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# इतिहासाचार्य वि. का. राजवाडे मंडळ, धुळे या संस्थेचे त्रैमासिक ॥ संशोधक ॥

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# Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad and Satyashodhak Movement

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## Abstract:

Maharaja Sayajirao was the strong supporter of the Satyashodhak Movement and he adopted the revolutionary thoughts of Mahatma Phule and always stood for the cause of the social change through the Satyashodhak movement. The path of education adopted by the Phule couple for the upliftment of the Bahujan community, which remained 'illiterate' in the traditional social system, was in line with Sayajirao's policy of social reform. Like Mahatma Phule, the role of a strong supporter played by Sayajirao in the life of Savitribai Phule, India's first female teacher, remains unknown till now. He understood the importance of Education in the overall progress of the Women, Shudras and Dalits and so ordered the Compulsory and Free Education to all in his Baroda State, which has become the first to take such a revolutionary welfare step.

Education is an important factor in promoting social reform. The Women, Shudras and Dalits are deprived of education in the Hindu society while the right to education was given to a handful of upper castes as privilege. Lack of education was the main reason for the decline of the Bahujan society in India. Mahatma Phule understood the basic reason of deterioration of the society and so established the first school for girls at Bhide Wada in Pune on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1848. He devoted his life to impart the

education to this Bahujan community. But because Mahatma Phule himself was educating girls in this school, the Bahujan community was not ready to send their girls to school. To find a way out of this situation, Phule started teaching his wife Savitri Bai. While educating Savitri Bai, this husband and wife had to face the heavy criticism of the society. This was the preparation for the development of Savitri Bai, India's first female teacher. Phule solved the problem of female teacher facing female education by teaching a woman from her own household. Mahatma Phule set the ideal of starting this social reform, which conveys the message of equality between men and women, from one's own home before all the social reformers in India. Along with being India's first female teacher, Phule's contribution in shaping Savitribai as a headmistress, poet, social worker is unique. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad converted this 'plant' of Bahujan education planted by the Phule couple into a 'banana tree' in his Baroda State. Sayajirao's strong support to the work of the Phule couple, who made Mahatma Phule's dream come true beyond their expectations, has been overlooked till now. It will be enlightening to understand the relationship between the Phule couple and Maharaja Sayajirao.

Mahatma Phule, always criticised the British Government for not extending education to the



masses. He demanded the mass education before the Hunter Commission on October 19, 1882 with a valid reason that these common people from lower castes were paying taxes to the Government and so it was the duty of the Government to provide education to the masses. It is considered to be the first such demand in India and therefore a revolutionary demand. He also insisted on free education of Shudras and Dalits, and demanded the scholarships and prizes to create taste for education among them. He also demanded to make education compulsory, to open separate schools for untouchables.

Sayajirao was adopted to the throne of Baroda in 1875. He received statehood in 1881 and in 1882 he issued the first revolutionary decree of free education for tribals and untouchables in Songad taluq of Baroda. According to this order, a hostel was started with free accommodation and education at government expense. Later in 1893 this Act was implemented in 10 villages of Amreli district. In 1906, free primary education was provided to students of all castes and religions in the entire Baroda State. The Primary Education Act made it mandatory for parents to send boys up to 10 years of age and girls up to 8 years of age to school. Parents who will not send their children to school will be charged Rs.1 per day. Penalties were also provided. 60 per cent of the amount collected from the fine was earmarked for building school buildings, 35 per cent for scholarships for poor students and 5 per cent for Patels working as Talathi. Further, the Indian National Congress in 1910 at the Allahabad National Convention demanded compulsory and free primary education. Not only this, in 1882, when Phule was demanding the right to primary education for women, Sayajirao started a college of education for women in Baroda to train women teachers. Sayajirao's 'expansion' of Mahatma Phule's life work is astonishing.

Maharaja Sayajirao, who made good use of the Satya Shodhak Samaj, Arya Samaj and Prarthana Samaj in his social reform activities, adopted the policies of Satyashodhak Samaj to the greatest extent among them all. In 1884, after attaining statehood, Maharaja Sayajirao called Ramchandra Vithoba Dhamanskar, an important seeker of truth, from British employment and appointed him to the post of *Naib Subhe* in the Baroda State. This appointment was made on the recommendation of Mama Parmanand of Mumbai. Dhamanskar later became the *Dewan* of Baroda State in 1901. Vasudev Lingoji Birje was the librarian of the palace library of Maharaja Sayajirao, the seeker of truth. His book 'Kshatriya and their Existence' was published under the patronage of Sayajirao. In the Vedokta case that arose in Kolhapur in 1900, the use of Birjelikhit as evidence was discussed in the Kolhapur court.

