CHAPTER – IV

MAHATAMA JYOTIBHA PHULE’S CONCEPT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Mahatama Jyotibha Phule, a star who rose on the firmament and who still continues to guide the thinking people of Maharashtra. During the life time of Phule, Social injustice, inequality, casteism, exploitation of the farmers and the underprivileged strata of society, untouchability and the suppression of women were rampant. It is with these social problems that Mahatama Phule battled with the every once of energy he had.

During the 1st half of the nineteenth century there was great dissatisfaction among the poor masses against the colonial rule. The native soldiers were also dissatisfied with the British rulers for many reasons. The untouchables were a great suffering lot. As a result rebellion broke out on May 10, 1857 to overthrow the Raj. Historians have different views on 1857 War of Independence. But certainly it was not an organized revolt against the British. It is called as a Sepoy Revolt or Mutiny. Many feudal ruling chiefs, kings and queens, nawabas and zamindars rose in revolt and helped the rebel soldiers and joined the war of independence beside common people and general masses.

It assumed the proportion and magnitude of a War of Independence in Maharashtra also. Some Maharashtra feudal chiefs participated in this revolt enthusiastically to regain their lost glory. In Gujarat Koli feudatories also rose in revolt in a big way. As Keer writes, “In Maharashtra proper there were fights with the British. In some other places there were some stray incidents. The Poona Brahmins of Bajirao II who mustered strong at Poona for fits were taking
things lying down. The prominent leaders of the revolution were Maharashtrians though the fields of battle were outside Maharashtra.

The Crimean War had left an impression on the minds of Indian that the English were not invincible. The conquest of the Punjab was the work of Indian troops. Dalhousie who unified and modernized India by cutting her off from her medieval moorings, pulled down some Indian States through the doctrine of lapse and loaded with hatred the guns of Princely India, which was seething with discontent and revenge. A belief caught the imagination of the common man that a century of English rule was about to come to an end.

The spark, however, was ignited by the growing fear among the sepoys of the Christianization of India when it was retoured that cartridges were greased with cow’s and pig’s fat, the cow sacred to the Hindus and the pig hateful to the Muslims. The support of Sir Salar Jung, Minister of the Nizam, the passivity of the Sikhs and the hostility of Nepal to the revolutionary leaders saved the Indian Empire for the British. The English won by the skin of their teeth. On the all of Delhi in 1857, the Governor of Bombay telegraphed to the Resident at Hyderabad: “If the Nizam goes, all is lost”. “Had the Nizam openly avowed sympathy”, said Colonel Briggs, “the whole of southern India would have been in a blaze”, for the British. When Salar Jung visited England in June 1876 he was hailed there as the ‘saviour of Indian Empire’.

However, Jotirao was firm in his convictions. Because the Hindus were divided by caste system, he seemed to have thought, there was disunity and lack of real patriotism. And, therefore the British had succeeded in imposing their rule on India. He was not sympathetic but apathetic towards the revolutionary
struggle that was raging all over northern India for the overthrow of British power. Yet, because of his patriotic antecedents and independent spirit of mind, he was shunned during the days of this rebellion by European friends and admirers. They must have watched his activities with no little suspicion. Since that time Jotirao resolved not to visit Europeans except on invitation and later he never sought interviews with them.

The response of Jotirao to the failure of the revolutionary war was not that of a patriot. He breathed a sigh of relief when the revolted by Nanasaheb was suppressed. An agonizing fear had seized his mind. If Nanasaheb succeeded, Brahmin rule would again have been established in Maharashtra and serious social and religious restrictions would have been imposed on non-Brahmins as had been done during Peshwa rule. “British rule is there today”, Jotirao remarked, “it may not be there tomorrow. It may not even outlast us. Nobody can be sure about its permanency. But as long as it is there, the lower classes should educate themselves and release themselves from the age-long thralldom of Brahmins, which had kept them bound with ignorance and deprived them of social and personal and human dignity”.

Further Keer says, it was Jotirao’s firm belief that the existing rule was favourable to social reform and progress. Two decades later, G.G. Agarkar, a leading figure in the social reform movement, too, said that the existing times were favourable for social reforms. God was merciful, he thought, to the Shudras that he frustrated the attempts of Nanasaheb Peshwa.

So Jotirao did not help the British either. He was aloof, lonely, believing that the rebels would not succeed as he seemed to think that it was not a war of
the people. Southern India was partly indifferent, partly lukewarm and in Pune not a Brahmin rose in revolt. Jotirao did not believe, it seems that good Government is no substitute for self-Government. Frankly and boldly, he preferred British rule to Brahmin rule. He had such a dread and hatred of Brahmin rule that the totally failed to look at the revolution from a broader angle which even the Bombay Times described as ‘a deadly national rebellion’.

Undoubtedly any revolution is a vehicle of change, as is a social or religious movement. With it come new values and new ideals, Jotirao was not a political thinker. Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade, Maharashtrian historian, expressing his views on this rebellion which aimed at the overthrow of British power, opined that the men of that generation were incapable of realizing the significance of the great struggle; therefore there was no question of their joining this or that party. Rajwade condemned the leaders of that generation as worthless men who were a disgrace to the society and nation! At the same time he branded the revolutionary leaders as a brand of thoughtless men who were more of a philosophic and world-negating bent than realistic!”

Unfortunately, in northern India the rebellion which continued for about a year failed and ultimately the organized British troops suppressed it.

In fact Phule devoted all his time and energies in organizing educational institutions for the poorer low classes. His upper caste progressive friends encouraged him in his mission, while he was discouraged by the Pune’s reactionary Brahmins. As narrated earlier he became very much popular among educated class. Even the Europeans appreciated his efforts for dedication to be seen nowhere in Maharashtra and other places. This was a practical way of
bringing social revolution among the lower classes. As we have seen Phule himself was a victim of Brahminical social order. In the words of Keer: “The public examination of the Mahar and Mang schools was held at Babaji Munagee’s Coal Factory, opposite the Queen’s Hostel near the City Hospital, on Tuesday, the 2nd February 1858, in the evening at half past four. A large number of European and Indian gentlemen assembled. C.M. Harrison, Judge of Poona, presided. Among the gentlemen assembled were Edwin Arnold, Principal of Poona College, Mrs. Arnold, Lt. C.J. Griffith, Inam Commissioner, The Rev. J. Mitchell, Bapu Raoji, Framji Nusserwanji, Annasaheb Chiploonkar, Noolkar and other officials.

As usual a report was read showing the progress made by Mahar and Mang children from September 1856 to January 1858 by the Jt. Secretary Waman Prabhakar. A few advanced scholars of one of the schools were very kindly permitted by the free Church Missions to attend their English institutions, but from causes which would be tedious to detail, the report said, most of the scholars had discontinued at that seminary. It was also related that in rainy and winter seasons attendance became very precarious as they had no clothes to protect themselves from rain and cold. Scholarships of higher value should be given, and these scholars should be formed into a normal class. An Industrial department should be attached to the schools to teach them useful trades and crafts, to enable them, on leaving school, to maintain themselves comfortably and independently.

