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आज़ादी का
अमृत महोत्सव



इतिहासाचार्य वि. का.राजवाडे संशोधन मंडळ, धुळे



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या संस्थेचे त्रैमासिक
॥ संशोधक ॥

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महाराष्ट्र राज्य साहित्य आणि संस्कृती मंडळाने या नियतकालिकेच्या प्रकाशनार्थ अनुदान दिले आहे. या नियतकालिकेतील लेखकांच्या विचारांशी मंडळ व शासन सहमत असेलच असे नाही.



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'Education and Social Change in Maharashtra in the 19th Century'

Dr. Sonawane Jagdish Chhaburao

Associate Professor, Department of History,
Arts, Commerce and Science College Sonai,
Tal-Newasa, Dist-Ahmednagar. 414105.
Email: sonawanejagdish31@gmail.com

Abstract:

The colonial rule played a very important role in bringing society based on equality, liberty and brotherhood among the masses by imparting education to Indians irrespective of caste, creed and gender. 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.

Change is universal phenomenon and is unavoidable; it is the basic nature of the society. Society has evolved through the times immemorial. During this process of evolution, the social institutions have undergone changes. Social change occupies the most important place in human history and social change in modern India is so vast and complex that to understand this process of social change we need an interdisciplinary approach.

Social change may be defined as the process which is discernible in the alteration of the structure and functioning of a particular social system.¹ This term is used to describe any change or modification in the social pattern or system. Social change is thus the significant change that occurs in the structure of the society. Martin Carnoy in '*Education as Cultural Imperialism*' argues that it is colonial knowledge which perpetuates 'the myth' that 'schooling has served the poor to succeed'.² Education played a vital role in bringing social change in India. It is the

education which brought new western and modern ideas like equality, liberty, humanism, freedom, brotherhood, etc to the notice of young educated Indians and they began to examine our society and its weaknesses like caste system, child marriage, secondary position to the women, etc.

The Hindu society was governed mainly by the upper caste Brahmins who had denied the right to education to the rest of the people known as Bahujan Samaj assigning them very hazardous punishments if they even listen to the Shastras i.e., Law Books of Hindus. This was very injustice to the women and Shudras. Particularly woman was considered as disguising, greedy, cruel, and foolish by the law books and thus she was made a mere servant to man in the patriarchal Hindu society. Mahar, Mang, etc were so called untouchables and moved out of society and denied all kinds of rights including that of education.

With the coming of the British, the scenario began to change as the missionaries took initiative in educating the masses, especially untouchables and women though with the aim of spread of Christianity. The Government of East India Company had accepted the responsibility to educate the masses by the order of Charter Act of 1813. The 43rd clause of this Act empowered the Governor General to appropriate "a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees" in each year out of "the surplus territorial revenues" for revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned



natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences among the British territories in India.³ 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.⁴ In fact, the British Government was not willing to spread English education among the masses, low Caste Hindus rather than it was willing to execute Education to Brahmins only which is clear from the role of Elphinstone, the first Governor of the Bombay presidency.⁵ 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.⁶

The Woods Dispatch came in 1854 and it threw out the Downward Filtration Theory and advocated government to take responsibility of educating the low caste poor people. That is why it was considered as the "Charter of English Education for Indians". Though it was not accepted on the ground level, it was really welcomed in the Indian scenario. But the Downward Filtration Theory was in practice even upto the last decade of Nineteenth century. Mahatma Jotirao Phule always objected this theory and demanded to educate common people.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule had come forward as a first voice for the education of the women, shudras and dalits. He 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. Mahatma Phule was aware of the fact 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. He not only appealed the government to spread education among these downtrodden people but also himself started schools for women and Mahar-Mangs, the untouchable castes. He started the first school for the oppressed girls in Bhidewada at Pune in 1848.⁷ This was an act of violation of social rules and so his father expelled him from his house. But Mahatma Phule didn't look back and again 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.⁸ Actually he wanted to wake up the 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, 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."⁹

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 and totally lost their confidence.



According to him, Knowledge and Education is essential for giving the humanity to human being.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ Shikshak Din ed. Sham Munde, and others Hariti Publications, Pune, June 2013. Page no 152.

He believed that the knowledge and education are the keys to the social revolution in India. He was quite sure that if the people from lower classes were educated, they would be willing to struggle for basic human rights.¹² 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."¹³ 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 criticized the government and appealed 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.¹⁴

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 and to increase the number of the primary schools

and by giving scholarships, awards to the students the government should increase the lust for education among the common people.¹⁵

Women, dalits and Shudras were deprived of education since last thousands of years and so to make them educated, he advocated a '**Protective Discrimination**'. He wanted to give some scholarships or other things so as to make them prepare to take education. The hostel facility would bring them to schools, and even he requested government to give them government services as soon as they complete their education. In his book, "Shetkaryancha Aasud" (Whip of the Farmers), he wrote, "To educate the sons of Shudra farmers, the teachers must be from them only who could do all the works related to fields; the students who passed the sixth standard should be given the appointments of the "Patils", which would create the lust to become Patil among the sons of the farmers"¹⁶ He wanted the education to bring the ability among students to identify the good and bad, to stand against the evils of the patriarchal society and to strive to bring equality.¹⁷

Thus, I conclude that colonial education 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.

Footnotes :

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