CHAPTER – IV

Interrogating Inherent Contradictions:
A Comparative Perspective on Marx and Phule

Comparative perspective of Marx’s and Phule’s ideological and philosophical concepts is necessary in order to understand the resistant and revolutionary tenets of both in combination. The present study believes in the fact that emergence of Marxian and Phuleian ideology is out of socio-cultural and political necessity. The basic concepts of Marx and Phule are already discussed in the earlier chapters through which one can definitely be convinced that these epoch making thinkers have investigated into every possibility of human happiness and wellbeing and seriously contemplated on the ways of emancipation. While thinking about the wretched condition of the depressed humanity they fore grounded their philosophical and ideological struggle into the materialistic perception of human existence. Broadly speaking, Marx and Phule waged an ideological war against exploitative, dominating socio-political and cultural system in their respective geographic contexts which envisioned a total emancipation of humanity.

In their battle against oppressive system they coined certain concepts which served as their ideological weapons. Marx subverted entire European philosophical tradition through his materialistic philosophy, while Phule, through his literary discourses, destructed the whole brahmanic cultural system which had
culminated into socio-religious, economic and political domination. Though his method of articulation differed, its ultimate aim was largely same i.e. emancipation of man from all oppressions. Marx was a Ph.D. and a well trained and disciplined philosopher, who reshaped human attitudes and influenced the intellectuals and creative writers all over the world. And Jotirao Phule did not have university or academic training. He was educated only in middle school, but he too has effectively reshaped the attitudes of the Indian people and initiated a new epoch in Indian cultural history which inspired many literary, cultural, social and political movements in India. There was a huge difference in Marx’s and Phule’s social and educational milieu, but still we find certain common threads in their ideological conceptualization in their battle against socio-cultural economic and political domination, despite their contextual differences.

Philosophically speaking, ontological perception and empirical interpretation of the material conditions are considered necessary for any struggle aiming at emancipation of man. Phule fulfilled these requirements; hence he could create a vast body of literature that provides an impetus to the Cultural Revolution in India. Therefore, Phule’s writing achieves the stature which goes beyond mere literary articulation and becomes a science of human emancipation.

A comparative interpretation of Marx and Phule might seem to some a little illogical and irrelevant, if viewed on the basis of their educational qualifications and philosophical training. Phule is not a disciplined and trained thinker like Marx,
yet a comparison is possible on many levels. Because, the whole philosophic and ideological conceptualization that Marx made was the outcome of his systematic and vast reading, understanding and contemplation, and, at the same time his academic discipline through which he was trained. On the other hand Phule brought out his philosophic conceptualization through his empirical abilities along with reading of Sanskrit, English and Marathi texts which were available to him at the moment. Since he was not much bothered with the canonical methodology of putting thoughts in a specific fashion determined by schools of philosophy, he attempted many genres like poetry, prose and drama etc. to put his thoughts and sensitize the masses. Nevertheless, in previous chapter, efforts were made to systematize his philosophic and ideological concepts. After all, seriousness, utility, and depth in the argument are of primary importance than the way in which it has been put. Undoubtedly, Phule is a philosopher and a theorist of universal stature who philosophizes and theorizes through literary genres, without being a formal theorist or a conscious philosopher.

Thus, Marx and Phule must be compared not in terms of the methods and methodologies, and selection of genres or disciplines, but on the basis of the strength of philosophical and ideological conceptualization they have made, and the radical transformations they have brought in the history of human consciousness.
Phule too, like Marx, devoted himself for the contemplation on the welfare of man in material society. His optimism in this regard, too, resembled with Marx. In this connection Prof. L.B. Kurkure has rightly pointed out the possible domains of comparison between Marx and Phule. He puts:

He can be compared with Marx in terms of philosophical values and materialistic attitude of fundamental social transformation. In terms of fundamental revolutionary attitude and fighting spirit he was greatest among his Indian contemporaries and not at all inferior to Marx except fundamental economic interpretive vision. (2006, 216)

Fundamental change in social-political-economic system of society is the most important point for Marx. He asserts the strong need for transformations:

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” (2008, 72)

Marx expects the fundamental change in the material condition of people and not just interpretation of the world. This is a shattering blow on the whole European philosophic tradition which merely contemplates on the creation and nature of the world. Marx believes that mere contemplation and interpretation of how world is will not solve the material predicaments of human being. For that, he expects some concrete steps to be taken to change the world. This is a materialistic demand of Marx against idealistic orientation of European philosophic world. Jotirao Phule speaks in the same tone:

There were several Brahman authors like Mukundraj, Dnyaneshwara and Ramdasa, among the plenty that mushroomed all over, who wasted their talents in comprising silly books. None of them dared to even touch the rope of bondage tied around the necks of the shudras. (2002, 75)
As Marx argues that all the European philosophies have failed in bringing happiness in the life of poor people, because it concentrated only on the interpretation of the world, so also Phule sarcastically states that several brahman saints and scholars emerged but no transformation took place in the life of shudras. Means brahman scholars and philosophers interpreted life with its intrinsic complexities, commented beautifully on life, death, heaven, hell, rebirth etc. but the slavery of the shudratishudra remained as it was. This clearly indicates a deep analogical bond in the perceptive set up of Marx and Phule. Thus Marx emphasizes the futility of whole idealistic philosophic tradition in European society, which according to him, only created the illusion. Phule, on the other hand radically rejects the metaphysical tradition of Indian philosophic system that failed in bringing material change in the life of society.

Marx viewed European social structure dichotomous in nature and termed the whole struggle as class struggle between bourgeois and proletariat. These classes are antagonistic in relation; bourgeois as oppressor and proletariat as oppressed. Categorization of classes in European society is not only a philosophic and ideological need for Marx but the historical and cultural need also. Applying the same Marxian vocabulary of class categorization in Indian context, Phule views Indian society divided into two broad classes as Brahman and shudratishudra, though he was unaware of it. This categorization, on the part of Phule is basically a cultural need which serves as a concrete ground for waging an
ideological war on shudratishud’s behalf. Shudratishudra, though a derogatory term used by brahman religion, is glorified and adopted by Phule as cultural identity of the oppressed masses. G. P. Deshpande pertinently remarks:

The dichotomous structure that Phule created by pitting Brahmans against the shudratishudras at one level accepted the position of high Brahmanism, though of course in a negative sense, by putting brahmanical theory on its head. It was argued at that time that in the Kaliyuga (the last of the four epochs according to brahmanical Hinduism, and the one in which we live), there are only two varnas, the first (brahman) and the last (shudra). This was of course supposed to be a sign of the degeneration that society had suffered. Phule turned this notion into a dichotomous structure, in order to emphasize the bipolarity of society. It will be recalled that Marx did something similar in his analysis of capitalism, by emphasizing the bipolarity of modern society between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. (2002, 8)

Phule constructs his literary discourses not in traditional caste or four fold Varna system; rather, he views it on broader surface as *dwaivarnik* (two-fold) Varna system. Categorizing these two varnas by giving certain cultural identities and projecting them as antagonistic classes is at the centre of his cultural interpretation. Thus Phule becomes the first modern Indian thinker to view Indian cultural past and contemporary present in class terms. Here, the concept of varna is taken as class because it fulfills the socio-economic and cultural requirements meant for the term class. Now the question emerges as why Phule wants to prefer a collective identity as shudratishudra to the people who were already categorized and separated by their caste identities. G.P. Deshpande again tries to clarify Phule’s position:
Emphasizing the bipolarity of the varna system had two other implications. One, it meant that Phule was not looking at it as a system of endlessly regressing hierarchy, where there is always someone, somewhere, who is lower than the lowest. In other words, his main emphasis is to demonstrate the basis on which the oppressed can come together and unite, rather than on the divisions and schisms amongst them. Two, he rejects the centrality of the pollution principle. This does not of course mean that Phule was blind or indifferent to the pollution principle. His attack on brahmanical dharma necessarily involved rejection of the notions of pavitra and apavitra (pure and polluted), sprishya and asprishya (touchable and untouchable), and so on. He also attacked the moral degeneration of brahmans under the Peshwai (Peshwa rule). On these scores, his attack on brahman hypocrisy is unforgiving. But the main thrust of his attack is on the exploitative and oppressive nature of Brahmanism. (8)

Had he not considered the dichotomy of society and not termed all castes and subcastes with certain all pervasive identity, his cultural struggle would have been impossible. Hence, everywhere in his writing the uses the collective cultural identity as - shudratishudra as Marx uses proletariat.