“The Government have also sanctioned”, observed the Report, “the grant of liberal sum of Rs. 5,000 for the erection of a new school. They have also
kindly made over the Society a site to build the school.” The war of 1857 had its effect on the European donors of the school. The Report says: “Several European and Native Gentlemen have of late withdrawn their monthly subscriptions and these have fallen so low that it will be the painful duty of the society to shut up at least one of the three schools under their direction”. It was the time when the Mahar and Mangs had become alive to the utility of education and were demanding better teachers, the society would have, the Report stated helplessly, to shut up one of the three schools, if benevolent persons did not come forward with a liberal hand and prevent the extreme step. Certainly is was a very unfortunate step.

C.M. Harrison, judge of Poona, made a very moving speech. Concluding his speech, he said: “The disinterested efforts of the founder of these schools and of the native gentlemen who are acting with him and who form the committee are, I consider, worthy of all praise. They have my entire sympathy and they shall have all the countenance and support it is in my power to afford them”. Really, this reference to Jotirao by the judge testifies to the fact mentioned by Jotirao in his statement submitted to the Hunter Commission: ‘I continued to work in them (schools) for nearly nine or ten years and that I and my wife worked together-for many years’.

It was a very sorry state of affairs and painful too, as Keer further writes: Jotirao finally withdrew himself from these societies when they were properly established, and when the cleavage between the committee and him widened. The Dnyanodaya was sorry that the natives of Poona were not helping the schools. It noted with regret that the Europeans had ceased helping the schools.
and added that it was a disgrace to the liberal and patriotic men of Poona that they were not helping the schools.

However, the Director of Public Instruction, held the view that a different kind of teaching was required for the low castes and as he wished to have one individual school in every district for the benefit of those who found book-learning above them and useless, he concluded in his Report on these schools: “My views on the subject have been confirmed by witnessing the signal failure of the Mahar and Mang schools, in Poona, from which Government aid was withdrawn a year ago”. It is painful to note that the school house could not be built as the money sanctioned by Government could not be secured, either on account of the downward trend and tone of the schools, or the dwindling interests of the committee. Sadashivrao Govande became the first General Secretary of the Sarvajanik Sabha in 1870, which mainly voiced the political grievances of Maharashtra.

Jyotibha is school met in a cottage on the site which Government had donated. Later, under Resolution No. 5421 of 24th September, 1874 the school was transferred on a special grant to the Local Fund Committee and in 1894 Government, under Education Department Resolution 1921 of November 13, 1894, ultimately made it over to the Poona Municipality. The other schools continued to work until 1869, when a mention was made in the report of the Director of Instruction of that year 1868-69 as follows: “Four Marath FIrds’ schools at Poona which receive a grant from the Dakshina Fund are not prospering”. 2
Money came in his way but Joti was a great success in his mission. He aroused public interest in the education of the Dalits.

Jotirao knew that besides illiteracy, there were many social evils in the society, which have crippled the whole social order. It was all due to ignorance, superstitions and traditional prejudicial thinking. In these days widow’s problem was there in the society. It was a great curse in the Hindu Social System. Due to early child marriage and many other social reasons those unfortunate women who lived as widows were not allowed to remarry. The dominating upper castes and the ruling chiefs even encouraged Sati tradition, against which foremost social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised his voice.

Jotirao’s mind now was attracted towards social problems. “As practical reformer, he virtually destroyed all religious dogmas that were against reason and opened the door to reforms. His aim was to reconstruct society on the basis of equality, liberty and reason”. In fact, enlightened by the sparks of Western education and thoughts, India had begun to march with the times and was throwing away her outworn cruel customs and obstinate traditions. Haunted and pressed by a personal grief caused by the death of his brother’s wife on the pyre of his brother, Ram Mohan Raoy had helped the Government abolish the practice of Sati. Government put an end to it in 1829. Yet, it seems, the cruel practice had not entirely disappeared until 1852. In the Telegraph and Courier, Bombay, news appeared in November 1852, that some English officers pulled, at Bhuj, an unfortunate woman off the pyre. She was quite willing to be saved; but the attendant Brahmins dragged her back, and on her second attempt to escape, they dashed out her brains.
Many more cruel superstitions in the society were yet crying for solution. Exposure of the sick on the banks of the Ganga had been regarded in Bengal as a religious duty and a high proof of the relatives affection for the dying man. The sick were not allowed to die in peace at home. It was the belief of many that if at the hour of death one thought about the Ganga one would attain the place in heaven. This pernicious custom was no less criminal than Sati, widow-burning, or infanticide of girls. The Calcutta Review published the horrifying accounts of these Ghat murders which involved crime and distress. The medieval custom of infanticide lingered in some lower sections of Hindu Society, but British rule put a stop to it.

Many superstitious women counted rice or wheat grains day and night till the full measure of one lakh of grains was complete, and then the whole thing was offered in worship to God. Wicks of various kinds numbering a lakh were offered to God. To offer grain or seeds devoutly to cows and eat the remnants which were excreted was a religious act. Brahmin priests would thrive on such superstitions of the people, and a period of such austerities would always end in a costly feast to Brahmins! All these superstitions Jotirao was preparing himself to attack. Ultimately, the power of Maharshtrian Brahmins, with the loss of their political supremacy, came under a critical review. Under British rule their religious and social power began to diminish. In 1827 the Shankaracharya visited Pune and demanded as dakshina any amount he chose. Some represented this matter to the British Collector of Poona who ordered that the Shankaracharya should accept what people offered him willingly. During Peshwa rule the Shankaracharya named any amount he pleased for his dakshina. Brahmins, too, were now made amenable to the law. They were now punished
even at Kashi where for years together these tiny gods on earth tried to escape punishment before the law.

Certainly the new modes of transport, new roads, Western education, railways and transfers of officers to different towns and centres gave a rude shock to the rigidity of old Indian customs and prejudices, and smote hard the old system of joint family. It began to crumble. Educated men began to think of having educated girls as their partners. For completing their primary education, girls naturally required some time. So the question of the minimum age for marriage arose. And along with it the question of widow-remarriage, too, pressed for a solution.

The society suffered so many ills. Though liberated from self-immolation on the funeral pyre of her husband, the widow faced from her young age widowhood till her death, the cruel tonsure of her head and the unjust laws of inheritance. A sad life, dependable on the head of the family, was her lot ordained by Hindu traditions and customs and the Shastras. Down to the ninth century the custom of tonsuring the widow was not in vogue. Only nuns and monks tonsured their heads. Tonsuring gave the widow an ascetic appearance. She was expected to lead a celibate life. So it was necessary to destroy her beauty.

Keer narrates that remarriage of child widows was allowed up to the year 1000. Earlier, widows were allowed to keep their hair but not to oil it. It became general from the year 1200. Originally, the custom of tonsuring was confined to Brahmins, but gradually it spread to the upper classes as a whole, and was
prevail more in Northern India than in Southern India. Shri Vaishnavas vehemently opposed the custom in Southern India.

Unfortunately the presence of the widow was regarded as a symbol of inauspiciousness. Early in the morning the sight of the widow was shunned as an ill-omen. Nobody would willingly see her face in the morning. She could not walk about freely at home. Regarded as impure, she remained humiliated and ostracized in a corner. She was deprived of her ornaments and was forbidden to dress well or to attend the marriage ceremony even of her own children or the thread ceremony, or any other auspicious function. She would waste away in a dark nook. She became an eyesore even to her parents. They often said that had this unfortunate girl died instead of her husband, they would have given their son-in-law another of their daughters in marriage. While the reformers said that only the marriage locked should be taken away from the widow after her husband’s death. Other things such as bangles, hair, the vermilion mark, and the hair knot which she used in her virgin state, she should retain; she had a right to them.