In October 1885, Ramji Santuji Awte started 'Baroda Vatsal', a 'Satyashodhak' (truth-seeking) weekly in Baroda. During 1896, Awte and Dhamanskar together started a class to prepare priests of the Maratha caste at Madhavrao Pawar's house in Baroda. In 1896, Maharaja Sayajirao published a biography of the Buddha written by Keluskar Guruji. It was the first biography of the Buddha written by any Indian, not just in Marathi, in modern times. On February 17, 1930, the Maharaja had deliberately held lectures for the public by some activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj in Lakshmilal Palace. Maharaja himself was present at that time. He paid Rs 200 as help to Naro Babaji Mahagat, a follower of Satyashodhak Samaj. Swami Ramayya Venkayya Ayyavaru, a renowned contractor, was given an opportunity to contribute to the construction of his Lakshmi Vilas palace. No other administrator supported the truth-seeking thought as strongly as Maharaja Sayajirao, who worked tirelessly for Bahujan literacy.



Maharaja Sayajirao, who was a strong supporter of the Satya Shodhak movement, also helped Mahatma Phule, the father of this movement, from time to time. In 1884 Maharaja called Mahatma Phule to Baroda. During Phule's visit to Baroda, Maharaj organized 2-3 lectures on social reform. While implementing Mahatma Phule's ideas, Maharaja Sayajirao also helped him during the financial crisis. Maharaja Sayajirao helped Mahatma Phule financially for treatment during his first bout of paralysis. During his visit to Baroda, Jotiba read out his book 'Shetkaryacha Asud' to the Maharaja. Maharaj's help in publishing this book is mentioned on the last page of this book.

Maharaja Sayajirao always referred to Jotiba Phule as Mahatma. The Maharaja instructed the Satyashodhak workers in Bombay to confer the title of Mahatma on Jotirao. Accordingly, in 1888, Satyashodhak activists offered the title of 'Mahatma' to Phule in Mumbai. Phule expressed the respect he felt for Sayajirao by writing an Akhand. This Akhand was published in Deenbandhu newspaper at that time. This aspect of the respectful relationship between the two great men, Sayajirao and Mahatma Phule, has unfortunately remained neglected till date.

After Mahatma Phule's death in 1890, Savitribai and Yashwant had to spend very difficult days. On the request of Mama Parmanand, Maharaja Sayajirao sent a check of one thousand rupees in the hands of Dhamanskar for the help of Savitribai. By depositing this check in Narayan Company, from the interest of that amount, Savitribai was paid Rs. 50 every quarter. Tukaram Tatya played vital role in depositing the cheque in the company. Arrangements were made to get help. According to Sayajirao's order to keep the receipt of this deposit with Savitribai, this receipt was sent to Savitribai by registered letter.

The memory of Mahadu Sahadu Waghole is important in this regard. Vaghole says, "After Tatya's death, her family Savitribai and son Yashwanta faced a very bad time. They had absolutely no money for food and for Yashwant's education. This story was brought to the ears of rich Sayajirao Maharaj by Tatya's friends. At that time, Maharaja had sent some amount to Savitribai, and for many days, he had managed his livelihood and Yashwant's education on that amount. This reminds Vaghole that his wife Savitribai and son Yashwant were able to lead a dignified life after Phule only because of Sayajirao's help. Dr. who risked his life to serve the patients during the plague epidemic in 1897. Yashwant's early education was done with the financial support of Sayajirao.

While sanctioning the pension to Savitribai, Maharaja Sayajirao had expressed the need for Mahatma Phule's memorial to Dhamanskar. In this regard, Maharaj said to Dhamanskar, "There must be a memorial for Jotiba and I am ready to contribute to their memorial fund if anyone cares to do so." Sayajirao's willingness to help for this memorial while first explaining the need for a memorial to Mahatma Phule, who laid the foundation of the Satya Shodhak movement, shows his affection for Mahatma Phule's work. 'Barodya', which actively supported Mahatma Phule in his ideological journey, played the same role with regard to Savitribai. In 1892, 'Baroda Vatsal' published a collection of Savitribai's speeches. This history of the strong support provided by Maharaja Sayajirao in the ideological life of the Phule couple remained 'in the dark' till now.

Maharaja Sayajirao was the strong supporter of the Satyashodhak Movement and he adopted the revolutionary thoughts of Mahatma Phule and always stood for the cause of the social change through the Satyashodhak movement. The path of education adopted by the Phule couple for the



upliftment of the Bahujan community, which remained 'illiterate' in the traditional social system, was in line with Sayajirao's policy of social reform. Like Mahatma Phule, the role of a strong supporter played by Sayajirao in the life of Savitribai Phule, India's first female teacher, remains unknown till now.

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