Marx and Engels published their seminal treatise ‘Communist Manifesto’ in February of 1848 through which they give a clarion call to all the productive working masses to unite; and announce the revolution of the century. At the same time, in India, Phule establishes the first school for untouchable girls. Jotirao Phule’s ideological struggle and field work had its parallel in Europe in the intellectual movement and philosophical and political writings of Marx and Engels. What Phule was thinking in terms of abolition of slavery and what Marx was thinking in terms of emancipation of proletariat has similarity of ideological positions. Marx says:
Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an overriding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society. (2002, 232-33)

Now it is worthwhile to see what Jotirao Phule writes in the English preface of his seminal dialogic satire – Slavery:

This system of slavery, to which the Brahmins reduced the lower classes is in no respects inferior to that which obtained a few years ago in America. In the days of rigid Brahmin dominancy, so lately as that of the time of the Peshwa, my Shudra brethren had even greater hardships and oppression practiced upon them than what even the slaves in America had to suffer. To this system of selfish superstition and bigotry, we are to attribute the stagnation and all the evils under which India has been groaning for many centuries past. It will, indeed be difficult to name a single advantage which accrued to the aborigines from the advent of this intensely selfish and tyrannical sect. The Indian Ryot (the Sudra and Atisudra) has been in fact a proverbial Milch cow. He has passed from hand to hand. Those who successively held sway over him cared only to fatten themselves on the sweat of his brow, without caring for his welfare or condition. It was sufficient for their purposes that they held him safe in their clutches for squeezing out of him as much as they possibly could. The Brahmin had at last so contrived to entwine himself round the Sudra in every large or small undertaking in every domestic or public business, that the latter is by custom quite unable to transact any concern of moment without his aid. (2002, 31)
Marx brings a brilliant social critique of exploitation and slavery, and, at the same time reveals that bourgeoisie class is not compatible with the society in whose reign the laborer is becoming a pauper, sinking deeper below his existence. Phule, in the similar fashion comments on the plight of the shudratishudra under the cloak of Brahmanism. In fact, not only he comments on brahman rule, but all the rules that colonized India. Historically speaking, the above is one of the most brilliant interpretations of imperialism offered by Phule. It is clear that both, Marx and Phule, are deeply contemplating on the plight of the masses, hence they, out of deep concern, bring a historicist materialist critique of exploitation and slavery in their respective socio-political contexts.

Even though Phule was little educated, it seems on the basis of references he gives everywhere in his writings that he had read voraciously and comprehensively. He had gone through the major treatises on religion, politics, sociology, history, economics, law and ethics. He had acquired proficiency Sanskrit language and gone through the Vedas, Smrities, Upanishads, epics and other brahmanic texts. He also had a strong command over English language and read many seminal books. Had Communist Manifesto, Wage Labour and Capital or Origin of the Family, Private property and State and Wages, Price and Profit, by Marx and Engels available to him, he would have redefined his terminologies, like, instead of saying ‘brahman’ he would have said ‘bourgeois’ or for ‘shudratishudra’ he would have termed ‘proletariat’. (Nerurkar 2006, 319) but,
even though Phule does not use Marxian vocabulary, his terms are largely similar to Marx- ideologically and philosophically.

Challenging and rejecting the dominant ideologies or turning them on head is the very basis of Phule’s theoretical frame-work. As Marx rejected idealism and Hegelianism while developing his materialistic concept of history, Phule too interpreted Indian history in materialistic vein. Gail Omvedt focuses on Phule’s stand on the Aryan race theory in Marxist perspective and says:

The Aryan race theory, the dominant explanation of caste and Indian society in his time, provided the frame-work for his theory. This had been made the centre of discourse by the European “Orientalists” who saw the Vedas as an ancient link between Europeans and Indians, by the British administrators and census takers who classified the society they ruled, and by the Indian elite, people like Tilak who used it to justify brahman superiority. Phule turned it on its head, in a way somewhat akin to Marx standing Hegelian dialectics on its head, to formulate a theory of contradiction and exploitation: brahmans were indeed descended from conquering Indo-Europeans, but far from being superior, they were cruel and violent invaders who had overturned and originally prosperous and egalitarian society, using every kind of deceit and violence to do so, forging a mythology which was worse than all others since it was in principle based on inequality and forbade the conquered masses from even studying its texts. (2008,19)

Reinterpretation of brahmanic mythology and Aryan race theory was crucial for Phule for it served the historical and cultural need around which he could build his argument pertaining to cultural reconstruction. Thus Phule provides the material basis while examining myths and reinterpreting History.
Since Phule belonged to the colonial era, his ideological stand is partially but certainly influenced by the British missionaries and Western renaissance thoughts. Marx too has propounded certain views on the future of British rule in India. It is necessary, in accordance with the comparative perspective, to focus on the perception of both on British rule in India that will again underline their resembling position as historicist. As discussed by P. V. Gadgil, Karl Marx in his writing on India during 1852-1859 comments that, England’s selfishness was of worst kind in bringing social revolution in India. But the major issue was whether fundamental revolution is possible in Asian societies, because it is impossible to progress for Asian societies without such fundamental revolution. If this is the solution, then despite all the crimes committed by Britain in India, one has to accept that Britain, though unknowingly, has brought social revolution and become tool of history. It is better that India was conquered by Britian and not by Turky, Irani or Russian invaders. This is more important. Indian culture has so degenerated that Indian people surrender and pray before a cow named Shabla and a monkey named Hanuman. (2006, 262)

Jotirao Phule also welcomes British rule in India. He expresses his indebtedness and considers it as an opportunity for socio-cultural awareness in Indian masses. We find many of his poems and prose pieces praising British rule and work of missionaries. Of course Phule’s many of contemporaries of progressive mind took British colonization as benevolent, but his perception of it
was of a broader outlook. This perception, to a large extent can be compared with that of Marx:

England has to fulfill a double mission in India, one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and laying the material foundations of Western society in India. (2002, 18)

While commenting on the above statement of Marx, G.P. Deshpande points out that:

Marx was writing about the future of British rule in India. Phule was thinking about the future of India under British rule. He welcomed the coming annihilation of the brahmanical system which he hoped that British rule would bring about. He also hoped that British rule would lay the material and institutional foundation of a modern, equalitarian society. One says ‘hopes’ because Phule was not certain it would actually come about…. There is a degree of duality in his attitude to British rule. The important thing was the annihilation that Marx and Phule both, though from different perspectives, hoped for. In that sense one can argue that his view of imperialism was historicist. (18-19)

Marx interprets British imperialism in concord with his understanding of history as materialistic phenomena whereas Phule perceives it as an opportunity to overcome wretchedness of masses which is the product of dominating culture. Marx expects that due to capitalist Britain there will be emergence of industries and society will be transformed into classes. Emergence of classes will lead to class conflict and ultimately communist revolution will take place. So far as Marx’s concept of historical materialism is concerned, class structure of society is necessary. Rather, it is an inevitable precondition in the stages of history.
But Marx failed to understand the socio-cultural situations in proper perspective. He tried to analyse Indian society under British rule without taking cultural realities, which were deeply rooted into India prych, into consideration. He wished to judge Indian future by applying the parameters which were compatible to European socio-cultural milieu.