Poet after poet then sang of the terrible fate of the widows who either perished in utter sorrow and misery in a corner or ended in debauchery with their hands full of crimson blood of the embryos, bringing disgrace upon the families from which their fathers, mothers and husbands sprang. The propaganda for widow remarriage was started in Maharashtra as early as 1840. By writing a booklet in Marathi on widow re-marriage, championed the cause in Poona. Remarriage of two Brahmin widows took place at Belgaum in 1842. These marriages escaped, however, unnoticed. The Lokahitavadi said that the
prevailing condition of widows was unbearable, and searing aside the injunctions of Manu and Yajnavalkya, they should relieve widows from the tragic fate and miserable life. In the last week of October 1853 a meeting of the Hindu Community was held at the general assembly institution in Bombay “to consider the advisability of introducing the custom of remarriage of Hindu widows”. Over five hundred persons assembled. Gangadhar Appa Shastri was to have presided over the meeting; but he was absent owing to a fear of persecution even though he had advocated the remarriage of widows in his writings. Bhawani Vishwanath occupied the chair in his place. Orthodox Shastras had mustered strong to appose the reform; and so the meeting broke up after a heated debate.

To meet the situation the Widow Remarriage Act was passed by the Government of India on July 25, 1856. By this Act XV of 1856 any Hindu widow was free to marry if she liked, and her progeny would be looked upon by the law as entitled to succeed to her property as other Hindu Children could. England was preparing for the Divorce Act and the British Parliament passed it in 1857. In 1857 the Rev. Baba Padmanji wrote a novel entitled *Yamuna Paryatan*. This first Marathi novel put before the bar of world opinion the sorrows of the Hindu widow. The religions heads were cruel to the widows. For example in 1854 the Shanaracharya decided a case of a young widow, who had morally gone astray. On receiving some money as dakshina, he ordered her father to perform the holy rites by administering him water made pure by bathing his toe in it, and by five products of the cow. When however, the Brahmin asked for the purification of his daughter who was pregnant, the Shankaracharya ordered that the young widow should be kept in the hollow trunk of a tree and the trunk should be burnt all round then, if alive the widow should be tonsured and reclaimed to the society
after a feast was given to one thousand Brahmins. Every religious or social rite or ritual prescribed as feast or the distribution of money to Brahmins!

The cruel practice of tonsuring widows long persisted, although it began to break down rapidly in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The story is told of a Brahmins’ widowed sister who, in due course, died. As she had not undergone the rites of shaving her head, Brahmins refused to attend her funeral. Barbers would not shave the head of the dead body. So she was consigned to flames by her Shudra neighbours. At late as 1930s, a similar case of a Brahmin widow from Naisk was reported by Anant Hari Gadre, a champion of social equality and annihilation of untouchability in Maharashtra, in his famous weekly, Nirbhid. Because the widow had not had her head tonsured during her widowhood, the Nasik Brahmins refused to carry her dead body to the crematorium. They got the head of the body pitilessly shaved, and then the corpse was carried away and burnt.”

As Keer writes further: “Although this problem of remarriage of widows was confined to Brahmins and some other high caste Hindus, Jotirao was moved by the miserable condition of the widows, and often by their immoral behavior. Sometimes they were involved in child murder. A man of flaming indignation against injustice, Jotirao actively supported the movement for widow remarriage. He wanted to liberate the woman from her age-old shackles. The Indian woman was now at the crossroads.

The remarriage of a Shenavi widow took place in Poona on March 8, 1860, with a Shenavi widower. The widow was about eighteen. The Dnyanprakash published the news of the widow marriage and stated that it was
not necessary for it to express its opinion on it. It is said that Jotirao encouraged the marriage of a Shenavi widow in 1864, and it seems this must be the marriage often referred to. Great reforms are the result of a series of small pioneering efforts. Later, Vishnushastri Pandit, rightly called the Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar of Maharashtra, resigned his job in 1864 and devoted his life to the cause of widow remarriage. Moved by the tragedies and crimes which sometimes resulted from the misdeeds of widows, Jotirao, a wonderful combination of a dreamer and a man of action, who attached more importance to deeds that words, resolved to found an orphanage where widows would secretly come either for delivery or for keeping their babies. Consequently handbills advertising this bold announcement were pasted on the walls of houses in Poona. They read: “O you widows! Come and deliver here safely and secretly. Take your child or leave it here at your sweet will. The orphanage will do the looking after!” This news sent the Poona orthodox wild. They asked one another who its author could be. The reply often was: “Who else can it be ! No person except Jotiba. The perfidious villain !” Orthodox Hindus became red in the face the moment they heard Jotirao’s name. It is a disgrace the way he is behaving”, they said indignantly. Great social changes do not occur accidentally. They are willed by men of action.

More is, this social institution was the first of its kind in India. It was conducted by a non-Brahmin boldly, humanely, benevolently, especially for Brahmin widows, to save them from disgrace, avert the killing of embryos and children, and to save the lives of the widows who often either committed suicide or were involved in criminal proceedings. Although meant for pregnant widows the orphanage was indirectly guided by one great motive. It saved orphans from
going over to Christian missionaries. However, this time Jotirao formed no committee. He was conducting the orphanage without the help of Government or any Brahmin colleagues. His experience in conducting the girls schools and schools for the low castes under committees composed of Brahmins had burnt his fingers. So he scrupulously avoided placing the orphanage under a committee of Brahmin members. The men who could not save their sisters and mothers from mental tortures and from tonsures were quite unfit, he said, to become members of that Institutions. Several widows delivered their children safely in this orphanage. Thus Jotirao became a savior of the unwilling sinners. The orphanage continued its noble work, and eminent men showed keen interest in it.

Just then Jotirao’s father fell ill. Govindrao’s other son Rajram lived with him. He looked after the property, and his household affairs were running smoothly. Yet he was grieved that Jotirao had no child. The old man advised him fervently to marry a second time, so that he might have children. He tried to impress the point through Jotirao’s father-in-law. That family also agreed. But when they asked Jotirao to consider their suggestion and insisted that he should respond to it, Jotirao was perturbed. He said that if a pair had no child, it would be unkind to charge a woman with barrenness. It might be that the husband also was unproductive owing to his defects. In that case if the women went in for a second husband how would her husband take it? Would he not feel insulted and humiliated? According to him, it was a cruel practice for a man to marry a second time because he had no issue from his first wife.

Bold and brave Jotirao lived up to his philosophy. But that was not the case with his generation. Describing the moral condition of the generation of
Krishnashastri Chiploonkar and pointing to the life of this Pandit, Lokmanya Tilak aptly said that the generation of Chiploonkar had made vice fashionable in Pune. Jotirao stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries in respect of high moral conduct, and so he outlived the dangerous attacks made by the rabid reactionaries. So Jotirao did not marry a second time and fulfil his father’s desire. His decision came as a sore disappointment to his father. His illness became prolonged, and he dies. Jyotirao was a true social reformer. He did perform the obsequies of his father, but not as ordained in the Brahmin Shastras. In accordance with his rational view of life, he performed them. He did not believe in offering lumps of flour to crows as an oblation to the deceased and his ancestors. Instead he stood a dinner to poor, crippled people and distributed books and other articles to students. On the death anniversary of his father, he gave a dinner to poor people and distributed books among poor students.

