CHAPTER — III
LIFE HISTORY OF JOTIRAO PHULE

This chapter deals with the family background, childhood, Education and influences of society on Jotirao Phule.

There had been a long history of rancor between Brahman’s and non-Brahmans in Maharashtra which was exacerbated due to the nepotism of the peshwas\textsuperscript{1}. So when the Peshwas regime was terminated by its final defeat at Kirki in 1818 and the East India Company directly took the charge of the administration of the Maratha territory. This event was not welcome event by the Brahmans of Maharashtra. Whereas the common man did not feel unhappy about it Memories of the nightmare in the days of peshwa Bajirao-II were fresh in the minds of the non-Brahmans\textsuperscript{2} and they even rejoiced at its termination. For them it meant the total loss of a lever for power, prestige and patronage. The Brahmans in Maharashtra both Chitpavan, Desheshta and others together, had dominated the rest of the society in all walks of life i.e. socio-economic and political and religious fields. They could not forget the days of their glory during the Maharashtra was to suit the unjustified ambitions of these Brahmans and to discriminate against the non-Brahmans\textsuperscript{3}. After the termination of Peshma rule the Brahmans of Maharashtra were the immediate and real loserers. The British were aware of this situation of the Brahmans. They therefore decided not to alienate them, further by interfering with their existing situations. The British policy under Elphinstone, governor of the Bombay and even some extent after him, was one of the caution towards the feeling and sentiments of the Brahmans and this meant to practice the least interference in the social institutions of the province. They even continued the old institution of ‘Daxina’ which was taken of the state recognition to the superiority of the Brahmans\textsuperscript{4}. 
British agrarian policies proved advantageous to the Brahmans. The main characteristics of pre-British Maharashtra society, was the absence of proprietary rights of landed gentry over land. The feudal nobility in fact had only the right given by the monarch to collect and appropriate land revenue over a specific number of villages. They (the feudal lords) were not the owners of the land of these villages but were only the revenue collectors⁵.

The land, in a sense did not entirely belong to the king or monarch. He was entitled simply to receive a definite portion of the produce. “The soil in India belonged to the tribe or its subdivision – the village community, the clan or the brotherhood settle in the village and never was considered the property of the king⁶”. It followed from this that the king was not the owner of land and could not create a class of nobles with property rights over it. What is also to be noted is that even the king and the nobles were not the proprietors of land.

Even after admitting the wide difference of opinion as to whether the cultivable land in the villages was communally or collectively owned by the entire village community⁷, on behalf of which the Patil allotted pieces of the same to different Jathas or families on cowls or whether it was individually owned by the peasants, one thing is definitely clear that it was not easily saleable in the market. This may be either because of the communal ownership as held by certain scholars or simply because of the dominant traditions in the village pertaining to the joint family system and rules of inheritance etc. The unit of revenue assessment was the village and the vicissitudes in the government did not alter this tradition by and large⁸.

The British Government brought about a revolution in the existing land relationship which disturbed the otherwise tranquil atmosphere in many respects. They, with a view to realizing more and more revenue
from the land, created two types of property in land: Zamindari in some parts of the country and the individual peasant proprietorship in others, known as “Ryotwari”. This was a great innovation with far reaching implications. Private property in land came into being and land became a commodity which could be mortgaged, purchased or sold. In the Ryotwari system which was introduced almost all over the Bombay Presidency by, the cultivator received a right to occupancy over his holding. On the condition of payment of revenue as per the Government demand. This ‘right of occupancy’, commonly known as ‘survey tenure’ has been described as a ‘transferable and heritable property continuable without question at the expiration of settlement lease on the occupant’s consent to the revised rate’.

The main concern of the East India Company, in effecting these changes, was to obtain a steady flow of large from the land. The Land Revenue system introduced by the British, for this purpose, was based upon the principles of measuring every field separately and assessing it at a sum fixed for a term of thirty years, the amount of assessment being determined by the quality of the soil and the crop. This plan was first introduced in 1836 in the case of Indapur Talqua of Poona District and was subsequently extended to almost the whole of the presidency. The assessment imposed on the cultivator, however, was excessive. Moreover it had to be paid in cash, without any consideration of the crop condition. This had adverse effects on the peasantry. In his evidence before the committee of the House of Commons, Mr. Elphinstone had said that “the principal imperfection of the land settlement was the too high assessment”.

MODERN EDUCATION:

The introduction of modern education was an event of great historical significance. Before 1813, the missionaries with the objective
of proselytizing, endeavoured to spread western education. But while imparting modern education, they criticized Hindu customs and institutions as worthless and extolled the merits of Christianity.

The East India Company did not favour the missionaries as their teaching antagonized the Hindus. In 1812 the East India Company accepted the responsibility of educating the Indians. The debates and controversies between the Anglisists and the orientalists started over the content of education and the medium of instruction. Ultimately the Angilists won.

Elphinstone in Maharashtra was aware of the Brahman domination in the socio, religious and political life of the people. He also knew that the Brahmans had a stake in preserving their supremacy over the culture and values of society.

He, therefore, visualized a policy of providing colleges in the cities for the study of traditional disciplines like Sanskrit and the scared texts of Hinduism. These colleges were chiefly meant for the students of Brahman castes. In such colleges the students would gradually be introduced to western science and philosophy. In contrast to this there were schools for the ‘plebeian castes’ which would introduce the students directly to the western secular disciplines\(^\text{16}\).