Phule, on the other hand, is quite sure that Britishers are not going to rule this country forever. Some day they will leave this country; hence the shudratishudras must try to come out of brahman domination as early as possible. He knows very well that British rule may provide opportunity of education and knowledge to masses but cannot destroy brahmanic domination. Because caste system may be annihilated in law but cannot be rooted out of mind.

In connection with this, the question of peasants and conditions of agricultural production prominently appears in most of Phule’s poems, dialogues and drama, which will again indicate the analogy between Marx and Phule. Phule, especially in *Cultivators Whipcord*, delineates the account of peasants and production conditions in India:

But now the cunning European employees of our honourable government have spent all their foreign and multifaceted intelligence to establish a massive Forest Department; including all mountains and hills and valleys. This culminates in the inclusion of unused lands and the town pastures as well. Now our poor and handicapped farmers’ sheep and goats have no place to feed even on air in the forest. Now if they want to fill their bellies they have to work in the factories as weavers, iron-smiths or carpenters or as casual labourers; artisans in England are selling things here - tasteful bottles of alchohol,
breads, biscuits, sweets, pickles, needles big and small, knives, scissors, sewing machines, heaters, colourful mirror and glassware, and thread, cloth, shawls, hand-gloves, stockings, caps, stics, umbrellas, brass, copper, iron sheets, locks and keys, coal, various vehicles and carriages, harnesses, etc. and finally, carpets – all made with machines, and selling them cheaper here. The goods produced here have lost their market, and many weavers and julahas and momins (caste groups connected with textiles.) are so poor that they are forced to near starvation and have to manage, in secret, on coarse wheat or rice powder, and many on piths of mango. Several weavers, unable to bear the starving condition of their family, in the evening, buy a few paise worth arrack on credit and at home lie down as if dead. (2002, 132)

Phule depicts the consequences of British industrialization in India. For English government, India was just a big market, is again underlined by Phule:

Some will object that the poor farmer should work as a labourer for the rich farmer who has enough land and manage to survive, but because the population has increased everywhere in general, farmers no longer have enough land to cultivate turn by turn, letting some of it lie fallow and because of this most of the land has become unproductive. They themselves have difficulty in feeding their own families so how would they be able to employ the poor farmers as labourers and help them survive? That this farmer, surrounded by difficulties, is not free to send his naked children to school is well-known to our far-sighted government employees, and they collect, all in all, local funds of several lakh rupees, in the name of imparting education to the poor ignorant farmer,.. (133)

Phule is talking about division of property i.e. land which is one of the basic reasons of increasing poverty among peasants. It is, in this connection, worthwhile to compare Marx’s concept of division of labor and Phule’s views on division of property:
While re-assessing the ignorant farmers’ lands every thirty years, the European workers, blindly worshiping our virtuous government, do not say ‘Amen’ until they have raised the taxes at least a little. But while everyday work is going on, are the lazy European workers, overly fond of hunting, spending most of their time in luxury and comfort, able to see how the brahman employees denude the ignorant farmer? Do they keep a watch over them? (134)

Phule, then, narrates the story when there are quarrels between the farmers over the boundaries of their land or getting water from common well. He writes:

“…. The cunning bhat and brahmans, visiting both sides, advise the two sides in a variety of manners and then on the next day favouring one of them, prepare an application, and send them to the mamledar. When the peon brings them the summons, they go to the kulkarni to accept the summons, who, after sending the peon away talks to the two parties separately, saying ‘You meet me at this time, and you at this time, alone, so that we can find a fine solution to the problem’.” (134)

In this way farmers are duped by bhat brahmans and police. Phule has depicted the whole episode in police station and elaborated how farmers are victimized by the British officers and brahman officers. Same is the case with brahman and Marwadi moneylenders.

Nowadays, many Brahman and Marwadi moneylenders are telling the napati (someone who is not credit worthy) letterless farmer, ‘We cannot give you money against land because of the government’s laws, but if you sell your lands to us, we will give you money and when you repay the money, we will again sell the lands back to you’, and then they make vows etc. but it is very rare that the credulous and ignorant farmer gets his lands back from these pious and non-violent moneylenders. Apart from this, these deeply religious moneylenders harm the farmer in many other ways when they loan him money. (138)
On another occasions, Phule describes how ritualistic brahman employees exploit the ignorant peasants:

Several ritualistic brahman employees make the naïve ignorant farmer give donations to story-tellers and devotional singers of their own caste. Several strategic cunning people corner the naive rich farmers and make them construct temples for Radha-Krishna, or make them restore old temples in villages and arrange large ceremonies in the name of completion. Several scheming employees trouble the farmer behind the backs of the European employees, and the farmers curse them, but they flatter the European workers day and night, who recommend them for the promotions that they get. (139)

Yet again, Phule depicts the agony of a farmer who has to sell the ornaments of his newly wedded daughter in order to pay taxes of government and offer bribe to the officers to escape the punishment:

Oh, how unfortunate I am that I sold off her ornaments to avoid a calamity and ruined her marriage in the process! And now, how do I pay this year’s tax? There is no money to buy new mot (for drawing water from the well), the old ones are torn and the sugarcane is drying up. The corn has also gone to waste. The catte-feed is about to finish, as is all the dried grass and fodder. The bullocks are weak because they do not get enough to eat. The women’s clothes are in tatters and they are forced to wear ancient bedsheets bought for marriage. The children have to go about half-naked and feel ashamed of meeting people. Because the grain in the house is nearly over, we are surviving on sweet radish. I do not have enough money to feed our mother with good food as she prepares to die. What shall I do? How will I be able to till the land if I sell the bullock? (158-59)

Three major elements, as Phule has depicted, are responsible for exploitation of peasants. These are Brahman religion, British government officers
and Brahman workers, and moneylenders. Through the depiction that Phule gives in *Cultivators Whipcord*, one can understand that Phule is not just describing the wretched condition of shudratishudras, but, at the same time bringing out materialistic critique of it, which resembles to that of Marx. The mode of production, production relations, economic system based on production relations, beneficiaries of economic system, role of state and law and ultimately exploitation of peasants is, to a large extent, analogous to Marxist scheme of materialistic analysis.

Phule understands that agriculture is the very centre of the loot on the basis of which England is prospering. He pinpoints that the loot of agriculture has become the means of capital creation; the reason behind which is the ignorance of peasants. He believed that brahmins inhibited the peasants from knowledge, hence this loot. But, Sharad Joshi has some different argument in this connection. He argues that, hadn’t brahmins inhibited the Shudras from knowledge, there would have been no loot of agriculture; this was Phule’s belief. But Phule was not aware that the countries where there is no such inhibition (of knowledge) and there is no caste system but still there is loot and exploitation of agriculture. In course of time knowledge and education spread in India, proportion of *Bhat* in service sector decreased, but in spite of this, exploitation of peasants continued. This was not expected by him. (Joshi, 2006, 191-192) Sharad Joshi maintains that Phule’s conclusion that farmer was drowned due to his letterlessness is the outcome of
spiritualistic stand of Phule which he had adopted from Christian and Islamic model of monotheism. (192) Interpreting Phule’s philosophical stand on the basis of Marx’s position, Sharad Joshi argues:

Factual condition is not changed by thoughts. Factual condition determines thought. Jotirao failed to take this scientificist stand. Exploitation is not an exceptional phenomena in India, it is not a poisonous tree that emerged specifically out of caste system and bhatshahi, it was, in fact just an Indian version of a universal queer system adopted for capital generation essential for industrialization. Such broadness of thought was impossible at least in Jotirao’s time in India. (192)

