

“EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION DURING THE 19TH CENTURY MAHARASHTRA”

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The dual function of history is to enable man to understand the society of the past and to increase his mastery over the society of the present.

- E. H. Carr

During the ancient and medieval times, the education was not given to all the people and it was used as an instrument to control rest of the society by the Brahmins. The women and dalits are deprived of almost all kinds of human rights as a result of caste system and patriarchal nature. Women have been kept under control of and at the mercy of men throughout the life, while dalits or untouchables were meant to serve upper castes and also kept under control and at the mercy of the upper castes. This was a treacherous move of the Brahmins to enjoy all kinds of privileges and control over them. To safeguard their own interests, Brahmins denied right to education to them. Due to lack of knowledge women and dalits could not realize the real cause of their slavery and did not revolt. The privilege of knowledge and right to perform rituals made Brahmins the leaders of Hinduism. They wrote religious books to keep their own interests safe and to enjoy supremacy over the society. During the Peshwa rule in Maharashtra, the Brahmanical supremacy reached its zenith and so women and dalits faced all kinds of atrocities; the untouchability was observed in more rigid form while women had to face all kinds of exploitations.

The establishment of the British regime in Maharashtra in 1818 was a very important phenomenon in the history of modern Maharashtra. The English Education introduced by the new rule here was open to all irrespective of caste, creed, and gender. It brought modern ideas and concepts like liberty, equality, justice, humanity, democracy etc. The attempt here is to find out the role of education in bringing out social change in Maharashtra and also the contribution of

the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule in making people ready to create society based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

Concept of Education:

Education is regarded as an important tool in the overall progress of any society. It is the backbone of the social development of any society. It constructs the personality of a human being. It has a potential of generating a spirit of enquiry and questioning to the accepted truths in the society and rebel against the injustice. So it is considered as an important factor in the process of transformation of society and all its other aspects from one stage to other. It inculcates scientific attitude among the people. It is regarded as an important instrument in bringing society out of evil practices and superstitious mentality.

Many of the social scientists tried to define Education and its role which differ from each other. For the Classical Greek philosophy of education, proper education involved the search for the good life and good society. But it was mainly limited to welfare of the upper classes. The Roman concept of education was designed according to the needs of the empire and given role to create a skill based cultured society. The concept of English education revolved round to teach young people good manners, etiquettes and thoughts. For the German, education is supposed to shape and create well recognized human beings. Hegel and Karl Marx both had emphasized the role of education to bring a humanized society. Karl Marx had stated the importance of education as an instrument to become a human being. At the same time he wanted education to rescue from the influence of the ruling class. In the twentieth century John Dewey, Babasaheb Ambedkar, an American philosopher, had given importance to the moral aspects of progressive education, linking education and democracy. He insisted on everybody's right to education because he assumes that without education democracy cannot work properly. To him, "Education is primarily a public and only secondarily a specialized vocation". Thus for Dewey, Education plays vital role in the success of democracy. According to Pestalozzi, education is a "rational, harmonious and progressive development of man's innate powers." The progress of society depends on the success of education. Thus the classical concept of education is aimed to create a just society.

Educational Policy of the British Government:

The Brahmins with having absolute socio-religious and cultural power in their hands maintained the educational policy in favor of themselves. The section 43 of the Charter Act of 1813, made it compulsory on the East India Company to accept the responsibility of the education of Indians. The prime aim of the educational system developed here in India by the British Government was to make it according to their colonial interests and that it should strengthen their colonial power. Though the colonialism could not disturb the existing feudal structure, it had to remold and alter it according to new capitalist mould for the existence of itself. The colonialist had understood the necessity to take support of the dominant castes for the aim of exploitation and so did not try to disturb the feudalism as per the will of new supporter class of the colonial government. The 'Educational Colonialism' developed by the British is the part of their 'Economic Colonialism'.

The Educational policy of the British government thus varied from time to time but never spent more amount of the expenditure for imparting education to lower castes women and dalits; because they did not want to disturb the feudal and caste based socio-economic structure so as to please the newly educated class of upper caste Hindus which was strong supporter and mediator between the rulers and the ruled. As these upper caste people did not want to educate their remaining castes in the fear of demanding justice and losing all kinds of privileges of caste system. So the focus of the Educational policy was upon educating the upper caste Hindus and not the dalits, women and lower castes.

According to the census the Brahmins were mere 3.94% of the total population and even then in 1896-97, there were 15 Brahmin students of every 16 students learning in the colleges; 167 Brahmin students of every 197 students of the middle schools. The Brahmins comprises 71% of the total graduates during 1886 to 1910. This clearly shows that the new colonial government had completely neglected the education of the dalits and other lower castes in favor of the Brahmins and *Baniyas*. The colonial government never tried to disturb the caste based feudal economy of the India and never wanted to disturb the interests of the upper castes as their support was needed and used in the colonial set up in exploiting the country.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Educational Revolution:

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule had rightly understood that only lack of knowledge is responsible for the worst conditions of the shudras,

dalits and women. As he stated in one of his *akhandas*, (prose), '*Itake anartha eka avidyene kele*', i.e. lack of knowledge is responsible for all kinds of injustices. So he considered the knowledge as the device of liberation, and according to him, knowledge brings new outlook in the educated person, it brings confidence and self-respect in a person. He considered that the knowledge makes a person more rational. Mahatma Phule launched a lifelong struggle against the caste system and the Brahmanical concept of knowledge and he wanted shudras, women and dalits to get education to attack these worst concepts and get rid of the worst conditions.