The Bombay Education society was established in 1815 in Bombay for the education of the European Children. Elphinstone, with the above policy in mind, insisted on stating its native branch, and accordingly the ‘Native Education Society’ was starting in 1820\(^\text{17}\). This native branch undertook the task of translating sciences and philosophies in the vernacular. These books were to be primarily used in the schools for the plebians.
In 1825 teaching of English was introduced in the Hindu College, Poona. The Resolution of 1853 declaring the promotion of European literature and science among the natives as 'the great objective of the British government', gave a great impetus to the progress of English education in India. Bombay Board of Education was created in 1840. Sir Erskine Perrie was appointed its President in 1843. During his term the numbers of English schools were started in Bombay. Chairs of Botany and Chemistry were instituted at the Elphinstone College. The Grant Medical College was also started and the English school and the Sanskrit college at Poona were amalgamated.

Sir Charles Wood's most celebrated Despatch (popularly known as Wood's Despatch) of 9th July, 1854 has also a very great impact on the evolution of educational pattern in Bombay as over the rest of India. This despatch was important because it resolved almost all controversies about the education in India, such as aims of education, medium of instruction etc. The Despatch also clearly and firmly stated that the 'Government should assume direct responsibility for the education of the masses'. This officially abandoned the former 'downward filtration theory'.

Thus till the famous Wood's Despatch of 1854 and even after that in practice, the educational policy of the government of India in general and that of Government of Maharashtra in particular was influenced by the "Downward Filtration Theory". According to this, the best policy for the government in a hierarchical society was to take care of the education of the higher or upper classes possessing 'leisure', hereditary qualities and inclination for learning and natural influence over the minds of their countrymen. "By raising the standards of instruction among those classes, they thought they would eventually produce a
much greater and more beneficial change in the ideas and feelings of the community than by acting directly on the more numerous classes.”  

The result of this policy was obvious. Government took utmost interest in the higher education and almost neglected primary and secondary education. Colleges of Arts and Science began thriving in the cities.

Another dimension of the situation was the vigorous activities of the Christian missionaries. They opened schools, hospital, leper clinic, toured every nook and corner of the region and delivered sermons for the propagation of Christianity. They criticized the undemocratic and irrational aspects of Hinduism and the inequality of the caste system. The educated people individually and the uneducated lower castes like *Mahar* and *Mangs* and tribal people, started in mass, embracing Christianity. So the reformers in Maharashtra, as elsewhere in India came forward and started preaching reforms in the Hindu religion and social institutions in order to save Hinduism which is surviving on complete disintegration.

At this juncture Jotirao Phule was born in Pune in 1827 to Govind Rao Phule and Cheemna Bai, a flower merchant. Originally this family known as ‘Gorhay’ came from Kotgun village in the Satara District of Maharashtra, when Jotirao was hardly one year old his mother was passed away. His grandfather Shetiba Gorhay settled down in Poona. Since Jotirao’s father and two uncles Ranjoti and Krishna supplied flowers and various articles made from flowers to the *Peshwas*. In lieu of their services, *Peshwa* gifted them 35 arcs of land. Then onwards they were known as ‘*Phules*’.

Jotirao was sent to local Marathi school., then after joined Scottish Mission School for his further education. While he was
studying in Scottish Mission School his education was stopped in 1833 on the advice of an employee belongs to Brahman caste working under Govindaraao Phule saying that education was useless to non Brahmans. By the time of 1830s the atmosphere of Pune city was that suspicious and jealous, was spread over among the Brahmans and non-Brahmans each other. In this regard there is a popular proverb in Telugu speaking area that “Kula Vruthi Manakura Guvvala Chenna” (Guvvala Chenna was the author of the Shataka literature). This author giving warning to the Indian society that under the influence of reforms introduced by the British Government should not change the caste occupation and profession. In this same manner the Brahmans employee who was working under Govindaraao Phule who could not stomach the changes which are taking place in terms of education of Jotirao in the family of Govindaraao. So he advised that useless education is not needed to Jotirao Phule. This phenomenon of the Brahmans not only confined to Maharashtra, Andra Pradesh and Tamilnadu, but it is a phenomenon of the entire country in terms of education to non-Brahmans.

After discontinuation of education Jotirao Phule helped to his father by working on the family farm. During this time Jotirao's marriage was celebrated with Savitri Bai when he was not even a 13 years. His neighbours who was a Muslim teacher viz., Gaffer Baig Munshi and another a Christian Gentleman viz., Lezit were influenced with the knowledge and intelligence of Jotirao. So they Persuaded his father Govindaraao to allow him to study in a secondary School. So in 1841 Jotirao again got admission in the Scottish Mission School at Poona. After readmission in the same school he met Sadashiv Ballal Govinde, a Brahman, who were close friends, throughout the life. Both Jotirao and Govinde were greatly influenced by the Thomas Paine's ideas and they read 'the Rights of Man' with a great interest. Moro Vithal Valvekar and
Sakharam Yeahwant Paranjaye were two other Brahmans friends of Jotirao who joined later and stood by him and followed his all activities.

The East India Company and the advent of European missionaries for the first time widening educational opportunities such as school and colleges to which all could have access were opened inspite of the open resentment expressed by the Brahmans. The Missionaries especially of the Free Chruch of Scotland and the American Mission, set up schools seeing in the low caste, a fertile ground for their proelytising activity. They emphasised how the Hindu religion had deprived the of lower caste to the religion and education. They portrayed India as a loser in the race of human advancement and higher civilization thanks to its orthodoxy, and its self-seeking priesthood. This idea preached by the missionaries was also echoed in James Mills’s “History of British India” For Jotirao Phule and others who attended these schools, the company rule naturally appeared as opening up new opportunities for their own advancement and for fighting against high caste oppression, which could just not have been dreamt of earlier.