Sharad Joshi’s arguments may be relevant in global perspective, especially from Marxian position, but not fully compatible in Indian context, at least in Phule’s context. Phule’s analysis of peasants’ exploitation is based on his deep perception of brahmanic culture which has been the very fundamental source of every sort of exploitation. Hence, applicability of Marxian position of exploitation which finds it basis in terms of production relations and ownership of property resulting into exploitation of proletariat is not fully and adequately compatible to Indian situation. Economic relationship or economic motives are not always the basic reasons for exploitation. Of course, these are inevitable dimensions of every society, but not necessarily the foundation of society, at least not in Indian context. It is true that Brahmanism is not the only reason behind exploitation of peasants, but it must be understood and accepted that it is the basic reason. But Sharad
Joshi’s another argument focusing on the limitations of Phule’s ideological position seems to be valid when he says:

*Bhat*, exploiter of peasants, will engulf not only shudra but atishudra too in their own camp, propagate education, but will not stop exploitation of peasants. Because bhat has no any other convenient alternative except exploitation of agriculture in order to create capital. Jotirao could not understand this because he was not Marx. (193)

While focusing on the limitations of Marx Joshi writes.

Due to certain circumstances in India Jotirao had limitations. In the same fashion Marx failed due to historic circumstance in European countries. Peasants did not participate in 1848 rising of Paris, hence, saddened Marx assumed the industrial worker as the pioneer of revolution. (193)

He further says:

He propounded the thought of economic exploitation, class consciousness and alienation which was suitable to the workers. Factually, primary economies of third world are exploited and the industrialists, capitalists, including workers in advanced countries are benefitted with this exploitation. Revolution never takes place in an industrially progressed country; it takes place in the backward country. Worker in one country does not fight for the sake of worker in another country. The worker earning 1500 rupees protects the interests of his owner than the worker who works with empty belly outside the compound wall of factory. Marx remained unaware of this. (193)

These arguments by Sharad Joshi focus on the limitations of Phule and Marx in terms of broader ideological perspective. Marx’s centre of ideological thought process is workers and not the farmer. This, according to Joshi, is the limitation of a comprehensive ideological struggle that Marx has envisioned.
Marx’s observations on pre-colonial Indian society are seminal because they provide the possibilities of viewing and analyzing Indian society in historical materialistic context which may not be fully in tune with the cultural realities of contemporary period. Aijaz Ahmad argues:

Marx was particularly concerned with the anachronisms of our pre-capitalist societies, the dead weight of our caste rigidities, the acute fragmentation of our politics, the primacy of military encampment over manufacture in our mode of urbanization, the exhaustion of the urban artisanate – due as much to levels of direct appropriations as to the inability to find markets in the countryside - and other such distortions of development in nineteenth-century India, because these distortions were seen as impediments in the path towards a true bourgeois revolution. We need to keep the whole range of these complexities in mind while reading those journalistic pieces, even though Marx’s understanding of Indian society was on some crucial points factually quite incorrect; indeed, the hope of brisk industrialization under colonialism turned out to be so misplaced that Marx himself seems to have abandoned it in later years. (2008, 226-27)

It again proves that Marxian scheme emerging from various stages of historical development did not succeed in India. Aijaz Ahmad further quotes Marx’s final judgement on the ‘double mission of Britishers in India’:

All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social conditions of the masses of the people.

The Indian will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the new ruling class shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether. (236)
On this Ahmad argues:

Finally, it should be of some interest to us here that Marx speaks of the ‘proletariat’ in the English context but of the ‘Hindus’ (by which he simply means the inhabitants of the country) in the context of India. In other words, only five years after his hopes for a European revolution had been dashed, Marx is hoping for three things in the short run: a socialist revolution in Britain, a nationalist revolution in India, and the break-up of the caste system. Those, he thought, would be the preconditions for ‘the masses of people’ even to start reaping any sort of ‘benefit from the new elements of society.’ Now, much later, India has of course become independent, but those two other issues—of class in Britain and caste in India (the hereditary division of labour, as Marx puts it) – are yet to be resolved; and the resolution of the class question in India doubtless passes, even today, through the caste question. (236)

For Marx, industrial revolution is the solution for destruction of caste system in India, which is turned into a false judgment on the question of caste system. Ahmad has brilliantly and rationally commented on Marx’s views on India as compared to most of the Indian Marxist thinkers who advocate Marxian position on India on emotional ground. It is highly impossible to think of panacea of caste-system without taking conceptual cultural and religious roots in to consideration.

In fact discussion of Marx’s views on India is not the chief concern of the present chapter; however, in order to show inadequate perception of Marx on India and incongruous generalization of applicability of his philosophic methodology, and to pinpoint the difference of view point with Phule, it was necessary. Ahmad is absolutely right when he says ‘the resolution of the class question in India doubtless passes, even today, through the caste question’, but Indian Marxist
thinkers, it seems, have been habituated to view caste question through the lenses of class ideology. Phule too views Indian society divided into dichotomous polarity, but his perception has castes implied in it. His categorization of society into two broad classes (Varnas) is a strategic interpretation emerging out of the goal of attributing cultural identity to the masses.

Base and superstructure is yet another seminal model which helps to understand basic arguments in Cultural Studies and focuses on power relations in the whole process of social development. For Marx economic structure of society is the foundation ‘on which arises a legal and political superstructure’. He connects, with the superstructure, to define forms of social consciousness i.e. economic reality as material condition is basis; and ideology, philosophy, arts, literature, religion, culture are the ramifications of the superstructure which are controlled and governed by the economic basis. Further, Marx states:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. (Williams, 2010, 75)

Marx’s analysis of social system is based on his understanding for dialectics in social relationships emerging from the production relations. Hence he considers economic system of any society as the basis and all forms of
consciousness as the superstructure. When this model is applied to Indian society which has been depicted in Phule’s literature, we find the caste or Varna system as the basis and economic system as the superstructure. And, if at all there is change in this Varna system, then sooner or later, there are the chances of a little transformation in superstructure. Phule maintains that everything, in Indian society is determined by caste or Varna identity. Means of production and ownership of means of production are determined by caste identity. Means, Indian society, primarily, is not based on economic relationships but on caste relationships whose ultimate manifestation is exploitation of lower castes and domination of upper castes. Economic exploitation of peasants and artisans is primarily the outcome of caste system; hence, Phule’s literary discourse brings caste philosophy, at the centre of criticism. Phule, in his every work of art strongly emphasizes that brahmanic rites and rituals and cultural practices are the indispensable part of cultural agenda with the sole intention of strengthening caste system. Because through caste system hegemonic interests of brahmans have been protected for centuries. As in Marx’s view culture, religion, law and politics are the outcome of economic basis, in Phule’s view these are the outcome of caste system.

