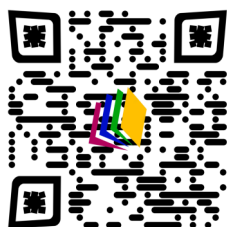




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## **An Ephemeral Conceptualization of Phule's Understanding of Socio-Cultural Structure: Brahman Supremacy, Caste & Tradition and Role of Education**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Jotirao Phule born in 1827 into a family of gardener (*mali*) caste in Maharashtra. A caste which eventually had a very distinct position in the Maharashtrian society that particularly in that point of time because of the fact that these members lived closely by cultivation and selling fruits and flowers and thus, was largely concerned with rural cultivation and also with a large market in the urban. Jotirao Phule's selected writings tends to be very useful in understanding the cultural and social milieu of 19th century. The caste system continued to be a belief that human beings are organized in a hierarchy ordained by divine indulgence which is one of the more abandoned and challenging areas of India social history. Phule seems to endure as one of the few prevailing and significant voice that particularly transformed the history of Dalit discourses in India. Jotirao Phule's writing precisely in *Ghulamgiri* (Slavery), *Shetkaryacha Asud* (Cultivator's Whipcord), *Jati* (Caste) and *Dharma* (Religion) played a vital role in terms of intellectual and academic output that worked as a voice of marginalized people in the society during the 19th century. Phule's writing is very much restricted to a kind of anti-Brahmanical in nature. His understanding of the social structure during the 19th century was a sort of anti-Brahmanical in nature and further suggesting how influential were Brahmins during that particular retro. This paper will precisely focus on looking into the social implications and the extrapolations focused by the Phule over the underprivileged sections and his replication on the problems of caste. At the same time also focuses on understanding how Phule treated class-based discernment and how education as suggested by Phule a key factor in permitting class-based discrimination during the 19th century.

**KEY WORDS:** Caste System, Varna, Slavery, Jotirao Phule, 19th Century, Cultivator, Brahman, Anti-Brahman, Socio-Cultural, Education.

Jotirao Phule's selected writings tends to be very useful in understanding the cultural and social milieu of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The caste system continued to be a belief that human beings are organized in a hierarchy ordained by divine indulgence which is one of the more abandoned and challenging areas of India social history. Phule seems to endure as one of the few prevailing and significant voice that particularly transformed the history of Dalit discourses in India. Jotirao Phule's writing precisely in *Ghulamgiri* (Slavery), *Shetkaryacha Asud* (Cultivator's Whipcord), *Jati* (Caste) and *Dharma* (Religion) played a vital role in terms of intellectual and academic output that worked as a voice of marginalized people in the society during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Phule's writing is very much restricted to a kind of anti-Brahmanical in nature. His understanding of the social structure during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a sort of anti-Brahmanical in nature and further suggesting how influential were Brahmins during that particular retro. However, he never opposed Hindu religion but his main concern was major social institutions with the Hindu fold of religion which he continuously opposed in his entire life time. His concept through the text was the social order of Brahmanism as one of the binaries that prolonged all that is unreasonable and coldhearted in nature. Phule's writing entirely focused on two important aspects which included Brahmins at one end and Shudratishudra on the other. However, at the same time Phule's work also focused on the education and gender discrimination as well. His main apprehension was connecting caste-based oppression in the tradition and the role of education as solution in bringing vicissitudes in the discriminatory social structure. This paper will precisely focus on looking into the social implications and the extrapolations focused by the Phule over the underprivileged sections and his replication on the problems of caste. At the same

time also focuses on understanding how Phule treated class-based discernment and how education as suggested by Phule a key factor in permitting class-based discrimination during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Phule born in 1827 into a family of gardener (*mali*) caste in Maharashtra. A caste which eventually had a very distinct position in the Maharashtrian society that particularly in that point of time because of the fact that these members lived closely by cultivation and selling fruits and flowers and thus, was largely concerned with rural cultivation and also with a large market in the urban. However, we can't deny the fact that later his father become one of the prominent contractors that entirely changed the socio-economic status of Phule's entire family. Nevertheless, Phule studied in the Scottish Missionary school in Pune that build Phule's first great encounter in leading foundation of Satyashodak Samaj and followed by new innovative ideas of social transformations and religious extremism. His main focus was on the discriminatory caste system prevailed in the Indian society and thus, he poises caste with that of slavery particularly with reference to enslavement of Africans in the America. He makes a precise comparison of Brahmin torture towards Shudras and Atishudras with that of slavery in South America on Africans. Moreover, ending up quoting that such torture was more unadorned than slavery that took place in South America and Africa. Interestingly, Phule tend to consider Shudras and Atishudras as *Kshatriyas* historically and supposed that Dalits in the Indian society suffered drastic humiliations, exploitations and marginalization particularly by the Brahman community. Therefore, Phule make a very distinction between Brahman and the low-caste. However, we can't rule out the fact that somehow Phule himself was struggled in retro to make a sense of the term non-Brahmas and

the lower-caste. Since, it was difficult in a society fused by Hindu particularly in Maharashtra during that time to categorize who belonged to the high status depending on the wealth and socially leading great families to the poorest untouchable sweepers.