The 1830s and 1840s also witnessed the emergence of a new periodical press, in English and Marathi, which was the creation in part of the protestant missionaries, and as well as part of the English educated Hindu reformers. In 1832 Bal Shastri Jhambhekar started the first anglo-Marathi news paper viz. “Darpari” (Mirror) from Bombay. The most successful Marathi newspaper of the 1850s and 1860s which started by the missionaries known as ‘Dnayanodaya’ (the Rise of knowledge) particular highlighted the discrepancies and contradictions within Hindu beliefs and expressed humanitarian concern for the social consequences of some of the Hindu beliefs and practices. They thereby did much to convince the more reflective and sensitive Hindus that their society was morally inadequate. The missionaries contrasted their Idea of God as the very principle of purity and the sources of moral government exercising the
same authority over all human beings, with the Hindu beliefs in a large number of Gods many of whom could commit harmful act against men and hence had to be propitiated with the help of Brahmans. The missionaries also attacked the inculcation of the spirit of acceptance and the notion, that religious merit lay primarily in obedience to the ‘Dharma’ (duties) of a present social position, itself determined by past ‘Karma’ or deeds – The ‘Dnayanodaya’ highlighted the cruel and senseless religious practices like hook swinging in the services of the God Khandob and the religious prostitution of the ‘Maralis’ and ‘Vaghayas’. The missionary newspaper also attacked the civil social consequences of a system based on ascriptive values. Another strategy adopted by the missionaries to undermine the legitimation of Brahman superiority was the large scale publication of the sacred Vedas and their circulation among the masses. The idea was to demonstrate that the Vedas were mere simple description of the worship of the elements and had little connection with the nineteenth century popular which bestowed privileges on the Brahmans. The demand of low caste radicals for an authoritative Hindu text, after the Christian model which would be available to all and act as a guide to conduct was the direct results of missionary propaganda. The important aspect of the Scottish mission school was their determination to admit boys of untouchable castes like any other, if they could fulfil the entry requirements. The missionaries regarded this as a crucial part of their public stand against Brahmanic religious values. This provoked quite frequent conflict with Brahman students. Phule remained in Scottish mission until 1847, and left having completed his secondary education in English.

Missionary teaching of equality and universal brotherhood of mankind on the one hand, and the most inhuman and cruel discrimination based upon caste distinction in the Hindu society on the other, led Phule to self-thinking. While in school, Phule had come
across the biographies of George Washington, Shivaji and Nepolean, later he studies these books in detailed\textsuperscript{35}. After thorough study of “Rights of Man” written by Thomas Paine in 1848 Phule was very much attracted and influenced towards the emphasis of Thomas Paine on oneness of God and equality among the man. On the other i.e. Paine, denied the necessity of the middle man between man and God\textsuperscript{36}. Phule in his book i.e. Sarvajanik \textit{Satya Dharma} insisted that the religious ideology of Hindu \textit{Dharma} no where found that oneness of god and equality among the man. At the same time he wrote very critically about the priest of the Indian Society who was a middle man between man and God in Hindu ideology. Further Paine emphasised on liberalism, so Phule very much impressed towards liberation which was advocated by paine in case of American society which is quite locking in Indian society.

On one hand Phule was getting influenced with Thomas Paine’s ideas like humanity, equality, individual dignity, freedom, social justice, meaning of the true religion etc. and on the other he was experiencing in the social reality characterized by untouchability daniel of certain social and cultural rights to the \textit{Shudras} corrupt religious practices, degradation of women\textsuperscript{37}. At about the same time Phule had an unpleasant experience regarding the touch-me-not attitude of the Brahmans. In 1848 he was invited to the marriage of a Brahman friend. In the procession he was recognised by some orthodox and arrogant Brahman as a \textit{Mali} and a \textit{Shudra} and ordered him to quit, he was radiculed and insulted matter regarding his own. Then he immediately boycott the marriage procession and returned to home and revealed the entire incident to his father Govind Rao. In connection to the above incident, Govind Rao narrated to
Phule some of his experiences about Brahmins high handedness and arrogance in the days of Peshwas\textsuperscript{38} as follows.