Marx argues Further:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (75)
Now let us see what Phule has to say in the introduction to his dialogic satire *Slavery*. He says:

The institution of caste, which has been the main object of their laws, had no existence among them originally. That it was an after-creation of their deep cunning is evident from their own writings. The highest rights, the highest privileges and gifts, and everything that would make the life of a Brahmin easy, smooth going and happy - everything that would conserve or flatter their self-pride, - were specially inculcated and enjoined, whereas the Sudras and Atisudras were regarded with supreme hatred and contempt, and the commonest rights of humanity were denied them. Their touch, nay, even their shadow, is deemed a pollution. They are considered as mere chattels, and their life of no more value than of meanest reptile. (2002, 29)

Marx says consciousness is determined by social existence and Phule emphasizes the formation of psyche of Brahman as well as shudratishudras. Marx in his extreme materialistic interpretation, views social being/ existence as the source of consciousness – ideas, thoughts, emotions etc. means, human consciousness is the product of his social being. Man’s entire thought process and emotional set up are originated and shaped by his materialistic being. And, Phule says that the institution of caste has inculcated highest privelges to brahmans; and supreme hatred and contempt is accorded to Shudratishudra. This code of conduct has been sanctioned and legitimized by religion and practiced very stringently in day today life. The brahmanic religious principles of purity and pollution have been deeply rooted into blood and psyche of people, hence consciousness of man is not determined by social being, at least in Indian context, but both, consciousness and social being are determined by religious principles. People can
not even imagine their social being devoid of caste identity. Marx may be right in European context when he says that ‘the social, cultural, political and intellectual life is conditioned by the mode of production of material life’, but again this argument can’t be generalized and applied to each and every society of the world. Phule, in Indian context, is absolutely relevant even today because in present socio-cultural and political scenario there is no existence to man without caste. Everything in Indian society – culture, politics, education, economy, bureaucracy, democracy, literature, social communications, media, and even names and surnames, food habits etc. are governed by caste. Deep down in the psyche of the people there exists the caste which shapes the consciousness and social being and even the modes of production of material life. Thus, religion and cultural practices condition everything associated to human existence as social being.

As we discussed earlier that Phule’s is the first analysis of Indian society and culture in class term. Of course, he considers it necessary to pinpoint the dichotomous structure of society. But, it is noteworthy that, throughout his literature he projects only two Varnas in antagonistic relationship. However, he never uses the terms like class, class consciousness, etc. as these terms were not available to him at that time. But the whole delineation of Indian socio-cultural conflict has been viewed as class-conflict, which connects Phule to Marx’s philosophy pertaining to class class-consciousness. G.P. Despande has argued pertinently to advocate this view: “He constructs a dvaivarnik (two varna)
structure, with the Brahmans and the Shudratishudras forming its two poles, in place of the traditional Chaturvarnya (four-Varna) structure.” (2002,9)

Phule’s interpretation of Varna, of course, has cultural grounding; means, for Phule, Varna is not just a group or a category of people sharing same status and identity, but a cultural category with specific cultural status and identity accorded by religion. Class, in Marxian scheme bears almost the same characteristics and transcends its traditional emphasis as just an analytical category. Thomas Mathew tries to interpret class in somewhat innovative way. He opines:

It was only with the emergence of the capitalist relations of production and exchange that the society started polarizing into two distinct classes with antagonistic interests. This transition also witnessed great ideological leap for humanity. The ideas of democracy, reason, science and socialism revolutionized the realms of thought, action and polity. The very idea of class as an analytical category as also consciousness as the motive force of historic development emerged in this era……. the most crucial aspect of the Marxian category of ‘class’ is consciousness. It is not just an economic or social category. Without the ideological content, ‘class’ is meaningless even as an analytical category. There is hardly any need to emphasize the importance of consciousness in class formation, class struggle and social revolution …… ‘class’ is not just an economic, social or racial category as generally understood. It is a dynamic concept with an ever vibrant soul, consciousness. (2007, 49)

As class consciousness is crucial for Marx, Varna consciousness is equally necessary for Phule. Thomas Mathew further clarifies Marxian position on formation of class theory:
…… the class theory was formulated only after the two antagonistic classes, the working classes and the capitalist class came to the fore in contradistinction to each other and capitalism brought the whole world under its sway. Marx, in fact recognized only these two basic classes contending and confronting at the global plane. He did recognize the feudal class, as the transition to capitalism was not complete. He also recognized the middle class or the petty bourgeoisie. The later two classes are not considered basic classes as they are bound to disappear as capitalism and human society develops to socialism and the struggle between the working class and the capitalist class brings about class society to an end. Thus in a fundamental sense, Marx recognized only two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These basic classes significantly denote the ideology of their respective classes, i.e. bourgeois ideology and proletarian ideology. (2007, 52)

In order to compare Phule’s construction of two dichotomous Varnas (classes) with Marx’s ‘Classes’, it is necessary to focus on Phule deliberate construction of two Varnas with antagonistic interests by rejecting the brahmanic construction of four Varnas. Phule merges two middle classes i.e. Kshatriya and Vaishyas into the cultural category of Shudratishudra in order to reconstruct the comprehensive world view against dominant world view of Brahmins. Through this formulation Phule makes his struggle more focused and pointed and tries to give Shudratishudra Varna consciousness. G.P. Deshpande argues:

………. Phule’s central point that the brahmanical system is bipolar, and this bipolarity is represented by the Brahmins and the Shudratishudras. Therefore, caste or varna is a relationship of power and dominance, and has to be attacked at that level. To construct his discourse around a dvaivarnik system was thus crucial for Phule, Since the Smritis and the Vedas talked essentially in those terms. If the caste system itself had to be destroyed, it had to be done by attacking this central element of the system. (2002, 9)
Emancipation of workers from the capitalist’s ideological, and economic domination of bourgeoisie is the prime concern of Marx’s thought. Theorizing class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat on ideological and philosophical surface is essential for Marx, because, he believes this theorization will formulate the proletariat worldview and prepare them for revolution. Alex Callinicos quotes Marx in this connection.

For almost 40 years we have stressed the class struggle as the immediate driving power of history, and in particular the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution. When the International was formed we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working class is conquered by the working class themselves. (2004, 140)

Marx shoulders the responsibility of emancipation of working class on working class itself. This clarion call is combined with the ‘class consciousnesses, which Marx believes as an essential precondition for rising of workers in revolution. Jotirao Phule, in the resembling tone, makes an appeal to the Shudratishudras. He says:

You Shudratishudras, majority in this country, you are the native people of this country. India is Balisthan. You, the natives of this Balisthan, were original Kshatriya, but Iranian Aryans invaded you, you were conquered by force of weapon and treachery, you were relegated to Shudra, you were denied knowledge by fabricating cunning religious books. And enaslaved you. Arya bhat Brahmans are outsiders in this country. You are to free from these alien Brahmans. (Rege, 2006, 559)

Marx interpretes class struggle as an historical truth and provides the specific agenda of this class struggle to the workers. He believes that the history of
society is nothing but the history of struggle between dichotomous classes with dichotomous interests. This theorization of Marx concedes the antagonism between classes which is in dormant position. But at the same time Marx consciously appeals the workers for class struggle by awakening in them class consciousness. Class consciousness or identity of the working class seems to be the precondition for waging a war against capitalists. Phule, in the same fashion considers all castes and sub castes as Shudratishudra and gives them ‘Varna consciousness’ combined with the cultural identity which he believes necessary for cultural revolution.