As usual, there were some family bickering and disputes about property; but he refused to fight over them with the family of his uncle. Children were the wealth of the nation and the wealth of the nation was his wealth. He looked after them in the orphanage. For money he had no love. He tried to live by his own hard work, never leaned on others for his livelihood. For ages it was the practice of the Shudras who rose to eminence by virtue of their learning or abilities to join the higher class, to assimilate themselves with the Brahmins and to forget and neglect the class from which they sprang. Almost all Indian ancient famous saints and seers afford such illustrations. But Jotirao was the only eminent man from the lower classes who had ample opportunities to attain prosperity and to shine in the galaxy of the brilliant men of the upper classes, and yet he neither
joined them nor made common cause with them. The education and welfare of the lower classes absorbed his thoughts.

Savtiribai his wife looked unflaggingly after the children in the orphanage as if she were their mother. She had no child; but with her hind and generous disposition she tenderly and lovingly cherished the infants. It was her practice to invite, from time to time, all neighbouring children to dinner. She was happiest and smiled her sweetest when she was left among children. So dearly she loved children. She would invite her female neighbours to help her to dress and feed the children. For several years she had worked in the girl’s school conducted by her husband. One can imagine the significance of her work when one knows that until 1873 a woman’s appointment to the post of teacher was noted in leading papers like the Native Opinion as a matter of respect and pride”.

According to Keer Jotirao played an important role in reforming the society. These Sledge-Hammer blows delivered by Jotirao shook to their foundations the citadels of prejudices and privilege, ignorance and oppression. The cracks of his whip resounded throughout Maharashtra and Jotirao, accustomed now to the storm and stress of public life, came forward to give a still greater shock to those who were capable of thinking and reflecting.

In those days, Maharashtra was awakening to new and progressive ideals. In Bombay, after the breakdown of the Paramahansa Sabha, which was socially a revolutionary institution, it was reborn on March 31, 1867, in a more mild and evolutionary form as Prarthana Samaj. Most of the leaders and advocates of the Paramahansa Sabha were the founders of the Prarthana Samaj. Institutions are children of ideas, said aptly Carlyle.
The Paramahansa Sabha, a theistic society, laid emphasis on equality in social relations whereas the Prarthana Samaj although believing in social equality, was more inclined to spiritual ideals. It was the difference between dodaba’s temperament and that of Dr. Atmaram Pandurang Tarkhadkar, Waman Abaji Modak, M.G. Ranade and Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar. In their preliminary meetings some of them thought of laying emphasis on social matters like abolition of the caste system, encouragement of widow remarriage, promotion of female education and abolition of child-marriage; but in the end it was decided to lean more towards spiritual than towards social ideals. Although he was one of its inspirers and pillars, Ranade joined the Prathana Samaj in 1870. The founders of the Paramahansa Sabha were chiefly social reformers whereas the founders of the Prarthana Samaj were mostly spiritual reformers.

Naturally Jotirao did not join the Pune Branch of the Prarthana Samaj when it was started on December 4, 1870, by its Pune worker some of whom were his friends and sympathizers. He was a believer in theism, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; but he did not join an institution which turned mainly to the pulpit and to prayer, and not to the masses. Though these angelic leaders were, in the words of Sir Narayan Chadavarkar who was himself one of the worthies of the Prarthana Samaj, associated with all that was good and noble and lead a life of piety and service, almost all of them were Government servants and armchair-liberals having no active interest in the uplift of the masses. Jotirao knew this well."

By now Pune had undergone a change. On April 2, 1870, the Sarvajanik Sabha was founded in Pune and its two stalwarts, Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi alias
Sarvajanik Kaka and Sadashiva Govande, took upon themselves the task of representing the grievances of the people and of the press. Moro Vithal Walvekar and Sakharam Yeshwatn Paranjpay, two of Jotirao’s colleagues, went to Bombay in search of service. Sarvajanik Kaka – Public Uncle – and Govande did their outmost to represent the grievances of the people. Their prestige and fame became so powerful that they body organized the Indian Press against Lytton’s Press Act, took to Swadeshi propaganda, first of its kind in India, and gave expression through the Sarvajanik Sabha to the people’s ills.

Jyotirao’s friend Govande was now turning to the philosophy of Vedanta, a world-negating attitude. His father had turned a recluse and had rested eternally in the court-yard of his house. Govande later was entangled in the coils of a certain recluse and lived the rest of his life with a world-negating attitude. Yet Govande had developed into a very influential leader with his colleague Sarvajanik Kaka, who was a man of boundless energy, patriotic spirit and bubbling originality. On his arrival in Pune in 1871, Ranade, with his scintillating personality and his all-round philosophy, gave a fillip to the work of the Sarvajanik Sabha.

Pune had established, early in the year 1852, its first political institution called the Deccan Association. Britain was then considering the nature of constitutional changes to be effected in India in 1853. This first political organization in Maharashtra was mostly dominated by Sardars, Jagirdars and young patriotic men. They had received a liberal English education and wanted to represent, on behalf of the natives of India, the grievances of the India people to the authorities in England. Government, however, passed a wedge through it
by offering some members better prospects on their transfer. And it died out within four months.

Much earlier, one Moreshwarshastri Sathe had established an institution called Kalyanonnayaka Sabha. According to it, only Sanskrit literature contained the best and most useful knowledge in the world. Its members were bitter opponents of widow-remarriage. They wished Hindus widows to give up salt-eating and waste away fasting and praying. There was a political association called the Poona Association established in 1867; but it ended its life without creating much stir and gave place to the Sarvajanik Sabha. An institution named Veda Samachar was started in 1865 at Madras. Its birth was the result, as was the birth of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj, of a visit to Madras by Keshub Chandra Sen who was a great revolutionary leader of the Brahmo Samaj. The Veda Samachar had nothing to do with the Vedas. Its members wanted, without evoking the least resistance, to reform social customs. They breathed and preached gradualism. This was the picture of social reform movement in India in Jotirao’s time.

In fact Jotirao had no faith in the ideals or philosophies of these organizations which were interested in the grievances of the higher classes and could not care to understand the ills of the lower class, who never appeared in their programme and propaganda. It was, then, no wonder that he should describe the Sarvajanik Sabha as the Bhat (Brahmin) Sabha.⁶

Certainly, M.K. Ranade was a strong isled man while growing to be a reformer of great vision and great thought. He was the doyen of Indian thinkers and reformers. His broad-minded outlook brought him in contact with Jotirao.
They both visited each other’s home. They held each other in respect. When Ranade visited Jotirao’s house he was paid the honour which he deserved so eminently. Ranade activated one hand of the society of Maharashtra through the help of Sarvajanik Sabha and the Prarthana Samaj while Jotirao activised the other. Ranade was naturally interested in the activities of Jotirao and offered him help and sympathy.