In those days no non-Brahman was allowed to adopt Brahman mode of dressing. \textit{Wakde, Wakdi} and \textit{Wakda} and were regarded as the monopoly of Brahmins. \textit{Wakde} is a peculiar mode of wearing \textit{dhoti}, \textit{Wakdi} is Konkani \textit{Pagdi} and \textit{wakda} is Konkani type of foot war. If any body tried to adopt it or copy it he was punished by law. Some Goldsmiths insisted upon putting carved \textit{‘gandha’} on their forehead like the Brahmins. Their foreheads were burnt with curved hot iron bar. Once Senu \textit{Sutar} who lived behind our house styled his \textit{dhoti} like Brahmans (\textit{Wakde}). His testis was cut as a punishment. \textit{Panchalas} wore threads like Brahmans. They were ‘punished by inscribing thread line on their bodies by burning iron rods. \textit{Mahars} and \textit{Mangs} were ordered to wear a black thread round their necks and to hang ear then pots to their necks to spit in and a broom was to be tied to their waist to sub out their foot prints on the road so that it may not pollute the Brahmans. They were allowed to walk on public roads only at noon when the shadows are short and can not fall upon the Brahmans. \textit{Mahars} and \textit{Mangs} were buried alive in the basements of the buildings. Some part of \textit{Shanwarwada} was being constructed in my childhood. I will remember some \textit{Maher’s} having been buried alive in its basement and some convicts having been buried in the walls. If some \textit{Mahar} or \textit{Mangs} or Barbour or a oil presser appeared before a Brahman in the morning, he was cruelly beaten by the Brahman for having caused a bad omen. I usually went to \textit{Peshwa Darbar} and \textit{Shanwarwads} with garlands of flowers. Once I saw a women sitting there. She was ordered to sit there for a couple of days. Her sex organ as burnt by hot iron rods. This was her punishment for having taken water from a tank meant for Brahmans\textsuperscript{39}.
The above reveals that Memories of Brahman high handedness and their arrogance against the non-Brahman and partial and biased laws in the days of Peshwas remained fresh in the succeeding generations. The experiences that Govind Rao narrated were really pathetic examples of the cruelty and inhumanity of the Brahmans. He was naturally led to fear that all this would be repeated if the pressure of Government were withdrawn. The British power seemed to him the only source of protection against this dreadful fate. The marriage of Brahman friend forced Phule to perceive the basic principles of Hindu society.

Phule became restless. He wanted know the roots of the caste discrimination and the inhuman institution of untouchability. He started reading extensively the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, the Manu Samhita, the Puranas etc. In addition he read the literature of the Medieval saints of the Bhakti Cult like Tukaram Gatha, Dryaneshwari and others texts of the Bhagwat Sect. He also read the writings and literature by such reformers as Gautham Buddha, saint Basweshwer and Tirthakars.

Apart from the writing of these Indian Saints and sages, he read the literature of the West: Such as Henry Mead’s Sepoy Revolt, Homer, Gol, G.J. Haly, on Fisherles in India. Sir William Jones, Vol-IV. The Bible, Captain James Cook’s, Voyages Round the World, John Wilson’s, India. Three Thousand years Ago. W.H. Prescott; History of Peru and Brazil, Vol-I. Sir William Jones; The Laws of Manu, son of Brahma, Vol-VII; Journal of the East India Association No.8. Vol-II. The basic philosophical outlook of Phule found expression in his book i.e. Sarvjanik Satya Dharma Pustak which was published after his death i.e. in 1891. This book insisted the concept of man and the cardinal principles on which the new society was to be founded were stated clearly. The ideas which
were at the very core of Thomas Paine's Philosophy appears to have influenced the basic propositions of Phule's philosophy\textsuperscript{44}.

This led Phule to examine the Hindu religion and its basic principles, and the customs and traditions of Hindu society. He went deeper in this investigation, more he realized that the whole of Hindu culture was rotten beyond possibility for reform. The number of deities, the idol worship, irrational social customs, the caste system based on inequality, the practice of untouchability; belief in rebirth, *Karma* theory leading to the acceptance of all social injustice in the name of ‘*Karma*’ and killing all initiative for and interest in a better secular life, the theory of incarnation leading men to think that God himself will incarnate and remove their troubles, meaning that they need not take any initiative and above all the numerous sacred texts sanctioning the above beliefs and institutions appeared like an impenetrable vicious circle\textsuperscript{45}.

By Birth Phule was a *Shudra*. The ‘*Mali* caste, in the caste hierarchy was ranked below Marathas along with whom they could dine and intermix. But unlike Marathas, the *Malis* could not claim for themselves the status of *Kshatriyas*. So within the system Phule had no chance of rising in the hierarchy. He could, therefore, easily identify himself with the people of all caste equal to and below his status to the extent of the lowest in the rank-the-*Ati-Shudras* i.e. *Mahars* and *Mangs* who were the untouchables.

Apart from his reading the environmental factors also influenced Phule, Phule himself testifies that those were Muslim and Christian influences.

Phule says that I acquired a little knowledge through them and began to realize the Rights of Man\textsuperscript{46}.
He further says that the British Government made it possible for me to speak out and express my thought⁴⁷.

The response of Phule to the changing environment of Maharashtra with this peculiar status in society was bound to differ from that of Brahman elite. His ideas reflected typically *Shudra* perspective of looking form below. The core of Hinduism was essentially Brahmanical, carefully designated and developed through centuries by the Brahmans themselves through their monopoly of education and religion⁴⁸.

In 1848, Phule and his student colleagues turned to the reform of traditional Hindu society as the most important single issue for the socially concerned. In education, they thought, lay the key to a fundamental change in social attitude⁴⁹.

Education of women and the lower Castes, he believed, deserved priority. He was convinced that both the women and the *Shudras* from the Hindu community should avail themselves of modern education. At the time, even the Brahmans were opposed to educating their women. He decided to open a school for girls, belonging the low and untouchable castes in Pune. Meanwhile his friend, sadasivaraoa Govende took him to Ahmednagar, the centre of education run by Christian missionaries. They visited mission school of madam Farrar, who too lamented that education of women had been sadly neglected in India. Further she felt that each Indian male should take to educating his wife who could help him in the spread of education⁵⁰.