Since Phule’s writing is chiefly concerned with cultural emancipation of Shudratishudra, he is supposed to formulate an alternative cultural system which, he finds impossible without reinterpreting brahmanic mythology. And, as a part of this reinterpretation project he demystifies the brahmanic myth and inverts the traditional Aryan race theory. Gail Omvedt argues:

By inverting the traditional Aryan theory, Phule took his critique of Brahmanism and caste to a mass level. He used it to radically interpret puranic mythology, seeing the various avatars of Vishnu as stages in the conquest of India, while taking the rakshasas as heroes of the people. Central to the interpretation was the figure of Bali Raja. In Phule’s refiguration of the myth, BaliRaja was the original king of Maharashtra, reigning over an ideal state of beneficence, castelessness and prosperity, with the popular gods of the regions (khandoba, Jotiba, Naikba etc.) depicted as his officials. The puranic myth in which the Brahman boy Waman asks three boons of Bali and then steps on his chest to send him down to hell is taken by Phule as a story of deception and conquest by the invading Aryans. This reinterpretation had a strong resonance with popular culture, for in Maharashtra (as
in other parts of south India, particularly Kerla) Bali is indeed seen as a popular and “Peasant” king, and is remembered with the Marathi saying, *ida pida jao, Balicha Rajya Yevo* (“let troubles and sorrows go and the kingdom of Bali come”) …… Phule’s alternative mythology woven around Bali Raja, could evoke an image of a peasant community, and his anti-Vedic, anti-Aryan and anti-caste egalitarian message with its use of poetry, dialogue, and drama, could reach beyond the literate elite to a wider audience of non-brahmans. (2008, 19-20)

Marx, however, does not project any king or kingdom as ideal as Phule perennially projects Bali and his kingdom. For Phule projecting such a figure or a reign is a cultural necessity while Marx’s ideal reign/situation is yet to come after the revolution. In fact, in both, we find certain utopianism for which they seem to be creating path towards that utopia. Marx’s utopia is the final stage in history i.e. classless society resulting through proletariat revolution and Phule’s is casteless society coming through Cultural Revolution. Marx’s concept of historical materialism is dialectical and runs through certain stages which are based on modes of production relations and not, necessarily, on cultural relations. Phule’s theory, which emerges through his literary articulation, is also to a large extent historical materialist but closely connected with cultural aspects. While distinguishing between Marx and Phule Gail Omvedt argues:

Phule’s theory can be looked at as a kind of incipient historical materialism in which economic exploitation and cultural dominance are interwoven. In contrast to a class theory, communities become the basis for contradiction (the shudra- atishudra peasantry versus the Brahman bureaucracy and religious order); in contrast to changing property relations, conquest, force, state power and ideology are seen as driving factors. (21)
This argument brilliantly encapsulates, with its basic differences and analogy, the theoretical constructs of Marx and Phule Gail Omvedt, terming Phule’s whole theory as ‘incipient historical materialism’ tries to aptly summarize as ‘economic exploitation and cultural dominance are interwoven.’ This is truly a rational analysis of Phule’s theory, because, economic exploitation is not an independent phenomena or which may result from economic situations, but is closely associated with the cultural grounding of society. Therefore, Phule in his *Cultivator’s Whipcord* and many poems and drama depicts the deplorable condition of Shudratishudras as a result of economic exploitation at the hands of brahman and British bureaucracy. But, at the same time, he provides the critique of economic exploitation which he locates in cultural domination. Means, cultural positions are the fundamental positions in Indian society from which stems economic positions.

Another point where Marx and Phule seem to be agreed is the concepts of consciousness and false consciousness. The concept of consciousness plays very vital role in the entire theoretical interpretation of Marx, which he poses opposite to the concept of false consciousness. But it must be noted that these concepts are not, in fact, independent but interconnected with the concepts of religious alienation. While clarifying his stand on the issue of alienation Marx puts:

The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and that begings to confront him as an autonomous
power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object
confronts him as hostile and alien. (1977,324)

In connection with this quotation, K.P. Shankar’s interpretation of three
features of active alienation can be stated. He says:

1. alienated relationship of the producer to the product of his
labour. According to Marx, the product confronts the producer
in a hostile opposition.

2. alienated relationship of the producer and the act of
production. In this relationship the producer feels that his own
activity is something which is alien and does not belong to
him.

3. alienated relationship between the producer and his co
producers. This, according to Marx, is species-alienation. In
this species-alienation the producer employs other selves for
his own private ends. The immediate consequence of this
according to Marx, is that each man gets estranged from others
and that all are estranged from man’s essence.” (1986, 44)

According to Marx, in 19th century capitalistic mode of production, capital
controls producer and labour. This situation causes emergence of money as
estrangement of essence of man’s work and existence. This alienated essence of
man is worshiped because it dominates him. Here, even the gods are turned into
commodities by money. Then there is a need to develop the productive forces to
the fullest extent in order to change the alienated existence. Then, after man
developed all his potentialities fully, the period of social revolution comes which
brings end of alienated life. But still, Marx believes, though the revolution is a
historical inevitability, human consciousness of it comes only through the
ideological superstructure. Marx says that it is only through the legal, political,
religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms, that people become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. (K.P. Shankar, 1986: P-44-45)

Therefore, Marx believes that criticism of religion is necessary because as he thinks criticism of religion is the precondition of all criticism because; such criticism takes men beyond all the false representations of his real being.

Basic intention of Marx behind criticism of religion is to reveal the depth and gravity of man’s alienation due to religion. This critique aims at creating situations which will make man aware of self-deception. Hence, Marx firmly believes in that the critique of religion, “is the premise of all criticism.” (2008, 39)

It must be noted that Phule’s entire literary endeavours is largely aimed at criticism of brahmani dharma. He too strongly maintains that criticism of brahmanic religion is the basic and inevitable step towards emancipation of Shudratishudras. Marx declares religion as an alienation and establishes three important points. K. P. Shankar puts them as:

(a) Religion is an expression of alienated life.
(b) Religion is false-consciousness that is ‘reversed consciousness.’
(c) Throughout history, religion performed two functions which are as follows:

(i) to justify established social order and thereby support the dominant class.
(ii) to console the exploited, at the same time, by offering them in heaven what they have been denied on earth; this is essentially a reactionary role. (1986, 46-47)
Consciousness, for Marx, is that which “takes the place of instinct” (48). It distinguishes men from animals. And false-consciousness is as Marx says, as cited by K.P. Shankar:

Consciousness can really fancy that it is something else than consciousness of existing practice, that really imagines something without referring to anything real; from this instant consciousness is able to emancipate itself from the world. (49)

Means, the consciousness which is emancipated from the real world is, as Marx believes, the ‘false-consciousness’. This false-consciousness is the result of real socio-economic conditions and division of labour. The most important conclusion that Marx brings here, and which is essential in the framework of present research, is religion as false consciousness. In this connection Marx’s argument on religion – “it is the opium of the people” (2008, 42) is meaningful. Religion, according to Marx sanctifies the established order in power structure of the society. It also consoles the oppressed by offering them in heaven what they have been denied on earth. Marx categorically puts in the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right as:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation… (42)

Religion gives the ‘illusory happiness’ by creating a world of intoxication where people forget the real torment caused by harsh realities. In fact, religion is the systematic arrangement of exploitation of the poor people and a soothing
system at the same time. Marx believes that religion is not required to men if the harsh realities are removed from the life of the people. Means, the exploitative and oppressive real situations make the people seek comfort in the illusory world of religion. Hence Marx says:

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion. (42)

While rejecting the very concept of religion, of course, Christianity is in Marx’s mind. Comparatively Phule has soft corner for Christianity because he maintains that Christian values of humanity, monotheism, liberalism and equality are important contrary to the inhuman and diabolical brahmanic system. Of course, Phule’s opinions of Christianity are based on his experiences and observations of missionaries who were preaching and practicing Christianity. He seems to be attracted to Islam and Christianity which was the consequence of exploitative and oppressive brahmanic religion. But, due to Phule’s sympathetic attitude towards Christianity, he has to face bitter criticism by orthodox as well as progressive thinkers in India.