Needless to say, non-Brahman infirmities were nothing new in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Maharashtra but, the way in which this new manner the exclusion of such social order was very much apprehended and Phule played an important role in providing a boost to such social reform or urge amongst the people. Phule fought unremittingly all his life against the caste system. His main efforts and support of his dedication led to the establishment of the Satyashodhak Samaj. However, the ideological non-Brahmin movement put forth by the cultivating and laboring castes as the true inheritors of Maharashtra tradition and culture in the natural social leaders and the most vital beneficiaries of government sustenance and this further flourished in devising a tradition. Nevertheless, Phule conjured it with aplomb and his main purpose was to deride Brahman voracity and to clutch that Brahmans had apprehended on the educational and administrative institutions which the British were now nurturing. But one of the vital determinations of Phule was to apposite for the anti-Brahman cause these myths, symbols and tradition in Maharashtra society that was employed by the Brahman supremacy.

Henceforth, Phule straight away write against Hindu gods and goddesses and also indicate the fact that social condition for the shudras and atishudras were neither favorable nor they were given any formidable status in the society. Furthermore, the way Phule indicate Hindu sacred texts like Manusmriti and Bhagawata inclines to acme that these were the text that were governing the social and cultural structure of that particular retro and his

works acted as a myth buster of the old Indian tradition. He also used Ballad on Shivaji were he brushed aside both as more stanch and the laxer which tend Brahman varieties of the story by representing his achievements as a way of uniting kshatriya and shudra community with any kind of Brahmin contribution that tends to be as a worthy of mention. Notwithstanding, Phule's greatest achievement was the attack upon the central traditional system that predominantly bolstered the Brahman position by disapproving with great amplification in his work on Aryan invasion itself. However, it is one of the crucial and problematic to excerpt such portrayal of king Bali to an end and the Brahman conquest hegemony and it can be seen as Phule's refusal to accept that suppression of low castes was the byproduct of a social system reinforced by all the varna but shudras and atishudras. Therefore, for him untouchability placed an important concern in a Hindu fold of religion and thus education becomes the tool to do so. Needless to say, Phule was not against all the Brahmins, there were many friends of his and some of them were Brahmins who helped him to open schools for shudras and atishudras girls.

Phule's writing played a vital role in bringing cultivators of low castes to fight against the brutal nature of Brahmanism. Another significant facet was given to the woes of women. Phule's sermon over the women in one of the significant feature that put forth the women in different background not only partial to shudras and atishudra women but to all the women to stand against the injustice in the Indian tradition and to begin with Phule's discourse on Manu's code was a set of religious code that discriminated against all women, irrespective of *varna*. As Dhananjay Keer mentions *"In short, Jotirao stood for the dignity of man, religious toleration and human rights. He regarded*

*all Indians as equal and free and declared that one law should be applicable to man and woman.*”, it was vibrant that Jotirao Phule’s main objective were to unshackle Shudras and Atishudras and to prevent abuse by Brahmin in all spheres within a strong context of gender impartiality. Phule made a great effort in bringing gender equality, a society with no caste-class discrimination and Brahmin supremacy as well as most importantly dignity amongst all. If we go through the text *Ghulamgiri*, the way in which Phule was talking, one can imagine that he was obnoxious and was method polemical. But all the same time careful study will let us know how Phule acted as a man who stood up for founding purpose in social relations. I feel Phule remained correspondingly lucid and belligerent in his way to decompose the Brahminical hegemony in Maharashtrian society. Therefore, to bring back the unaware masses from darkness, he might have felt education can be treated as a mean to light up these low caste people. In order to cut off the illogical outmoded practices, for Phule, one needs to be educated.

Henceforth, Phule stressed on education and viewed the affiliation between the exclusive of lower-caste from education was the tactics of maintaining Brahmin hegemony. Nonetheless, it is also noteworthy to clench upon in detail about Phule’s knowledge of society and also about science & history. For instance, the way he refers to Darwin’s theory along with reproductive and DNA theory to juxtapose Hindu god’s birth be disposed remarkable. Simultaneously, he makes several other comparisons pertaining from history. This advocate that Phule was well aware with the sources and he was well known about what he was talking to and in a handsome manner he was successful in convincing and fitting his ideology in that particular socio-cultural structure. His writing clearly suggests

that society during that retro was well influenced with the western texts and there was eventually an urge from the society about keen interest to learn western ideologies as well as to imply them. Phule’s writing eventually grant us to look from a different perspective on how Brahmins treated shudras and atishudras. Moreover, facilitates in providing a clear understanding of socio-cultural background of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Needless to say, that Phule cleverly used the term historians to denote the composer of Manusmriti and Bhagwata. It is very interesting that Phule address them as historians in order to just give scarcer reputation to the authors of Manusmriti and Bhagwata.