Accordingly, when Jotirao returned to Pune, he persuaded his wife Savitribai to get educated. She did so and later started a school for girls belonging to the lower caste, in August, 1848 at Bhidewada in Budhwar⁵¹ Peth. It was the first school opened by a *shudra* for *shudra*
girl. It was first of its kind in India. Joti’s associates Paranjape, Hate, and Govande, gave him financial assistance to run the school. This school was opened to girls, of untouchable castes such as *Mahars, Mangs* and *chamars*. This was the time when Pune in particular was the bastion of ultra-conservative Hindu leaders, who looked upon an Institution, which imparted education to Shudra and ati-shudra women as an offence against God, the *shastras*, religion and society. According to these leaders, Hindu religion prohibited women from learning. It is only the Vedas, which are prohibited the women and *Shudras* from education. However in practice the, learning had been denied to women by leaders of various castes. The Brahmans and the caste leaders feared that the social edifice of the caste structure would receive a severe jolt if women became educated. They felt that a woman, if educated, could go astray and destroy family happiness. Those were the days when women were not allowed to use footwear or umbrellas or speaks to their husbands in the presence of elders and others, a newly married couple could not converse with each other in the presence of elders; a woman could not allowed to sit down to a meal with her husband. Educating women was considered as bad as plying with fire as it good lad women to cross the boundaries of family decorum and make elders lose their authority.\(^5\)

Jotirao’s father, Govindaraao Phule, being a man of tradition, was deeply troubled by his son’s action. Education of women and low castes. Phule believed that it is deserved priority. Hence at home he began educating his wife Savitribai and opened a girls school in August 1848. In this regard the orthodox opponents of Maharashtra were very furious and they started a vicious campaign against Phule. He refused to be unnerved by their *Malicious* propaganda. As no teacher dared to work in a school in which untouchables were admitted as students.
Jotirao asked his wife to teach the girls in his school. Stones and brickbats were thrown at her when she was on her way to the school. The reaction arises threatened Jotirao's father with dire consequences if he did not disassociate himself from his son's activities. Yielding to the pressure, Jotirao's father asked his son and the daughter-in-law to leave his house. Even though both of them refused to give up their noble endeavour. However, Govindrao's friends of the same caste convinced him that Jotirao was right in taking action against age-old Hindu religious belief. Jotirao argued with his father but to no avail. Govindarao in a fit of anger told his son to go his own way and ordered Jotirao and his wife to leave his house. Jotirao's wife, Saitribai, stood by her husband in this period of trial. Thus, Jotirao and his wife moved out. Meanwhile the school closed down temporarily due to lack of sufficient funds. When the finance improved some extent, Jotirao reopened the school in the space donated by his friend Govande in old Ganjipeth area in Pune. This time the number of girls in the school increasing. Jotirao found a bigger place to run the school, which he took on rent from a Muslim. Major Candy provided books to the school. On 3rd July, 1851, Jotirao started a girl's school in Anna Chiplunkar's mansion house at Budhwarpeth, where Phule taught for four hours daily without taking any salary. A committee was constituted with Keshave Sivaram Bhavalkar, Anna Sahastrabudhe, Bapuroji Mande, Vishnu Bhide, Kishnashatri Chilpunkar and Vishnushatri Pandit and school management was handed over to the committee.

The school first began with eight girls on the roll under the above management, soon their number rose to forty eight. Since the financial position of the school was not very sound.

Then after Savitribai wife of Jotirao began teaching on an honorary basis. She also became principal of this school. He opened a
second school for girls in Rasta Peth it is one of the street in Pune on 17th September, 1851 and third in Vithalpeth on 15th March 1859. The curriculum of the school education comprised of reading, grammar, arithmetic, geography, history map reading etc. In this way Jotirao became an important figure in the promotion of women’s education. Major condy, supervisor of the school said in his report that “I am happy to note the intelligence and progress of the girls’ while I visited the schools runned by the Jotirao Phule.54

On 17th February, 1852 Jotirao’s school was publicly inspected, following which there was a speech by Bhansaheb mande “It is pity that the citizens of our country are not yet convinced of the need of education to women”. A Judge viz. Brown was present on this occasion. In his speech he quoted Milton and said “Educating women will strengthen the family happiness and utility of the institution of the family.55

A fourteen year old girls of untouchable from one of Jotirao’s schools for un-touchable wrote an essay in which she said “The Brahmans say that other castes should not read the Vedas: this leaves us without a scripture. Thus, are we without religion? Oh God, please tell us, what is our religion? God by your Grace, you sent us the kindly British Government. This has brought relief and welfare. Before the British came the Mahars and Mangs were beheaded when they committed an offence against the people of higher castes. Earlier we were not allowed to move about freely in the bazar of sultekadi: now we can” such was the freedom given to girls in schools run by Jotirao.

Jotirao Phule was the first Shudra, started the schools for Ati-Shudras, it was first in kind in India. The Dakshina prize fund committee gave him a meager grant of Rs.75/- per month and since this was woefully inadequate, so Phule had to rely mainly on his friends and
the generosity of few European Administrators for continuation and help. For his untiring services to the cause of women education among the low and untouchable castes. Towards service for the cause of education Phule was publicly honoured by Major Thomas Candy, Principal of the Pune College, Presenting him the traditional pair of shawls on behalf of the Bombay Government.\(^{56}\)

In 1853 Phule formed a society for increasing Education among Mahars, Mangs and others. His close friend and colleague, Sadashiv Govande was made as President while Valavekar and Sakharam Yasavant, paranjae were appointed Secretary and Treasurer respectively, and Phule also a member of the committee. The society established two schools for untouchables and arranged lectures to be given to the Mahars and the Mangs of Pune explaining the benefits of education in these schools.