Jotirao and Ranade both welcomed new thought and were on the right path to the salvation of the nation. Each held a torch of reform in his hand. Both were intellectually and spiritually fresh and alert. Ranade was a man of light, learning and foresight. Jotirao and insight, valour and vision. Ranade wanted to remove the social ills and liberate the society and not to remold the social structure. Jotirao wanted to pull it down and build anew. Both believed in making society better fitted for a new life. Both had respect for human dignity and had faith in essential equality between man and man. In their scheme of things nobody would be below; ever body would be with you and not against you. They obeyed the dictates of conscience, the divine spark in them.

Ranade, one of the greatest men of his day in India, was drawn to Jotirao can be seen in the farmer’s social and political ideology which fully justified the movement started by Jotirao for social equality and social justice, for promotion of rational thinking and removal of social justice, for promotion of rational thinking and removal of social injustice. “You cannot have”, observed Ranade the great sage and seer, “a good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor an you be fit to exercise political rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good
economic system when you social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideals are low and groveling, you cannot succeed in social, economic or political spheres. The interdependence is not an accident, but is the law of nature”. In January 1871 a social institution called the Stree Vicharawati Sabha was established in Poona by Saraswatibai Govande, wife of Sadashivrao Govande and friend of Savitribai Phule, and Saraswatibai Joshi, wife of Sarvajanik Kaka. At the instance of Ranade and assisted by Sarvajanik Kaka, Poona women held a function of April 25, 1873, to distribute vermilion. The Depressed Classes women were given it at an isolated place while the non-Brahmin women who were at first suspicious of the treatment they would receive at the hands of Brahmin women, joined them there. This was a unique function. It is not known whether Savitribai Phule attended it.

Immediately after the establishment of the Stree Vicharavati Sabha, female students of the Native Female Normal School at Calcutta established an institution and held their first meeting on April 14, 1871. It was attended by twenty women. Babu Keshub Cahndra Sen urged them to be prepared to work for the uplift of the natives. So in this way reforms were going on during Phule’s age.

From the very beginning “Jotirao had been preparing the ground for a social reform movement. With a view to freeing the lower classes from ignorance, prejudice, illiteracy and caste-feeling, and from the thralldom of Brahminism, he had written books and pamphlets on the subject. He was busy writing a book, parts of which he completed in August and December 1872. The first part of the book contained his proclamation under which he challenged
Parashuram to appear before society as he was described by Brahmin scriptures and *Puranas* to have been living for ages. This was unmistakably a dig Jotirao had at the Brahmins, as he wanted to annihilate the doctrine of incarnation in Brahminism.

The other part comprised his manifesto relating to his readiness to regard any man as a member for his family and to have food with him if he was convinced that the man led a virtuous life, had faith in God, and was following an honest calling. Jotirao declared that he himself had broken the shackles imposed upon him by Brahmin scriptures and come out of the prison of slavery. He denounced all Brahmin scriptures and their teaching which had condemned the Shudras as the slaves of Brahmins and he declared as his brothers all those who treated him as his equal, even if from another country.

Those who their behavior imposed humiliation on others he would leave to act as they liked; but he himself refused to discard the god-given sacred rights of Man. If any Shudra willing to break the shackles of Brahmin thralldom, informed him of his desire to do so, he would be grateful. Referring to the manifesto issued by Jotirao, a Brahmin journal of Pune, *Lakakalyanechchu*, sarcastically observed: “Our well-known Jotirao who is a man of great learning and great though a great research scholar and a great philosopher, sent a letter for publication. The letter was full of self-praise and Brahmin hatred. We have no place for this letter for which we hope Phule would excuse us.”

A Christian journal called *Shubhavartamana* from Kolhapur published Jotirao’s manifesto as no Hindu editor would publish it. Although his Hindu contemporary might think it reviling, in its view it was a worthy and brave
announcement. As Jotirao did not believe in caste system, he had courageously declared that he would have food with anybody. The journal expressed a hope that the number of such men would increase in the land. These two announcements were parts of his book *Slavery Within the Indian Empire, under the cloak of Brahminism*. It was published in June 1873, and it at once became a controversial book. It is for the first time here that Jotirao who previously signed as Jyoti now signed and put his name on the book as Jyotirao.

It was a sequel to his three books on the same subject. Liberty, equality, and fraternity is the burden of his books. Liberty is essential to every man. To bestow, the book observes, liberty on a man who does not enjoy it is the duty of every good man under the sun. It is a great achievement to recapture the God given rights of every human being who has been deprived of it. A self-respecting man would not falter to do this act. Every human being needs proper rights for his or her happiness. To confer freedom on every human being by liberating him from injustice, is the main object of noble men who undertake such great tasks at the risk of their lives.

He Changing social condition of America inthenced Jotirao sang the glory of the American heroes and statesmen who nobly and untiringly fought for the liberation of the Negroes. The poet in Jyotirao imagined the divine satisfaction that prevailed on the day when Negro mothers met their sons and daughters, wives their husbands, sisters their brothers and men their relatives. It must have been a glorious spectacle, he imagined.

The brutality which skinned their backs, burnt their skins and broke their limbs and diminished in the land of the new world, Jotirao rejoiced to note it. He
visualized a society in which the peasant and worker were freed from the Brahmin thralldom that crushed them under its various forms-dark superstitions, colossal ignorance, endless religious rites, never-ending debts; and the fear of God”. Inspired by the glorious triumph achieved by Lincoln, who had abolished slavery in 1863 in America, Jotirao dedicated the book:

To

The good people of the United States
As a token of admiration for their
Sublime disinterested and self-sacrificing
Devotion in the cause of Negro
Slavery; and with an eamest desire,
that my countrymen may take
their noble example as their guide
in the emancipation of these Shudra Brethren from the trammels of
Brahmin thralldom.

The book open with a quotation from Homer: “The day that reduces a man to slavery takes from him the half of his virtue”. The book is written in dialogue. It is divided into sixteen chapters; the first nine explain the history of Brahmin domination in India as interpreted by it author”.

Keer has summarized Joti’s philosophy as per narrations in his book. “The Brahmins invaded India, the original cradle of their race being an arid, sandy and mountainous region. They were imbued with every notion of self, extremely cunning, arrogant and bigoted. They fought the Kshatriyas who
comprised the Shudras and Ati-Shudras. The Kshatriyas were a hardy brave people. They offered heroic resistance to the Aryan invaders, but were defeated. Their best, beloved, equitable, just, brave and powerful king was Bali, whose empire stretched from the Himalayas to Ceylon.

They came Waman, leader of the Brahmins. According to *Puranic* scriptures the four preceding incarnations of Vishnu perhaps related to the evolution of Man. There is a story that Waman tricked Bali out of his empire either at a game of dice or in the form of a Brahmin beggar who asked for three paces of land; the two paces occupied heaven and earth and the third he kept on the head of Bali and Bali was pushed down into the internal region of the earth. Jotirao ridiculed the idea, asking the *puranic* authors whether Waman was greater than earth and heaven.

