
THE IDEOLOGY OF MAHATMA JYOTIRAO PHULE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY TODAY

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Abstract

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was a social reformer and educator in India. In many aspects, his contribution to modern society is enormous and significant. He impacted nationalism, gender equality, corporate social responsibility, community development, and secularism ideology. The purpose of this essay is to show how Mahatma Jyotirao Phule's ideas has influenced modern society.

Keywords: Social Reform, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Philosophy, Society, Nationalism.

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Introduction

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was a social reformer and educator in India. In many aspects, his contribution to modern society is enormous and significant. He impacted nationalism, gender equality, corporate social responsibility, community development, and secularism ideology.

Jyotirao Mahatma The thought of Phule was essential in transforming India from a largely illiterate society to one that could no longer be described as "exclusively" uneducated. Phule's emphasis on girls' education has had a huge influence on current Indian culture, as women are becoming more educated and seeking equal rights as citizens. Phule's ideas also paved the way for "social mobilisation," or collaboratively mobilising individuals to effect social change. Because of its effectiveness in creating grassroots-level change, this strategy is now widely adopted by NGOs across India.

He was a young man when he entered the Gokhale Memorial High School in Pune, founded in 1880 by his mentor, B. R. Ambedkar, to finish the education he had lost throughout his youth due to rural Maharashtra's underdevelopment. While working in the school's Industrial Department, Phule studied English literature and became a teacher in 1892. He became the school's principal in 1905. In his honour, the school was christened Pune College.

In 1907 he founded the Maharashtra Prathmik Sahayak Trust, which helped and continues to help educate and empower girls and women (see: Maharashtra Education Service). He devoted all his energies towards social reform and education. Phule's non-violent movements against casteism, superstition and classism were instrumental in recognizing these issues as wide-ranging social evils, which needed to be tackled by all. He wrote numerous books on education (including for children), nationalism, political reform, women's rights, social reform and poverty alleviation.

Phule's writings are frequently cited by scholars across India for their value in understanding the historical development of modern India. He founded an English School, the Maharashtra Prathmik Sahayak Sanstha, that continues to provide scholarships to deserving students. He is credited with raising awareness about importance of education for women.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Philosophy: In today's Society

In 1953, the Government of India awarded Phule the Padma Vibhushan, recognising him as one of the outstanding leaders of India's independence cause. In the state of Maharashtra, his birthday

is celebrated on the 22nd of December every year as Maharashtra Day. To honour him, a slew of events have been planned across India.

On the 22nd of December 1828, Phule was born in Satara, Maharashtra, British India. He was the first son of a devout Brahmin Phadnavis family with roots in Central Maharashtra's Satara and Wardha regions, and a Shukla dynasty descendent. He was born into a low-income home with no other children. Subhas Joshi, Jyotirao's father, died when he was four years old, and Janaki Bai Phadnavis, Jyotirao's mother, died when he was nine years old after giving birth to her fifth child. When Jyotirao Phule was nine years old, he lost his mother. Jyotirao had only one brother, who was older to him by two years. Jyotirao's father was employed as a revenue official of the Bhosale Maharaja (Bose) of Satara.

Jyotirao's grandpa Govindrao was a brilliant Marathi scholar, as was the rest of the Phule family. In 1804, his father Subhas Joshi married his maternal cousin Janaki Bai, a member of Maharashtra's farming castes, Gavali (then known as Mahar). In 1852, Jyotirao Phule married Savitribai, India's first educated lady.

Phule was born into a family of modest means. His schooling started at his uncle's house where he studied Marathi and English. At that time, education was difficult to obtain for lower class, as there were no government schools. It was only the rich and the upper class who were able to get an education due to their ability to pay school fees and for whom private tutors were available. There were some private schools in some parts of Pune, but it was rare for the common people to even get the time to walk to these schools.