Phule's radicalism however, was not fully shared by others particularly the Brahman members of the committee and soon a rift was developed between Phule and others. His Brahman colleagues were unable to accept Phule's contention that the Brahmans were solely was possible for the educational backwardness of the low castes. But perhaps the more serious causes for the rift was the fact that while the committee thought that the lower castes should be given education only in the basic skills of reading and writing. Whereas as Phule insisted that they should be given compete education, so that they could decide what was good and what was bad for themselves.

Phule waged his idelogocial fight against Brahman domination in the field of education on two fronts; First, he urged the education and employment to the lower caste education in schools as teachers, and in administration. So that the stronghold of the Brahmans elite could be broken. Till such time, he preferred Englishmen to Brahman as
educators and administrators because of their more secular and liberal outlook. Second, he made it a point to convey to the British administration that his feeling about the designs of the Brahman employees. Phule blamed the Brahmans for trying to impress on the British that the low castes had neither any liking nor real aptitude for education. He suggested that every village school should be compelled to have a certain proportion of children from the Mali-Kunbi castes and if it did not then the school should be closed.

Having quarreled with his colleagues in 1853, Phule worked as a part-time teacher in 1854 in the Scottish Mission’s School. After founding educational institutions, Jotirao turned his attention to social reforms by striking at age-old social traditions.

Phule showed remarkable imagination and creativity in his attempts to mobilize the Shudras. First, he projected the Brahmans as the villain of the piece, responsible for the present plight of the Shudras. Second, he made education of Shudras and Ati-Shudras the cornerstone of his strategy and tirelessly worked for spreading education among them. Finally, he sought to project a new collective identity for all the lower castes in Maharashtra. He sought to bring together the Mali-Kunbis and the Mang-Maharas into a single fold who together oppressed in the name of religion by Brahman community.

Time and again Phule presents the Brahman as the villain solely responsible for the plight of the low castes and for the oppressive caste system. One play in which such a portrayal of the Brahman comes out most forcefully is "Traitya Ratna" written by Phule sometime in 1855, but first published in 1879 in the journal of "Purogamin Satyashodhak" (April-June). The principal characters of the play are a poor cultivator and his wife, a Christian missionary, and Phule himself who makes inventions as the commentator. The plot of Drama is
simple: The Brahman priest visits the pregnant wife of the cultivators and cautions her against an unfortunate conjunction of the zodiac which can destroy her unborn child. The only way toward off the danger is to propitiate God Maruti and fed a large number of Brahmans.

The cultivator and his wife incur a heavy debt in order to give the feasts to the Brahmans. The Brahman is not only portrayed as cunning rascal who play on the ignorance and credulity of the simple peasant, but also as heartless and unscrupulous. During the feast the Brahman keeps the peasant couple waiting in the hot sun and when it is over spares the tired, exhausted and hungry couple only a few left avers. Shortly they are after, the cultivators and his wife come across a Christian missionary preaching by the road by the side and enter into a discussion with him. As the missionary explains the true nature of God as kind and good who could never have willed the inhuman caste system and explains how he cannot be found in idols, the cultivator’s anger grows and he comes to understand how he has been fooled, cheated and robbed in the name of propitiating the idol of Marutis and planetary forces. The play ends on the happy note of the cultivators and his wife realizing their folly and revolving to educate themselves at Phule’s own night school.

What the play bring out clearly is not only the fact that the Brahmans acting as the guardians of Hindu beliefs and institutions, exploited and robbed the ignorant low caste people, but also the existence of a conspiracy on the part of the Brahmans to deliberately keep the Hindu masses ignorant and illiterate Phule’s endeavour in the play is to show how the Brahmans conspired to use the doctrines of “Karma” Dharma and the ideas of “Varna” and “Jati” not only to exploit and plunder the low castes but also to kept them permanently backward. The commentator urges the Malis and the Kunbis, the
Mangs and the Mahars to cease fearing the Brahmans and to no longer fall a prey to his conspiracy, for now, God has send the English into this country to revoke the disabilities which the Brahmans had imposed on the Shudras.  

Although he was hard put to it to make both ends meet, he did not neglect the school work. His wife faithfully supported him. In 1855 Jotirao brought to light the beliefs and rituals practiced in the name of God. Some educated Hindus too were fighting against superstitions in order to bring about new thinking. It was being realised that Jotirao’s action and teachings not only challenged the superiority of the Brahmans but struck at the very root of Hindu religion. Some fanatics, disturbed at this, sent some assassins to get rid of Jotirao. But when the assassins set feet in Jotirao’s house, they entered into a dialogue with him. Jotirao asked them “Why have you come to kill me? “What wrong have I done to you?” The assassins replied “We are going to be paid a thousand rupees each for this job” Jotirao replied, “Alright then here is my neck. I know it is your poverty which is making you to do this” Jotirao’s magnanimity impressed the assassins. They fell at his feet in repentance and become his followers for life. One of them Dhandiram Kumbhar, studied well and became the pillar of the Satya Shodak Samaj.