Jotirao said that Bali, his hero, fell fighting in a battle with Waman. Bali became an immortal king. The later Brahmin scriptures incorporated his name in a list of seven immortal personages – Ashvathama, Bali Vyas, Hanuman, Bibhishana, Kripa and Parashuram. The non-Brahmins have been reviving their dreams of a *Bali raj every year* saying on Dashhara day: “Let all troubles and misery go, and the kingdom of Bali come”. The last of the Aryan leaders Parashuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, who butchered myriads of men and defenseless innocent children and pregnant women of the Kshatriyas, was so selfish, infamous, cruel and inhuman that the author Jotirao was of the opinion that the cruelties perpetrated by Nero and Alaric sank into insignificance before his ferocity. So he held that Parashuram was more a fiend than a god.
The Aryan Brahmins, opined Jotirao, held the Kshatriyas in great aversion; their hatred divided the Kshatriyas into Shudras and Ati-Shudras in order to weaken their forces, and they subjugated them. According to Jotirao, Shudras and Ati-Shudras belonged to one race. Because they bitterly opposed Brahmin suzerainty, they were dubbed Dasyus, Asuras, Rakshasas and Dasas, whereas they regarded themselves as Devas. They forbade the Shudras to touch Ati-Shuras, and the Ati-Shudras being deprived of the means of livelihood, were obliged to eat carrion.

Then the Brahmins composed works. They prohibited the Shudras and Ati-Shudras from reading scriptures, amassing wealth, and from following certain occupations or professions. They added from generation to generation incredible legends to the fabricated tales in their holy books. Jotirao therefore denounced Manusmriti as an unholy book.

The Brahmins established the caste system arrogating to themselves the position of earthly gods, the possession and enjoyment of the rarest gifts of fortune, and the highest rights and privileges. The commonest rights of humanity were denied to the Shudras. Thus they reduced Shudras and Atishudras to slavery and penury. They forbade them to read their holy works, so that the hidden blasphemous lies of the Brahmin scriptures should not be exposed and their myths exploded.  

“According to the Brahmin Shastras”, observed Jotirao, in fact Brahmins were not subject to the law. It was enjoined that “if a Brahmin kills a cat, the bird, or a frog, a dog, a lizard, an owl, a crow or a Shudra”, he was absolved of his sin by performing a sort of fasting penance, perhaps for a few hours or a day.
requiring not much labour or trouble. On the other hand, a Shudra killer of a Brahmin was put to death, for the killing of a Brahmin was considered the most heinous crime one could commit. The power and prestige of the Brahmins is shown by a story in which Bhrugu, a Brahmin sage, gave a kick on the breast of the god Vishnu. Jotirao congratulated the British Government on having set aside the preposterous, unjust and inhuman penal enactments of the Peshwas and on having established equitable laws. Jotirao cited from various Brahmin scriptures instances in which the superiority or excellence of the Brahmins was enjoined on pain of divine displeasure. These were the divine rights of the Brahmins.

The Brahmin is styled as the Lord of the universe, even equal to God Himself. He is to be worshipped, served and respected by all. A Brahmin can do no wrong. Never shall the king slay a Brahmin, though he has committed all possible crimes. To save the life of a Brahmin any falsehood may be told. There is no sin in it. No one is to take away anything belonging to a Brahmin. A king though dying from want, must not receive any tax from a Brahmin, nor suffer him to be afflicted with hunger, or the whole kingdom will be afflicted with famine.

The feet of a Brahmin are holy. In his right foot reside the holy waters of all places of pilgrimages, and by dipping it into water he makes it as holy as the waters at the holiest of shrines. A Brahmin may compel a man of a servile class to perform servile duty, because such a man was created by the Almighty only for the purpose of serving Brahmins. A Shurdra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from a state of servitude; for being born in a state which is natural to him, by whom can he be divested of his natural attributes.
Let a Brahmin not give temporal advice nor spiritual counsel to a Shudra. No superfluous accumulation of wealth shall be made by a Shudra, even though he has the power to make it, since a servile man who has amassed riches becomes proud, and by his insolence or neglect he gives pain even to Brahmins. If a Shudra cohabits with a Brahmin adulteress, his life is to be taken. But if a Brahmin goes even unto the lawful wife of a Shudra he is exempted from all corporal punishment”.

The main object of these injunctions, ordinances and prohibitions, observed Jotirao, was to dupe the minds of the illiterate and ignorant and rivet firmly upon them the chains of perpetual bondage. “This mass of legends and idle phantasies and blasphemous writings were palmed off on the ignorant masses as of divine inspiration, or as the acts of the deity himself. The most immoral, inhuman, unjust actions and deeds have been all attributed to that Being who is our Creator, Governor and Protector; and who is All Holiness Himself”.

Jyotirao attributed to the caste system based on the selfish superstitions and bigotry of the Brahmins, the evils under which India had been groaning for ages past. The Indian rypt consisting of mostly Shudras and Ati-Shudras, Jotirao observed, had been a proverbial milch cow. Those who held sway over the rypt cared only to fatten themselves on the products of the sweat of their brow, without caring for their welfare or condition.

The Brahmin despoiled the lower classes not only in his capacity as a priest, but also in the capacity of a Government Officer, as the Brahmins had
monopolized all higher places of emoluments. He was the master, the ruler, the village hereditary accountant, the village Police Patil being a tool in his hands. He was the temporal and spiritual adviser of the *ryots*, the money-lender in their difficulties. He set them by the ears and fomented trouble among them. In the capacity of a Mamlatdar, a supervisor in the Engineering Department, an officer in the Revenue and Public Works Departments he was there to exploit him, in league with the Kulkarni, or the lawyer or the money-lender who were Brahmins. So there was nepotism, bribery and jobbery because of the domination of one caste in the administration. Jotirao condemned this gang of officers as village demons. He suggested to Government to appoint Englishmen on the basis of *Inam* lands or pensions to report on village matters.

The Western ideas and civilization were exercising their influence over the Brahmins, and they were not as superstitious, cruel and intolerant as they were under Peshwa Rule. "Is the Brahmin, "he asked, "inclined to make atonement for his past selfishness? Perhaps it would have been useless to repine over what has been suffered and what has passed away had the present state been all that is desirable". "We know, "he observed, "perfectly well that the Brahmin will not descent from his self-raised high pedestal and meet his Kunbi and low caste brethren on an equal footing without a struggle. Even the educated Brahmin who knows his exact position and how he has come by it will not condescend to acknowledge the errors of his forefathers and will not willingly forgo the long cherished false notions of his won superiority. At present not even one has the moral courage to do what duty demands, and as long as this continues, one sect distinguishing and degrading another sect, the condition of the Shudras will remain unaltered, and India will never advance in greatness or prosperity".¹⁰
“Jotirao therefore appealed to Government to provide the Shudras with educational facilities, and to dispel their ignorance and prejudices. The Government should care for the education of the lower classes. It was its duty to do so because most of its revenue came from the labour of the *ryot*, from the sweat of his brow. It was anything but just and equitable to expend profusely a large portion of Government revenue on the education of the higher classes who, it was believed, would in time vend learning without money and without price. According to Jotirao, the theory of filtration was wrong and its philosophy utopian. The best way to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the people was to spread instruction among the masses.