Nonetheless, Phule emphasized on the idea of education for all. He considered that low caste people were deprived from joining administration and this was due to lack of education. “Influence of Western Egalitarian thought was a guiding force to such reformist efforts. Phule saw that the failure to education women in particular was the main reason of India’s downfall”. Phule’s main concern was education for women not only to shudras and atishudra women but for all women. Since, there were several restrictions were imposed on women including Brahmin women, therefore Phule and his wife Savitribai opened school for girls and Phule also argues in Cultivator’s Whipcord about the irrationality of Brahmanical beliefs. Interestingly, he knew that British administration will be proficient of eliminating the odds in the social dominion of Brahmins from the government offices and educational sectors but at the same time he never spared British government in criticizing them for the system that is paralyzed by the Brahminical hegemony. And for this he criticized Manusmriti for permitting such irrational practices. He also challenged religious texts that were not the words of God, but merely of Brahmins.

At the same time, one can also say that, Phule was technically a prodigious person for the reason being that he used both British and local people specifically shudra and atishudra community for propagating his doctrine of anti-Brahman society. He carefully used his understanding of the datum that only through British administration he will be able to make progress in weakening the social structure of Brahmins from the government offices and education sector as well. Therefore, we see a great influence of western education on Indian society. Despite of several British governmental pronouncement on their caste belief, although there was a concurrent impact of western ideology was replicated through the movement in Maharashtra. Thus, Phule led this vein of reforms that predominantly fixated on alteration and equivalence in the society through education. As stated by Dhananjay Keer, *"It is observed that the missionaries find the lowest castes the best pupils; but we must be careful how we offer any special encouragement to men of that description; they were not only the most despised but among the least numerous of the great divisions of society and it is to be feared that if our system of education first took root among them, it would spread further, and we might find ourselves at the head of a new class, superior to the rest is useful knowledge, but hated and despised by the castes to whom these new attainments would always induce us to prefer them..."*, it tends to be remarkable that the government of that time has not been initiate much interested in flouting the traditional structure and guard low caste people's right to get education, making it indistinct that large number of copious administrators were not even ready to accept the bigoted caste tradition that was followed in educational scheme. Thus, Phule was the courageous person who boxed rigidly for daunting

the communal retort through his achievement that would lure the lower sector of the society.

To conclude, Phule through his experience tacit the courses of caste coercion domination in society for thousand years. However, he shaped an episteme that literally altered the unchallenged connection of Brahminism, educational and social supremacy and perpetual suppression of low castes in India. For Phule, caste or *varna* system remained as a rapport of dominance and power and has to be condemned at all levels by the domination of certain sections in the society. Phule's influence was restricted due to the constrictions of the colonial economy and state that could allow neither the determination of a new class looking for civic-social supremacy nor an endurance of discord. Nevertheless, the ideological critique of Hinduism was in the case of Phule tends to continue to a larger extend by the communal critique of the Brahmins, their dominance and their sleaze. He was not the only social reformer in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Maharashtra who argued the Brahmins but at the same time, he was the only one who sturdily fraught the social orders. Phule's writings and activities made an attempt to unite all non-Brahman castes of western India in opposition to the Brahman collaborating to gain superior power through their cartel of the British administrative service.

Nonetheless, Jotirao Phule's writing is a fine blend of several social and cultural information pertaining to 19<sup>th</sup> century which grant us a new lens to look into the cultural milieu from the viewpoint of shudras and atishundras community. Although, Phule was neither given place in British accounts nor in Brahmanical accounts, but he cleverly managed to endure himself from the intimidating practices of shudras because if his education from missionary school and moreover, because his father

was attached with high officials. Phule literally took advantage of being educated shrudra and tried his best in enduring welfare practices to the fellow shrudra and atishudras. However, he also played dual strategy whereby he maintains harmony with British authority and at the same time criticized them for their malpractices of favoring Brahmins. Notwithstanding, his writings are finest source of primary information for unrevealing the cultural milieu of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Testament that the inkling of modern India being made merely by the elites has fatigued itself and Phule's sermon tends to be aided as a contemporary resolution to humiliation, discrimination, inequality and marginalization in Indian society.

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