**EARLY REFORM MOVEMENTS IN MAHARASHTRA:**

The impact of western education in liberating the mind from the bondage of traditions, the virulent criticism of Hindu religion and social order by the missionaries and the objective change in the socio-economic and politico environment together necessitated a thorough and critical review of Hindu traditions and society with the object of reforming it. The first spark was it in Bengal and in course of time it spread outside assuming regional variations in the country.
In Maharashtra, the first efforts in the cause of socio-religious reforms expressed itself in the form of “param Hans Sabha” It was founded in Bombay in the year 1840. Among its founding members were Dadoba Pandurang, Ram Balkrishna Moroba Vinoba, Atmaram Pandurang, Tukaram Tatya etc. It had a very limited membership and it functioned secretly. The members believed that Hinduism had degenerated and needed reforms. But they were not active on the reform front owing to the fear of public opinion and public pressure. This society disintegrated in 1860.

“Ved Samaj” was founded in Bombay in 1865. It was in 1867 that the famous Prarthana Samaj was established. It was inspired by the Brahma Samaj of Bengal. The prominent founder members were Atmaram Pandurang, Paramanand, Ramakrishna Gopal, Bhandarkar, Bal Mangesh Wagle, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Moroba Vinoba, Bhāskar Hari Bhagwat, Vasudev-Navrange etc. Its objectives were rejection of idol worship unity of God, brotherhood of men and denunciation of priesthood.

Mention should be made of Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823-92). He was the pioneer of Marathi Journalism. In his “Shatpatre” (hundred letters) under the pen name of “Lok hit wade” he advocated social reform. In his sarcastic and pungent style he vehemently attacked most of the prevalent customs, traditions and superstitions in the Hindu religion and way of life.

He firmly believed that old Hindu faith was blind and harmful, old cases were obscurantist, and old knowledge was useless. So he thought it essential to restructure the Hindu society on Western lines. He considered that out social Morality and secular professions were harmfully biased towards the life hereafter. It was, therefore, necessary first of all to separate them thus, “Lok Hit Wadi” was protagonist of
secularism and insisted on separating religion from secular profession. He did not approve of the Divine origin of the *Vedas* and held that the knowledge of the Brahman was imperfect and dismantle to the progress of the society. He criticized the hollow rituals of the Brahmans in an equally blunt and pungent language. He did not spare the hermits of ‘Sadhu’ among the Hindus and openly expressed his utter disregard for the sacred books.

The writings of Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895) in “Sudharak” emphasised the need of emancipating the minds of the people. Each and every article in “Sudharak” was an artillery fired against the citadels of Hinduism. Agarkar was extremely critical of religion and religious notions. According to him all religions originated from the concept of ghosts and witches and man has shaped every God and Goddess after his own image. Until the advent of the British all our life remained like a log of wood or just as piece of bone. In the last two thousand years we had done nothing beyond preserving our life “he felt Commenting on the situation obtaining in his period he said, at present a we have no courage, no enthusiasm, no reasoning capacity, no profession, no art, no real patriotism, no true faith in religion, no habit of speaking or practicing the truth, in short we have nothing good or worth cherishing.

Maharashtra witnessed a bitter controversy, in this period, over the question whether social reform should get priority over political reform or vice-versa. In this controversy he championed the urgency of the cause of social reform as against political reform. He argued that it was easier to introduce social reforms during the British rule. The *Arya Samaj* was founded by Dayananda Saraswati on 7th April, 1875 in Bombay. His approach to the problem of reformation was different from that of other reformers and associations. Over the centuries, Hinduism
has gathered an accumulation of irrational customs and traditions, idolatry and superstition. The social structure has also degenerated into stratification of over 4000 castes and sub-castes. So that best was to reform it is to restore to its pristine reform of the Vedic society and polity. Arya Samaj accepts only Vedas as the authentic texts of the Hindus or the Aryas as they prefer to call it, that the religion taught in the Vedas is the only true religion and that the other texts regarded as sacred by Hindus are only the unwanted outgrowth of the centuries. He rejects the caste system, granting relative equality of status and freedom to women, right of the Shudras to education and Knowledge etc. are some of the principles of Arya Samaj which are no doubt as liberal as the ideas of the reformers. Rational interpretation and criticism of Vedas becomes of our of question, and Vedas believe in a number of Gods, the rejection of the entire sacred literature other than the Vedas, the outright denial of the Hindu culture.

Mahadev Govinda Renade whose name has been mentioned earlier, was the leading spirit of the social reforms movement in nineteenth century in Maharashtra. The institutions with which Renade was closely connected were Prarthana Samaj, Sarvajanika Sabha, the social conference, the Deccan Sabha, Renade and Ramakrishna Bhandarkar joined the Prarthana Samaj in 1870. The Samaj abandoned the cult of idol-worship, disapproved of caste oppression, child marriage propagated women’s education and widow-remarriages.

But, when Mahadev Ranade’s sister was widowed, once Jotirao Met Renade and asked him why don’t you arrange re-marriage to your widow sister, then Renade replied “If I go for remarry of my widowed sister, it will break my father heart. Besides, the Pune Brahmans will ostracise me “to which Jotirao replied “Then don’t parade as a
reformist”. Ranade lost his wife in October, 1873 when he was thirty two years old and married a girl of twelve years. The reformers of Maharashtra were embarrassed by his action. Jotirao expressed strong disapproval and wrote a scathing article on Renade in “Vividha Bhanavistat”, similarly, another social reformer Viz. Lokahitawadi Gopalrao Deshmukh, too surrendered to the conservatives and performed penance for having committed the anti-religious act of sending his son to England, in defiance of the scriptural ban imposed on crossing the seas, so did many other reformers back down. Only a very few reformers were there who practised what they preached73.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak accepted need of socio-religious reforms until 1885. But after entering the political arena he disowned it. He started suspecting the validity of the western values and culture. He opposed the age of consent bill, his refusal to accept the claim to Kshatriya status by Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur.