Lord Macaulay, a Law member of Council of Governor General Lord William Bentinck, had advocated the western education and English medium for education in India. In fact the British Government was not willing to spread this English education among the masses that means the Bahujan Samaj or low Caste Hindus. Rather than they were willing to execute this Education to Brahmins only and it is very clear from the role of Elphinstone the first Governor of the Bombay presidency. The British Government had formed the "Downward Filtration Theory", which states that the education should be given to the Brahmins and they will educate the rest of the people. This view had come in the minds of the British think tank with the fear of any revolt by the low caste people if they were given liberal western education. Mahatma Phule strongly opposed the Downward Filtration Theory on the basis of the reality. Reality was that even one dalit student if he came in the class he was given such worst treatment that he had no way than to leave school. He had the clear idea that within the society which is divided into many castes it is very natural that high castes were thinking of their progress only and could not think about spreading education among the dalits and women. To him, social slavery is most dangerous evil than political slavery. This social slavery had come only because of the divisible caste system in Hindu society, so he wanted it to eradicate by educating women Shudras and dalits on the western line. According to him social change is not possible without educating the oppressed people. Only educated Brahmins will never eradicate this social evil of caste system, which is very beneficiary to them. And so Mahatma Phule strongly attacked the Downward Filtration Theory, he rather wanted to attack the basic values of caste system with forming strong union of women, Shudras and dalits. Because the society was completely under influence of caste values which were prevalent since

last thousands of years among them. With the help of western education, he wanted to make the untouchables and women aware of their conditions which would be challengeable by launching a strong struggle against the caste system by forming strong organizations. He started the first school for the oppressed girls in Bhidewada at Pune in 1848. He opened new three schools for girls in 1851 and 1852 in Pune only. During this period of 5-6 years, he started three schools for untouchables like Mahars and Mangs. Actually he wanted to wake up this oppressed castes against the basic reason of their oppression by educating them with new western ideas like equality, humanism, freedom, brotherhood etc. Even other social reformers like Lokhitwadi, Ranade, and Agarkar were also well-known about the fact that Brahmins had deprived rest of the society with denying the right to education to them. Lokhitwadi said:

"The Brahmins have monopolized learning through unfair means. They have decreed that other castes should not be educated. Today the Brahmins have captured all the means of livelihood. The Brahmin *Pandits* have threatened to leave their profession rather than teach the holy language Sanskrit to non-Brahmin students.

Mahatma Phule rightly stated that lack of knowledge, for which he used the word "Avidya" in his famous quotation in Marathi, is responsible for all kinds of injustice with the untouchables, women and Shudras. They even could not think properly, they were totally lost their confidence. They were just behaving as directed by the law books and this is the mental slavery given to them by the Hinduism and so Mahatma Phule was against this Mental Slavery of the untouchables and women.

According to him, Knowledge and Education is essential for giving the humanity to human being. He believed that just like the revolution took place in western countries due to education, the same will happen in India and only with the help of imparting western education to all. He believed that the knowledge and education are the keys to the social revolution in India. He states that due to lack of knowledge, these people never revolted against the system and accepted all kinds of injustice. So he was very keen and firm on educating this Bahujan Samaj i.e. non-Brahmins. He was quite sure that if the people from lower classes were educated, they would be willing to struggle for basic human rights. He was looking at education as a tool to help non-Brahmins in improving their livelihood.

He was almost very close to the views of Paulo Friary's theory of social revolution through Education in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" or "Cultural Action for Freedom." He wanted a strong revolt against the prevalent evil social system by the non-Brahmins so as to make new society free from any kind of discrimination. He wanted education to play role of creating new society with full of righteousness, equality, ethics etc. Nobody could be deprived of human rights. No one should be oppressed by anyone. Thus humanity and social equality were very essential thoughts of Mahatma Phule and he tried hard to bring these values with the help of education.

He was very thankful to British Government for opening the doors of education to non-Brahmins on one hand, but at the same time he never feared to show the faults of the government in the application of education to them. He appealed the government to open the schools for Shudras and untouchables in every village and not to aid the higher education for high castes, if it wanted to prevent the misuse of the power by the Brahmins as an officer.

He clearly showed his disagreement with the condition of the primary education in the Bombay Presidency in the application given to the Hunter Commission. He requested government to aid only those schools run by the trained teachers as untrained teachers were only reciting the religious paragraphs in the schools. He further requested government to increase the number of the primary schools and by giving scholarships and awards to the students the government should increase the lust for education among the common people. He also requested to improve the quality of education which would be fruitful to students in future life.

Thus, I conclude that colonial education in the nineteenth century played a very important role in bringing society based on equality, liberty and brotherhood among the masses. It created a wave of social reformers in Maharashtra and Mahatma Phule was the greatest humanist wanted a society free from any kind of discriminations and for this looking at education as a weapon and his thoughts are still most important and guiding us to bring the equality and humanity in our society.

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