Whatsoever Marx propagates about religion, Phule says in the same tone about brahmanic religion. According to him Shudratishudra’s belief in religious books is a part of well planned intrigue of Brahmans. Phule puts in the introduction of his dialogic satire Slavery:
If this is what happens today, it is not at all surprising that the shudras and the atishudras fell prey to the deception of the Brahmins in the past. The Brahmins had oppressed them so much and reduced them to such a state of ignorance that when they cunningly showed them the books and told them that they were written by God himself, they immediately believed it to be true and fell prey to the trickery of the Brahmins. This continues even today as a lot of shudras and atishudras believe in the Brahmins and are deceived by them. (2002,38)

_Shastras_ i.e. religious scriptures of Brahmins, which are inaccessible to the masses, are the source of exploitation and deception. Marx proclaims religion as ‘the opium of the people’ and Phule declares brahmanic religion as ‘deception’. People are conditioned in such a way that they go on believing in anything that is projected in the name of God. Means god and religion are so indispensable and complementary to each other that people cannot even imagine to investigate into the authenticity of these concepts. Brahmanic religion also promises a happy life after death. It also assures to provide those things in heaven which are denied on earth. Marx’s consideration of religion as ‘the opium’ is absolutely similar to Phule’s consideration of brahmanic religion as ‘trickery’, ‘fraud’, etc. As man, after consuming opium enters the illusory world of happiness, in the same fashion shudratishudra ‘enjoy slavery’ by dutifully and sincerely following the tenets of religious scriptures. Shudratishudras are not wise enough to pinpoint the undercurrents of religious tenets, therefore, they seek pleasure in the imaginary realm of heaven after death. They fail to understand that the religion which consoles them in misery is the original cause of it.
Like Marx, Phule also believes that criticism of religion (brahmanic in Phule’s context) is the precondition of the philosophy of emancipation. We can notice, on every page of his works, such criticism which exposes the hollowness of the tall claims of Brahmans about their religion. A dialogue between Jotirao and a Sadhu is worth quoting in this regard:

Jotirao: If God had created the Vedic scriptures for the liberation of entire mankind, the bhat Brahmans would not have prohibited the shudras and atishudras from studying the Vedas. The bhat brahmans have thus violated God’s commandment and are not the shudra and atishudras suffering for that? Why should they trust either the God who is supposed to have created the Vedic scriptures or the scriptures themselves? Or indeed why should they call themselves Hindus? (188)

The questions raised by Jotirao are fundamental, for they challenge the very basis of infallibility of Vedas. He is aware of the fact that the Brahmans have been deceiving and exploiting the shudratishudra on the basis of Vedas. Whose origin is claimed to be divine. Means, the Vedas are used as instruments for domination and exploitation. Here again Phule resembles to Marx; when Marx concludes that, religion justifies established social order and supports the dominant class. Brahmamic religion justifies, according to Phule, the torment and misery perpetrated on shudratishudra. It not only justifies but proclaims as duty of shudratishudra to enter into servitude. In fact Brahmamic religion glorifies the inhuman treatment meted out to shudratishudra. Phule in *Cultivator’s Whipcord* records some of the religious laws by brahmans:
Some of the written-down items are found in the one sided and heartless book like the one by Manu. These are like the following, ‘Wherever there is a shudra ruler, brahmans should not live there, the brahman should not teach the shudra and not only that, he should not allow the shudra to even overhear the chanting of the Vedas. The Aryans should not travel with the shudras at predawn. The dead body of a shudra could be carried out only by the southern gateway. The shudra was not allowed to touch a Brahmans dead body. Even if the king is starving, he should no take as taxes parts of the produce from a brahman, but the king should arrange for annual feasts for the brahman. If a scholarly brahman finds a treasure, he alone has the right to use them, but if a king finds a treasure, he should give half of the money to the brahman. Whatever the crime a brahman might perform, he should not be harmed, but merely exiled. The Brahmans should employ shudras for labour, because God himself created the Shudras for the service of the brahmans. (148)

These sorts of laws, Phule says, were made to maintain brahmancic domination. Further, Phule talks about the strategies practiced by Brahmans to implement their religion. He mentions:

Dhondiba: What? You mean, the rowdy ancestors of these ruffian brahmans came to our country from outside, defeated our ancestors and turned them into their slaves. Then they brutally forced the rule of their own kings upon us and ruled the roost with great fanfare. I can’t call this dastardly act as great heroism! But just imagine, had our ancestors defeated their (brahmans’) ancestors, wouldn’t they have meted out the same treatment to these jugglers, the bhats? Anyway, let that be. Now tell me, whatever happened when these bhats disguised their brutality as religion, and by what trick did they prejudice the minds of the ignorant shudras against the benevolent British government?

Jotirao: Several bhats started holding nightly meetings in the temple of that heroic god Maruti, in the central square of the villages, outwardly professing to preach religion but really to pollute the minds of the ignorant folks with stupid tales (puranas) from the Bhagawata. (76)
Jotirao Phule’s observation of his time is quite relevant even today. Temples have been used as the institutions to inculcate the puranic superstitious stories by the brahmans. According to Phule, brahmans in the name of religion pollute the minds of the ignorant people. And, in this way they perpetuate the hegemonic system. Here we must understand that Phule focuses on the concept of hegemony much before Gramsci talks about it. Antonio Gramsci argues that the dominant groups impose their domination on the masses and earn the ‘spontaneous’ consent to this domination. (Szeman and Kaposy, 2011,191)

For seeking such ‘spontaneous’ consent, Brahmans adopted many methods. Night meetings in the temples of the villages are one of these methods. Such and many other strategies were adopted by brahmans to emotionally paralyze the masses, so that cultural hegemony would be smoothly and conveniently perpetuated.

Though Marx out rightly rejects the very notion of religion, Phule never does so. Rather, he feels that religion is necessary for humanity. Of course Marx and Phule have resembling views on the disgusting and exploitative nature of certain religions i.e. Christianity for Marx and Hinduism for Phule. But, it must be noted that Marx’s perception of Christianity convinces him to reject the very notion of religion as such. Therefore he categorically proclaims that religion is not required; and religion must be abolished. It is true that Marx’s whole philosophical and ideological endeavor is preoccupied with the single and ultimate aim i.e.
emancipation of humanity from all sorts of oppression. But he never believes in the necessity of religion in the process of emancipation. On the contrary he feels that religion is an impediment in achieving the juncture of communism. He dreams of class less society; rather, it’s his utopia. Such utopia is necessary for every revolutionist. Marx’s revolution starts from abolition of religion, abolition of illusory happiness provided by religion, to construction of communism i.e. construction of real happiness. It seems that communism, as projected and treated by Marx, is antithesis of religion.

Now, it will be interesting to discuss Phule’s views on religion to pinpoint his departure from Marx; but before that it is necessary to focus on Ambedkar’s interpretation of religion and Buddha’s doctrine. This discussion is necessary in order to denote Phule’s ideological affinity i.e. whether he is close to Buddha or Marx. Ambedkar has brought a brilliant comparison between Buddha and Marx, which will, in the fitness of our research frame work, focus on a different dimension of Marxian philosophy. Ambedkar summarizes Buddha’s doctrine in the following way:

1. Religion is necessary for a free society.
2. Not every religion is worth having.
3. Religion must relate to facts of life and not to theories and speculations about God, or soul or Heaven or Earth.
4. It is wrong to make God the centre of Religion.
5. It is wrong to make salvation of the soul as the centre of religion.
6. It is wrong to make animal sacrifices to be the centre of religion.
7. Real religion lives in the heart of man and not in the Sharstras.

8. Man and morality must be the centre of religion. If not, religion is a cruel superstition.

9. It is not enough for morality to be the ideal of life. Since there is no God it must become the law of life.

10. The function of Religion is to reconstruct the world and to make it happy and not to explain its origin or its end.

11. That the unhappiness in the world is due to conflict of interest and the only way to solve it is to follow the Ashtanga Marga.