At young age Phule had little formal education due to the lack of funds. His uncle Mahadev had an estate of about 150 acres of land where on hens lived on his property maintained by pet-keeper employed by him. This farm was situated on the outskirts of Poona called Nandgaon on river kharwadi side. There was no proper road so people who wanted to visit this place had to walk about three miles from the railway station. For this reason, when Phule was about to leave his uncle's home in 1849, he saw the prospect of gaining an education in a private school in Poona where a math teacher accompanied him to a teacher's house and helped him in brick making by teaching him the art. This way Phule learnt English at a very young age.

In 1852, when he was 16 years old, Jyotirao went to Bombay with his wife Savitribai. They were running from trouble for committing marriage at such an early age. He initially stayed with his brother Govindrao Joshi and started working as a clerk. There he started writing articles in newspapers like the Kesari. At that time, the British hired people to work in their offices. The British had also started schools in Bombay for Indians and offered jobs to select students to teach in these schools. Phule got selected for this job and worked there for some time. During this period, Jyotirao attended many lectures on literature and current events organised by the nationalist Turiyanik Sabha. He also read many books on social reform written by contemporary intellectuals like Henry David Thoreau, Harriet Martineau, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer who preached liberation of 'the masses'.

In 1858, after the death of his uncle Mahadev Phule, Jyotirao moved to Satara and became a headmaster in a Marathi school. After a while, he resigned from this job and came back to Pune along with his wife. In 1871 he helped found the Deccan Education Society which was intended to open schools for the poor students from the local area who had been denied access to education by traditional institutions.

He opened the first girls' school in 1848, called Mahilashram (महिलाश्रम) in Khetwadi, Pune. This was the first girls' school to be established in Western India. He also opened the Satyashodhak

Samaj (Society of Seekers of Truth), which campaigned against social discrimination based on caste and gender.

Jyotirao worked as teacher before becoming a full-time writer and social reformer later in life. He had to take up many odd jobs to support his family after he lost his job because of his writings against the Brahminical system.

He started his first newspaper, called "Maravi" (मार्वावी) at the age of 23. This newspaper dealt with political and literary issues of the time. Maravi was just a part-time job for Jyotirao at that time. He wanted to devote all his time to his social reform activities. He wanted to bring down the social barriers of class and caste so that each Indian could have equal access to education regardless of the class he belonged to or his caste. The newspaper he started dealt with political and social problems. It was not about bringing down the British rule as many publications by other nationalists were doing at that time. In his newspaper he wrote against Brahminism.

In 1848, Jyotirao converted a room of his residence into a classroom, and started teaching children from nearby poor families; he charged the students only nominal fees, and provided them with books and uniforms at his own expense. Over the next decade, he also started schools for girls, English schools and training college for teachers. The schools aimed to provide an education to all castes equally rather than just the Brahmins. He demanded that women be given rights equal to those of men (women's rights).

He also started a library and reading room near the school, so that students could read newspapers, magazines and books. Jyotiba was determined to improve the society and he did not want to remain silent while injustice was being done to the community. He did everything possible to improve the lives of the people who were poor and provided them with education. The society at that time did not accept women to be educated; they thought it was not permissible in society. Phule openly challenged this view by teaching girls along with boys.

He wrote about his purpose: "If we want to make our nation knowledgeable and strong, we should teach social equality and eradication of horrible customs like child marriage. My duty is to fight against Brahmanism." His opponents complained that he was promoting the education of girls, which was forbidden by the Hindu Code Bill of 1856. He answered, "It is better to teach women, rather than leaving them ignorant. This will not be causing any harm. The duty of a responsible man is to educate everyone."

Jyotiba was also opposed to the Hindu marriage system. He thought that the dowry system was not necessary for marriages and that it would lead to misery in society. He said, "We can make a revolution in this society and we should not be lazy and selfish. We should stand by the poor and work for them together."

