternity, humanity. Phule believed that this would help in the construction of a new society. This book includes a description of simple rites which lead to happiness, Akhandadi Kavyarachana or continuous poetic creations (which include certain socially truthful, noble principles), enlightenment, that is, fight against religious orthodoxy, importance of some great persons and teachings of the ‘Shudras and Atee Shudras’. Such noble thoughts are presented in a systematic, simple poetic form.

Mahatma Phule firmly believed that if you want to create a new social system based on freedom, equality, brotherhood, human dignity, economic justice and value devoid of exploitation, you will have to overthrow the old, unequal and exploitative social system and the values on which it is based. Knowing this well, Phule attacked blind faith and faith in what is given in
religious books and the so-called god’s words. He tore to pieces the misleading myths that were ruling over the minds of women, Shudras and Ati-Shudras. Yielding to god or fate, astrology and other such rubbish rituals, sacredness, god-men, etc. was deemed irrational and absurd. This was explained by giving innumerable examples. He also led campaigns to remove the economic and social handicaps that breed blind faith among women, Shudras and Ati-Shudras. Mahatma Phule subjected religious texts and religious behavior to the tests of rationalism. Hence, it can be concluded that the Phule’s principles were based on humanity, equality and fraternity and they are against social discrimination, blind faith, exploitation in the name of religion, caste or gender. He was not only taught these principles, but also practically followed the same and in spite of difficulties and obstacles faced in the society, he was empowered and emancipated backward classes including Shudras and Ati-Shudras and women.

Based on his ideas, the importance of secularism was begun in India. Further, idea of female education was become started. Due to female’s participation in education and increase in the awareness among women, many of the women were begun participating in Indian National Movement. For which, a few of them have organized in women’s associations or organizations of their own. Further, Dalits have got awareness of their rights, which are suppressed due to social restrictions imposed on their castes. Gradually, the Dalits (Shudras and Ati-Shudras) were started to participate in education so as
to get knowledge. In this respect, Shahu Maharaja, ruler of Kolhapur State supported the ideas of Mahatma Phule. As such, he was encouraged education of Dalits by building schools and hostels for Dalits. He also has announced scholarships to Dalits in education. In his State, Shahu Maharaja banned practice of untouchability. Further, he has also given employment to many of the Dalits in his army. Such measures taken up by Shahu Maharaja inspired Dalits and many of the Dalits have gained education.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Architect of the Indian Constitution was one of such thinker, who was suppressed and oppressed during his childhood due to caste barriers. Inspired by thoughts of Mahatma Phule, he was carried out the projects which Phule had taken up. However, Ambedkar’s strategies to fight against the social injustices were based on the new radical, economics and political views. Dr. Ambedkar, like Phule, advocated the education for the lower castes and women. In fact, it was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who brought the Dalit women as speakers and chairpersons into the public spaces during the Ambedkarite movements. Like Mahatma Phule, his ideas were also based on humanity, fraternity, equality and social justice. To achieve these objectives, fundamental rights and human rights of weaker sections such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes and women are protected under different provisions and articles of the Indian Constitution. Later, based on these Constitutional principles, many of the legislations are passed to protect the human rights of all the citizens of India irrespective of their castes, religions
or gender. Hence, it is concluded that, contributions of Mahatma Phule are notable in the field of human rights and he was the first human rights thinker in modern India.