12. That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another.

13. That it is necessary for the good of society that this sorrow be removed by removing its cause.

14. All human beings are equal.

15. Worth and not birth is the measure of man.

16. What is important is high ideals and not noble birth.

17. Maitri or fellowship towards all must never be abandoned. One owes it even to one’s enemy.

18. Everyone has right to learn. Learning is as necessary for man to live as food is.

19. Learning without character is dangerous.

20. Nothing is infallible. Nothing is binding forever. Everything is subject to inquiry and examination.


22. Everything is subject to the law of causation.

23. Nothing is permanent or sanatan. Everything is subject to change. Being is always Becoming.

24. War is wrong unless it is for truth and justice.

25. The victor has duties towards the vanquished.

This is the creed of the Buddha in a summary form. How ancient but how fresh! How wide and how deep are his teachings! (2008, 442-43)
Buddha’s doctrine, as Ambedkar argues, is human centric, i.e. not god centric, it is highly scientific. There is no place for any sort of superstition, it is the proclamation of social justice and equality. Maitri or fellowship is indispensable feature and not the war in Buddha’s doctrine. Ambedkar derives these doctrines which he understood from Tripitak. Further he brings a comparison of these doctrines with Marx’s major premises. He puts:

Even when the communism – which is another name for the dictatorship of the Proletariat – came to Russia, it did not come as something inevitable without any kind of human effort. There was a revolution and much deliberate planning had to be done with a lot of violence and bloodshed, before it could step into Russia. The rest of the world is still waiting for coming of the proletarian Dictatorship. Apart from this general falsification of the Marxian thesis that socialism is inevitable, many of the other propositions stated in the lists (Ambedkar has given the list of major premises of original Marxian creed) have also been demolished both by logic as well as by experience. Nobody now accepts the economic interpretation of history as the only explanation of history. Nobody accepts that the proletariat has been progressively pauperized. And the same is true about his other premises.

What remains of the Karl Marx is a residue of fire, small but still very important. The residue in my view consists of four items:

(i) The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world.
(ii) That there is a conflict of interest between class and class.
(iii) That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation.
(iv) That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property. (444)

Ambedkar argues that most of the Marxian philosophical premises have been ‘demolished both by logic as well as by experience.’ He has strong objection
against Marx’s principle of inevitability of socialism. No doubt, Ambedkar, the disciple of Jotirao Phule, attacks most of the philosophical tenets of Marx, but at the same time he praises some of the very essential and basic tenets which resembled Buddha. According to Ambedkar the above four items’ are ‘very important’ and, are very close to Buddha’s doctrine. As a matter of fact, Ambedkar’s criticism of Marx is not taken positively by Indian Marxist thinkers. But it must be understood and accepted that Ambedkar’s proposal of Buddha’s doctrine as an alternative to Marx’s philosophy is in tune with Phule’s proposal of *Satyadharm* (True Religion).

Ambedkar raises two questions pertaining to Marx’s proposition of ‘withering away of the state’, which, he claims, are not satisfactorily answered by the Marxists. He asks:

> When will it wither away? What will take the place of the State when it withers away? To the first question they can give no definite time. Dictatorship for a short period may be good and a welcome thing even for making democracy safe……

> The communists have given no answer. At any rate no satisfactory answer to the question what would take place of the state when it withers away, though this question is more important than the question when the State will wither away. Will it be succeeded by Anarchy? If so the building up of the Communist State is an useless effort. (460)

After raising these questions which enquire into the possibilities of political future of Marxian philosophy, Ambedkar underlines the inadequacy in ultimate stage in human history as proposed by Marx. Necessity of religion is outrightly rejected by Marx, but Phule and Ambedkar seem to be thinking very seriously
about it. Ambedkar argues that if establishment of communism is by force, then, what will happen after force is withdrawn? How communism will sustain? (460) If at all communist values are to survive force will not be a permanent solution. He writes:

The only thing which could sustain it after force is withdrawn is Religion. But to the communists Religion is anathema. Their hatred to religion is so deep seated that they will not even discriminate between religions which are helpful to communism and religions which are not. The communists have carried their hatred of Christianity to Buddhism without waiting to examine the difference between the two. (460)

Further, continuing his argument Ambedkar says:

The Russians do not seem to be paying any attention to Buddhism as an ultimate aid to sustain Communism when force is withdrawn. The Russians are proud of their communism. But they forget that the wonder of all wonders is that the Buddha established Communism so far as the Sangh was concerned without dictatorship. It may be that it was a Communism on a very small scale but it was communism without dictatorship a miracle which Lenin failed to do. (461)

Here we notice that Ambedkar again and again emphasizes on the necessity of communism without force as its driving agent. He supports his argument related to the necessity of religion by insisting on Buddha’s establishment of communism in his Sangha 2381 years before Marx. While distinguishing between the methods of Buddha and Marx, Ambedkar says:

The Buddha’s method was different, His method was to change the mind of man: to alter his disposition: so that whatever man does, he does it voluntarily without the use of force or compulsion. His main means to alter the disposition of men was his Dhamma and the constant preaching of his
Dhamma. The Buddha’s way was not to force people to do what they did not like to do although it was good for them. His way was to alter the disposition of men so that they would do voluntarily what they would not otherwise to do. (461)

Thus, the doubts raised by Ambedkar about Marxist philosophy necessarily pinpoint the inadequacies and one sidedness of it. For Ambedkar, material development without spiritual development is futile, hence, he finds the true welfare of human being in the principles of Buddha.

According to Ambedkar a religion which is not god centred and which rejects the concepts of heaven, hell, divinity etc., which doesn’t observe any superstition, which is based on reason and equality, fraternity and liberty is inevitable for human being. Phule’s Satyadharm fulfills all the requirements of a religion which contains love and friendship along with communist values. And, these communist values are not forced but expected to be voluntarily adopted by the people.

Close reading of Phules’ literature reveals that he is in search of a perpetual system which manifests into Satyadharma (True Religion). Marx rejects the need of religion; he condemns it by declaring it as ‘illusory world’, whereas Phule insists on Satyadharm to save Shudratishudra from ‘illusory world’ of Hinduism. For Marx communism is the alternative for religion, and, for Phule, Satyadharm is the alternative for Hindu religion. Means, for Marx, Socio-economic and political ideology is inevitable to replace religion, and Phule wants to replace one religious system with another religious system. Marx’s generalization of all religions as
‘illusory world’ is actually based on Christianity which he considers as the ultimate and applicable to all religions. Phule does not formulate such general perception of religion on the basis of Hinduism. On the contrary, he distinguishes between Hindu religion and other religions in the world, and, by carefully studying most of the religious books he comes to the conclusion that a new religion is needed. Accordingly, he formulates the principles of his universal religion of truth (Sarvajanik Satyadharm). This, I think, is a crucial step that surpasses Marx. Probably, this may be the reason why Ambedkar seems to be inclined toward Phule. In one of his speeches Ambedkar announces as Dangle quotes:

> Let others go where they will. We will follow the path of Jotiba[Phule]. We may or may not take Marx with us but we will certainly not abandon Jotiba’s philosophy. (1992: 259)

Marx appeals to all the workers in the world to come together, where as Phule appeals all the people in the world to come. Marx proposes, after revolution, the dictatorship of proletariat but Phule never proposes the dictatorship of Shudratisudra. He envisions casteless society which will be based on equality, fraternity, liberty and morality. He does not want to extinguish brahmans by using violent methods, but he wants brahmans to transform themselves and live as human beings on equal footings with shudratisudra.

Proletariat in Marx’s scheme is, to a large extent, synonymous to shudratisudra in Phule’s scheme, and the ordeal of self emancipation is also common for them. But, for Marx this self-emancipation is considered as inevitable
and one of the steps in the process of historical development. And, for Phule self-emancipation is a ‘deliberate phenomena’ which has to be achieved by a continuous struggle on various planes.

Marx’s philosophical strategies culminate largely into economic and political dominions, whereas Phule, going beyond economic and political domains, culminates into cultural reconstruction with deliberate insistence on morality and brotherhood, tolerance and transformation.
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