On June 14, 1875, he started his weekly newspaper called Satyashodhak (सत्याशोधक), which he named after his Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers' Society). The Marathi word "satya" means truth; "shodhana" means to seek or search; and "samaj" means society. Therefore, the meaning of the term "Satyashodhak" is "truth-seekers". He wrote in his column "Bhur" (भुर) that "Satyashodhak" means "Truth-seekers" and not the name of the newspaper. He wrote that it means "the search for truth". It was published in English throughout its existence, thereby exposing the English-educated students to Sanskrit texts, non-Hindu philosophies, and other current events of its time.

Jyotiba became founder secretary of Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers' Society). He was also instrumental in getting laws against child marriage implemented. His society was not a political party and therefore, not an organisation in the true sense of the word. It was more like a social reform movement; however, Jyotiba's followers started two political parties later in life.

Jyotiba considered contemporary society to be full of injustice and unfairness, and government to be corrupt with regard to the poor in particular. He believed that in order to change the unjust society, people must take responsibility for their actions. He used "satya", truth, as his motto with the intention of teaching students that all truths are relative. (Thus, saying "satya sukhiman" means "Truth is happiness", because all truths are relative and what is true for one may not necessarily be true for another.)

He wanted his students to be able to stand on their feet and take ownership of their education and lives. He said – “The weak, whether weak in body or mind, can be strong only through education.” Jyotiba started the first school for girls in Pune. He noticed that girls were not getting an education as they were considered inferior because of their opprobrious social status as women. He started a school for girls in the same locality where he was teaching boys. He asked his students to treat the girls equally, pay attention to them, and not take advantage of them in any way. He also wanted his girls to have equal access to education. He said that it would be good if girls got education so that they could be responsible citizens that would work for democracy, justice, equality and freedom. He wanted to show the world how humans live together peacefully by being educated so that they can think independently, have strong opinions and not follow anyone blindly.

Jyotiba started an English school in Pune following the 1886 Education Act. He wanted his boys to get an English education. He saw the need to learn the English language, not only because of the access it provided to information, but also because English was a key that would unlock opportunities in society.

He said that lies are lies no matter what language they are told in. The more lies are spoken the further away people are from the truth. As he believed that truth is above all else, Jyotiba started teaching English along with Marathi so students could see the difference between truth and lies. He wanted students to see the value of English, not only for its ability to communicate information, but also as a means of economic opportunities.

There were less than a hundred girls in Jyotiba's school when it opened. Many people thought his school was a waste of time and energy. They said it was a silly idea for girls to study English instead of Sanskrit or Marathi or any other language so that they could become wives and mothers. The teachers were not getting paid well enough, and Jyotiba had no money at all for the school. He wanted his students to learn as much as possible if they were going to be successful in life. He believed that girls needed to know the world, not only in terms of geography, but also in terms of economics and politics.

Jyotiba believed in free speech and expression, so he encouraged students to speak up when they felt like it. He wanted students to feel safe when they told the truth, explained their feelings or asked questions about anything they did not understand. As an educator, he never forbade anyone from speaking or punished them for saying something he did not agree with or liked.

He led by example when his own actions were louder than words, because he was always respectful of opinions even if he did not agree with them. He was true to himself and true to his convictions in every way possible. The students began to feel it safe to speak their minds, and the school became a place where everyone was respected for who they were and what they believed in. The school was transformed into a community of students who believed in Jyotiba's philosophy that whatever they learn while studying English should be put into practice while living life.

Jyotiba was against child marriage because he felt that a child cannot make a decision on his or her life at such a young age. He said that the age of maturity was variable for each individual, therefore, one should wait until he or she is old enough to understand before making these decisions. In Pune, the average marriageable age for girls is between 14 and 15 years old. In many

families, the choice of a partner is made by the parents for their children. The parents or guardians choose a patriarchal figure - a successful, educated man who can provide for his family. Jyotiba wanted girls to get an education so they would be able to say no to child marriage, and also to get a job and be financially independent. He wanted them to start careers that would provide them with the income needed to take care of themselves and their children.