Demanding then the abolition of the virtual monopoly of the Brahmins in the administration, he advocated the recruitment of candidates from other classes. He suggested that candidates from the lower classes should be selected, trained and appointed to the posts of Kulkarnis, Patils and Teachers. He raised no objection to Brahmins getting posts in proportion to their population. He said it was agonizing to see that there was not a Mahar or Mang graduate. Brahmin teachers had brought disgrace upon the Education Department by creating this situation.

How Jyotirao was justified in making his attack can be seen from the fact that until the year 1881-82 there was no student from the Ati-Shudras in either any of the high schools or colleges of the Bombay Presidency. He also demanded the establishment of village schools without Brahmin teachers because they either discouraged the lower class pupils or frightened them into quitting the schools.
Jyotirao urged the necessity of nominating men from the lower classes to Municipal bodies to look after the interests and amenities of the lower classes, such as adequate supply of water and light. It was his experience that because of absence of representatives of the lower classes on Municipal bodies, the poor classes were not provide even the minimum supply of water. When the Ati-Shudras and the poor classes of Pune started using cisterns in the localities of the Brahmins, they obtained a supply of water for their own cisterns. He felt that it was the bounden duty of the Municipality to provide proper lighting and an adequate water supply to the lower classes.

Jyotirao wrote that the practice of calling the roll for the criminal tribes who committed robberies was not improper; but he held the view that the same practice would have been not improper in case of pregnant Brahmin widows whose crimes were more sinful and harmful to society. Jotirao further observed that had the Brahmins been real patriots they would not have reduced the Shudras and Ati-Shudras to slavery and regarded even pure spring water at their hands as more impure than the urine of animals.

Jyotirao observed that the Brahmins were brothers, but he was ashamed to call them so. He would accept them as brothers even though they had harassed the Shudras in the past, if they would thenceforward be just in their dealings by giving up their selfish motives. It was his firm belief that the press manned by Brahmins would never help the lower classes by exposing the black deeds of Brahmins. The lower classes, who were in the main illiterate, did not know whether the printed word was man or donkey.
Jyotirao believed that the Vedas were not God-inspired. They were man-made. The Vedas fomented divisions in society. The theory that the Brahmins sprang from the mouth of Brahma, Kshatriyas from his arms, Shudras from his feet was a galling and flagrant myth. As according to him, Narada stirred up quarrels among the Kshatriyas and made the world safe for the Brahmins, he condemned him as a villain. He condemned *Manusmriti* as an unholy work which prescribed slavery for the Shudras. He had nothing but praise for the mighty personality of the Buddha. The Brahmins, in order to establish their supremacy again, gave up beef-eating and wine, and abosorbing some tenets of Buddhism, they revised their holy works and ultimately defeated Buddhism by cruelly persecuting its followers.

Jyotirao denounced the Maharashtrian saints Mukundraj, Dnyaneshwar and Ramdas who did not have the courage to condemn the wicked acts of the Brahmins. These saints described the wickedness of the Brahmins as *Karmamarga* and their Vedanta as the path of knowledge and did not raise their finger against the exploitation of the Shudras by the Brahmins. So his verdict was that these Maharashtrian saints helped to perpetuate the hold of the Brahmins over other classes.

The message, through his book, to the Shudras and Ati-Shudras was that they should educate themselves as long as British rule was there in the land. It was not certain how long that rule would last. But during that time they should be all educated and prepared to fight their battle for liberty, equality and fraternity by dispelling ignorance and prejudices, destroying the coils of slavery entwined...
around them by the Brahmins. It Was God’s wish, he observed, that Nana Saheb Peshwa was defeated in the revolt of 1857.

“My object in writing the present volume”, observed Jotirao “is not only to tell my Shudra brethren how they have been duped by the Brahmins, but also to open the eyes of Government to their pernicious system of high class education, which broad-minded and highly sympathetic statesmen like Sir George Cambell, the present Lieut. Governor of Bengal, are finding to be highly mischievous and prejudicial to the interests of Government. I sincerely hope that Government will before long see the error of their ways, trust less to writers or men who look through high class spectacles only, and achieve the glory of emancipating my Shudra brethren from the trammels of bondage which the Brahmins have raised around them like the coils of a serpent”.

Further, “The Shudras are”, Jotirao concluded with confidence, “the life and sinews of the country, it is to them alone and not to the Brahmins, that the Government must ever look, to help them in their difficulties, financial as well as political. If the hearts and minds of the Shudras are made happy and contented, the British Government need have no misgiving about their loyalty in the future”. He cried vociferously for mass education and loudly denounced the theory of filtration, but in vain”.

“Later Jotirao’s proposition that the Shudras were originally Kshatriyas was amply proved by no less a scholar than Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It was the confirmed view of Jotirao that the ancient history of India was nothing but the struggle between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The meaning he attaches to the non-Vedic deities is very important from the sociological point of view. According
to Jotirao the festivals of Dashhara and Diwali, and the sacredness of Sunday are non-Brahmin in their origin; Khandoba, Jotiba, Bairoba, and Martand Malhar are the gods of non-Brahmins.

Keer further writes that in the supplement to the *Government Gazetter*, Bombay dated the 25th December 1873, some details regarding the book *Slavery* are given. A Government Officer, probably helped by a Brahmin Assistant, described the book as philippic on Brahminism, a discourse full of invective. Jotirao issued one thousand copies of the book. It contained one hundred and seventeen pages demy. It was printed at the Poona City Press. It was registered for copyright. The price of the book was annas twelve; for Shudras and Ati-Shudras it was annas six.

The *Government Gazette* further observed: “It is a most virulent production; mostly consisting of the most wild and ludicrous fancies. In a few places it is even indecent”. The language of Jotirao in *Slavery* is crude in some places. But the Government reviewer lacked insight and therefore missed its social content. It casts also a revealing light on the mind of the Government employees against whom Jotirao so furiously fought. The book was reviewed by R.B. Gunjikar in the *Vividhadnyan Vistar*. This monthly magazine was for ‘ladies and gentlemen’. The book was meant for peasants, the Ati-Shudras and their tyrants. So the task of the reviewer naturally became pungent. He reminded his readers of similar booklets issued by Jotirao. The review piously said that this book was, as all Jotirao’s previous books were, foolish and full of invective. It was apparent, Gunjikar opined sarcastically, that such a book betraying such a colossally incomparable knowledge of language, religion,
history, and logic must have been born out of the brains of a jealous, disappointed, dwarfish Christian, newly converted but frustrated, and Phule must be a mere tool in his hand.

The reviewer emphatically said that the book wanted to destroy Brahmins root and branch, that they should not be given shelter of any kind, whatsoever; that they should be deprived of all their rights, and that Christian missionaries should be invested with these rights. He condemned the book, saying that it was full of invective, indecent expressions and false statements. The *Vividhadnayan Vistar* got an opportunity to have a tilt at the *Satya Depika*. Bombay, a Christian weekly, in which Jotirao’s book was advertised. The *Shree* on the front page of the *Vividhadnyan Vistar* had become a disturber of the Biblical beatitude of the *Satya Depika*, So the reviewer seized the opportunity of blaming the editor of the *Satya Dipika* for having published in his journal an advertisement of Jotirao’s book which was according to *Vividhadnyan Visitar*, full of wicked thoughts. The editor of the *Satya Dipika*, Gunjikar added, had boasted of its rules of moral conduct and had already published a notification that only good books, excluding novels, were advertised at cheap rates. Gunjikar asked the editor of the *Satya Dipika* whether Jotirao’s book was more valuable than a novel because it abused the Brahmins.