The frame work of the prominent reformers was religious and cultural. Renade tried to prove that whatever reforms he was seeking were based in our healthy ancient religious traditions and not opposed to it. Thus whatever reforms were advocated and sought, were sought on the strength and support of the same tradition and not on the strength of logical and rational arguments74.

Moreover the issue taken up by the reformers were concerned with the institutions of the family75 like child marriage, education of women. Again many of the reforms which were advocated with great gusto were relevant to the upper castes and had little or no relevance to the lowest castes. The disfigurement of the widows or the remarriage of the widows were the problems of the Brahman caste only. The lower caste widows were allowed to remarry and they were never disfigured. Even the question on womens education was remotely related to the
lower castes, as strictly according to the Shastras even the Males from the lower castes, particularly the Shudras were not allowed to educate themselves. After the advent of the British this position has changed to some extent and all castes were allowed schooling. Even then, the number of Shudras benefiting from this was very little, owing to their poverty. Thus, clearly the reformers were, for the most part, Brahmans were addressing their own caste, which formed a very small section of population. The bulk of the population was indifferent and there were no efforts to get them involved in the movement. This was probably because both the reformers and the people to whom they were addressing had a vital stake in retaining the old structure. What they aimed at was simply mending some traditions here and there so as to cope with the new exigencies, keeping the entire old form intact.

Involving the masses meant broadening the scope of reforms even to the extent of affecting the whole structure. Moreover the reforms suggested suited only the personal needs of the educated Brahmans, and the majority of the Brahmans who were uneducated felt no urgency about them. These orthodox Brahmans opposed the reform movement bitterly and at the point no matter how minor were the reforms advocated. They felt that a minor needle hole was enough to deflate the balloon. One reform accepted would lead to another and thus the entire structure would crumble. So with the bulk of the population indifferent and the majority of the Brahmans opposed to it, the movement was foredoomed to failure.

The orthodox opposition manifested itself in the late nineteenth century in the form of nationalistic awakening and started asserting itself against the proponents of reforms so that ultimately the reformers were totally isolated and their position was on the wane. There was also a wide gap between the words and deeds of the reformers. This
contradiction between the precepts and practice of the reformers was part of the dilemma in which they were caught. They shrank from acting up to their own precept for fear of public opinion and social consequences. Which meant excommunication or social death. Hinduism allows thought to be free but rigidly controls practice. It contrives conservatism in practice with liberation of belief. Whatever be the reasons, this gap between word and deed on the part of the reformers was an example of hypocrisy and want of moral courage and constituted one of the major weaknesses of the movement making it unacceptable to the people.

In short both the reformation movement and the opposition to it by the orthodox together constituted the response and reaction of a small section of the population to the challenges posed by the British advent on Indian urban society. This set of circumstances had little relevance to the bulk of the population that lived on the countryside. So they had, in general coldly responded to the movement. The masses were confronted with a different set of circumstances. Their lives and fate were being shaped by the changes brought about by the British administration in the field of agriculture the land reforms, the changes in the administration and judiciary, the revenue systems etc. The economic policies of the British which caused famines and destruction of village industry was their main concern but the reformers failed to take notice of it. The perspective of the reformers was narrow and elitist, while the educated non-Brahmans looked at the them with suspicions, if not with hostility.

The memories of the Brahmanic hegemony with the state support under the Peshwas were still vivid. The people had not forgotten the nightmare of Peshwas rule under Bajirao-II. So they distrusted the Brahmans. They looked at the institution of “Daxina” as a state
sanction to the Brahmanical hegemony. They felt that the Brahmans alone were getting the benefits of higher education opened up by the Britishers. They looked at the advent of British people as the end of the rule of the *Peshwas* who favoured Brahmans. So their response to the call of nationalism was attended with reservations and lacked enthusiasm. They would rather prefer reform that would end Brahmanical dominations and supremacy and establish a society based on purely on the principles of rationality, justice and equality. Looked from this perspective the whole of the reformation movement of the nineteenth century appears to result in a deep and broad vacuum. To fill in this vacuum it was necessary to launch a new and totally different movement. The limited frame of traditional religion and religious text had to be transcended and a more comprehensive frame of reference had to be achieved for the purpose Jotirao Phule of Poona, *Mali* by caste, took up this challenge. He offered a different theory of reform, which was capable fulfilling the aspirations of the masses at large.
FOOT NOTES


11. Ibid.


13. Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol II P 192.


17. Ibid, p.53.


19. Ibid,

20. Ibid,

21. Ibid,


28. Laxmanashastri Joshi., Jotirao Phule, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992 p.4
32. Ibid, pp.200-201
35. Ibid, p.53.
37. Ibid, p.13
40. Ibid, p.54.


47. Ibid, p.65


51. Ibid, pp. 10-11


54. Ibid, p. 12

55. Ibid, p. 12


57. Ibid, pp.206-207.


60. Ibid, pp.204-205.


63. Ibid, p.28.

64. Ibid

65. Ibid

66. Ibid

67. D.N. Shikare., *Dharmik Sanstha Va Sampraday Sampraday Adhunik Kal* in Maharashtra *Jeevan* (Marathi), P.158.


77. Ibid, p.39.

78. Ibid, p.40.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid pp 40 – 41.