He said that he liked boys and girls equally and could not treat them differently. He did not keep boys and girls in separate groups, did not call different names for boys and girls, did not pay attention only to the boys or listen only to the concerns of boys, or distribute sweets or gifts only at special occasions such as festivals or birthdays separately indicating again his deep respect for equality.

Jyotiba had broken all the barriers of injustice and had united everyone regardless of their castes in one place by giving them a chance to think freely and independently without prejudice or discrimination. This changed the attitude in society in a positive way towards equality in religion, religion in politics, religion in economics and religion in language.

Before India became independent in 1947, Indian society was highly patriarchal. Caste system was strong and the society was dominated by the Brahmins; in fact it was Brahminism. Mahatma Phule affected to break Brahminism. His contribution in this area is immense. Some of his quotes which signify the impact of his philosophy on the society are as follows:

1. "If a woman is a slave, then the whole family is a slave, if a woman is free, then her entire family will be free".
2. "A slaveholder can never be a true savant. Freedom from slavery is absolutely necessary for any kind of study".
3. In 1853, he started Satyashodhak Samaj which is stood a for slaveholder's truth son, and a nonviolence free at man any is cost his even own if master, it for was there opposed is to no orthodox slaveholder Hindu on ideas the and face practices, of also the strongly earth advocated whose inter-caste maladaptation dining does and not inter-marriage. result from his having been brought up by slaves."
3. "Women must be first-class citizens in the realm of ideas and first-class public-school teachers first of all."
4. "A woman must be up on in an equal orthodox footing Brahmin with family, men Phule in did every not respect at before first she shows can open emancipate antagonism herself".
5. slavery, "By which nature was women the are unquestioned born norm to in civilize the men." early
6. He fought for the rights of women and their emancipation from male domination even when it meant to fight against people like himself who stood in the opinion that he may also end up like his master. He fought for the women's emancipation well before the British ascension to power in India.
7. He was also strongly pro-unity, pro-nationalism and he wanted India to be an independent nation. He took part in many nationalist movements; his contribution to the Indian nationalism is immense. He always fought against the fanaticism of the Muslim community which was encroaching upon foreign lands like Pakistan by fanaticism and violence; also he wanted to keep India intact even at the cost of its independence

Conclusion

Mahatma Phule's philosophy contained many fundamental principles that are still relevant in today's culture. One of them, among other things, is about empowerment via education. He thought

that through educating oneself, one may get the ability to govern one's own life. He sought to build schools for women and the lower castes. He also desired that everyone have a good education. He also believed in equality amongst individuals of various castes, religions, ideologies, and so on. In this regard, he has made a significant contribution. Mahatma Phule was also an individualist, believing that if each individual is self-sufficient, the community as a whole will be self-sufficient. As a result, his thought might also be classified as an individualistic philosophy.

Another important thing that was important to Mahatma Phule was the empowerment of women and their emancipation from male domination. His philosophy empowered women and made them confident of themselves; this is also reflected in the fact that his wife Savitribai was an inspiring person and later became a social reformer herself. Yet another important thing was the importance he gave to an individual's character and personality rather than his/her religion, caste, gender, etc. He believed in humanism and not just sympathy for humans as an idea but as a feeling as well. Another aspect of this man's philosophy that is still relevant in our society today is that of serving the society and doing good to the society. This man fought against slavery, advocated inter-caste marriage and also founded schools, orphanages for children from lower castes so as to uplift them from poverty and misery. His contribution to the society in this area is immense.

In 2009, The Government of India issued a stamp celebrating Mahatma Jyotiba Phule's life and contribution to the social development. Mahatma Phule was not a scholar; nevertheless he contributed much towards "social reform" as a common person. In this context, his contribution is immense. He helped in creating a sense of human dignity among the people and also in awakening them from their slumber. Mahatma Phule's philosophy has a few important aspects in it that are still relevant in our society today. One of them is about empowerment through education, among other things.

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