A reader wrote to the *Dnyanprakash* complaining of Jotirao who had priced *Slavery* at annas twelve for Brahmins. He himself had been to Jotirao’s shop and purchased a copy for annas twelve although the price was annas six for the Shudras. Jotirao recognized him as a Brahmin customer and therefore charged him annas twelve. On reading the book the Brahmin realized why its
price was kept at annas twelve for Brahmins. The Brahmin reader was not surprised that the book was not discussed in the *Dnyanprakash* or in any other paper, as it was modeled after missionary booklets written to condemn the Brahmins. But if, the reader of the *Dnyanprakash* said, the author had sold it at low price as did the missionaries theirs, the book would have had a wide circulation and Jotirao would easily gain his object. The Brahmin customer of Jotirao was fully justified in his complaint against him. Being a Brahmin, he never imagined that slavery would cost so much.

Jyotirao’s message to do away with an intermediary in religious ceremonies was practiced by a goldsmith at a village near Dapoli in Ratnagiri District. He performed the obsequies of his relation with the help of Sanskrit works. Some letters appeared in the *Dnyanprakash* protesting against this adventurous pandit. As to Jotirao’s violent opposition to the theory of filtration, he proved to be in the right. Ram Mohun Roy, Macaulay and other prominent educationists of Jyotirao’s day were in favour of the theory of filtration. “In many respects”, observes Mr. H.V. Hampton, “Ram Mohun Roy was far in advance of his age, but in so far as he believed that education must begin at the top and spread downwards, he was in agreement with the prevalent opinion of his day. With many others he considered that culture and useful knowledge would inevitably ‘filter’ down from above and, gradually at first and then more rapidly, would reach the masses. Subsequent history has shown that those who pinned their faith to the filtration theory were too optimistic”.

Jyotirao was no research scholar, he was no pandit, he was no philogoist. He wanted to condemn the theory of incarnation, which was not in existence until
the days of the *Mahabharat*. He had no knowledge of theology. His stand that the Chitpavan Brahmins came from the east coast of Africa or from Iran, or Egypt, or Palestine, was not refuted by any historian. On the contrary, historians and research scholars have given proofs and corroborating facts. V.N. Mandlik in his article in the journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1865, R.B. Gunjikar in his book *Saraswati Mandal*, Lt.-Col. Mark Wilks in the *Historical Sketch of the South India*, Edward Moor in the *Hindu Pantheon*, the Rev. William Taylor’s *Oriental Manuscripts* and several others have upheld the same view.

Apart from historical corroboration or otherwise, if this argument used for attacking the Brahmins is applied to non-Brahmins, against the Hill Tribes of India, who would remain there to boast that they were original inhabitants of this land? No doubt the bitterness in the tone of the book was the reaction of the mind of Jyotirao to the prevailing social condition. For this bitterness, the background of Peshwa rule was responsible. Jotirao revolted against priest craft, the gods of the Brahmins, the scriptures, the *Puranas* as he thought they were dripping with tears and the blood of generations of Shudras and Ati-Shudras who had been their victims for ages. British rule had brought with it justice, an independent judiciary, and scientific outlook, and stood in bold relief against the background of unrest, arson and injustice of Peshwa Rule.

He was very happy to see that British rule had brought education. Science and justice for all; but he overrated its blessings. He could not realize that the British god of Progress was sitting on the Indian caste system from
which he did not care to alight, and so there would be no equitable progress for all the classes in India.

He believed with Ranade and the Lokahitavadi that God had sent British rule to India to reform the Hindus by correcting their foolishness, dispelling their ignorance, and by removing their prejudices. That was no mean gain. Jotirao was sure that some day British rule would end. His fight for the emancipation of Shudras and Ati-Shudras, who were peasants and landless classes, was against their exploiters, and in those days they happened to be Brahmins. The men who were running the administration of the British were almost all Brahmins. The money lenders and Government Officers such as Police Officers, Shirastedars, Mamlatdars and Assistant Judges were Brahmins. They all combined to keep the lower classes in bondage and exploited them jointly. Brahmin priests, money lenders and lawyers were always there in every village to fleece them of money. Their lands and property were defrauded by this trio. So the fight assumed the colour of communalism, though its trend was economic and social.

According the Keer the title of the book is more colourful than outlandish. Slavery connotes a condition of bondage in which human beings are bought and sold, and forced to work without payment. That kind of slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, in Russia in 1863 and in America in 1883. This was not exactly the case in India. Jotirao attacked and exposed the religious and social slavery practiced in India by Brahmins under the cloak of religion. He himself tells us that: “My object in writing the present volume is not only to tell my Shudra brethren how they are duped by the Brahmins....” Under the cloak of religion the Shudras and Ati-Shudras were made to slave for the Brahmins; the
Untouchables, a section of their co-religionists, were treated worse than slaves; but they were not bought and sold.

It is said Jotirao derived inspiration for his drive against social injustice from the struggle in the U.S.A. The Lokahitavadi pointed out to American freedom struggle and said that if the British did not yield power when the people of India would be able to govern themselves, they would do what the Americans had done in America to throw off their yoke. The impact of the freedom struggle of the U.S.A. and of her declaration of the abolition of slavery on the minds of Jotirao’s generation was tremendous. Certainly, Jyotirao made the Brahmins, especially the Chitpavans (without mentioning them), the target of his attack. The Chitpavans are not mentioned in the Vedas. The Vedas were not their creation. It is not certain whether they were responsible for all scriptures and puranas. Until the seventeenth century their names do not appear in history. During the days of Shivaji and Sambhaji they had no political power. They were not treated as their equals by the other Brahmins in Maharashtra. They ran errands and were also cooks by calling.

It was on the advent of Balaji Vishvanath as Peshwa on the scene of Maharashtra politics that they found themselves emerging as a respectable and powerful community. It was all right till the accession to the Gaddi of the Peshwa Balaji Bajirao. He pressed the other Brahmins to give a status of equality to the Chitpavans. The Brahmins, who had kept their holy books their rituals, dogmas and ideas of highness and lowness in their houses, opened out now and began the karmakandas which had been suppressed since the days of the Buddha’s rise and the rise of Mahanubhava, Gosavi, Nath and Bhagwat sects. The
communal tension, even among the Brahmins of different lines, thus became aggravated, and the situation rapidly deteriorated after the death of Peshwa Madhavrao. The other castes, too, were harassed by the Chitpavan Brahmin rulers. The Nasik Brahmins had forbidden Bajirao II to visit a certain sacred Ghat.

In Northern India, the Brahmins did not differ from the Kshatriyas and Shudras in their dress, food and behavior. But in Western India, to the South of the Narmada, Brahmins completely turned to vegetarian life, regarded other castes as Shudras, and when they won political power in Western India, the unification of these two powers in them, priestly and political, came to be hated by other castes. Jotirao’s life was a reaction to this situation”, writes Dhananjaya Keer in an impressive way on the social reform movement started by him during the second half of the nineteenth century.\(^\text{12}\)
NOTES AND REFERENCES


