



Hindu Social Reform – The Framework of Jotirao Phule

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Introduction:

Prof. (Dr) S. K. Chahal is presently working as Professor and Chairman, in the Department of History, at Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra. He is holding charge of the prestigious ‘**Mahatma Jotirao Phule Chair**’ in his university which is the only chair after the name of Mahatma Jotirao Govindrao Phule as of now. Through his excellent book, the author attempted to resolve the complicated question of Hindu social reform, which remains an unresolved problem and is a serious hindrance to India's nation-building.

The primary objective of the book review is to provide a historical, comparative, and critical evaluation of the framework for the great Hindu social reform put forward by Jotirao Govindrao Phule (1827–1890), a revolutionary social reformer in 19th-century Maharashtra who envisioned Hindu society free from Brahmanic exploitation, hegemony, and leading problem caste discrimination. Jotirao expressed a great deal of concern for the oppressed segments of Hindu society and declared a crusade against ‘**Brahmanism, Brahminic discriminating Philosophy**’, and the ‘**slavery**’ it imposed upon the Shudras, Ati-Shudras, and women for centuries. It is important to note that Mahatma Phule (Jotirao Phule) is referred to as “**the greatest Shudra of modern India**” by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian constitution and another proponent of the disadvantaged group in contemporary India, when he inscribes his historically significant work, who served as the Shudras, towards the memory of Jotirao Phule. The great work of Jotirao Phule was that he made the lower classes of Hindus aware of their slavery towards the

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higher classes, especially the Brahmanical class, and also preached the gospel that for India's society this tribute provides adequate lighting for Jotirao's historic contributions to Hindu social reform.

The book is exclusively crucial for Hindu social reform. Jotirao, who was primarily from Hindu society's lower classes, came transversely as an “organic intellectual,” to use Antonio Gramsci's phrase. In other words, his social position significantly influenced the way he developed his strategy, as it was a ground-breaking but also natural strategy based on a “**Perspective from Below**”, or the perspective of the marginalized groups throughout Hindu society. From this angle, Jotirao looked at the issue of Hindu social reform. Using the Foucauldian paradigm, Jotirao Phule defined “**Brahmanism**” as the conceptual and established system of a specific class's domination of knowledge, power, and advantages and their use of these things to rule over, marginalize, and exploit most other groups in Hindu society. In his emphasis, Jotirao highlighted the need to eliminate this dogma from Hinduism to transform Hindu society. He put forth a plan based on multiple factors for Hindu social reform to accomplish this,



stressing the necessity of a complete "**Restructuring**" of Hinduism in addition to the adoption of morality, equality, fraternity, and reason as the guiding ideals of the "**Transformed**" Hinduism. In conclusion, Jotirao's conception of reformed Hinduism was a common form of Hinduism, in which he imagined a morally upright and egalitarian society based on **Satyadharma (religion of truth)**. Jotirao was a man of action who originated a revolutionary reform movement in colonial Maharashtra to implement his social reform structure for the proclamation of the oppressed Hindus.

Finally, the book claims that applying Jotirao's *"insights as well as framework, unless availed, could also have great relevance to addressing the issue of social inequalities and Hindu reform."* Jotirao's framework of Hindu social reform, which would have been significant in his time but also highly relevant in the current context, appears to be crowded with potential given his sustainably grown insights and contributions. As specially mentioned here that the Author is well aware that social reform in Hindu society remains an open question and has become a controversial topic in modern India. This same presence of the caste system with all of its medieval traits, the frequency of atrocities committed against members of lower castes, and the rise in caste conflicts are just a few instances to comprehend the seriousness of the problem. Hence, the '**father of India's social revolution**' mattered and, of course, still matters in today's India.

The Author has offered his thoughts in five chapters of this book with an Epilogue, Summary, and Glossary.

Chapter 1: Maharashtra before Mahatma Jotirao Phule:

The author has described the historical background of Jotirao Phule's intensification in Maharashtra in this chapter. This chapter specifically describes the diminishing pre-colonial Maharashtra politics and society, particularly during the control of the most recent Peshwa Bajirao II. The following chapter sheds light on the social order and significant institutions that existed in rural Maharashtra at the contemporary time. Nevertheless, the author has communicated about Hindu society's regressive structure in India, particularly as it relates to the Maharashtra province. On the other hand, the British East India Company's overthrow of the Maratha Empire in 1818 manifest the beginning of the process of colonization. In the meantime, Maharashtra experienced social and economic changes up until the mid of nineteenth century with the aid of '**The English Enlightenment.**' As the mainstream of social changes (i.e., abolition of Sati, Veil-system, Female Infanticide, and Child Marriage) occurred after the British arrived in India.

Chapter 2: The Making of Mahatma Phule:

The Author's efforts to frame Mahatma Jotirao Phule throughout this chapter. The personal history of Jotirao Phule has been started briefly so far. Then an attempt was made to look into the influencing factors, inspirations, and other things that helped shape his thinking. Noteworthy writings in this chapter disclose that because Jotirao came from the lower strata of Hindu society (Mali Caste), his firmly recognized social position, along with his life experiences and sources of inspiration, played a significant role in his development as an organic intellectual. Here, countless arrangement of detail was covered regarding Jotirao's various insights and his discourse on the societal structure. Jotirao could subsequently acquire a "**Perspective from Underneath**", or that of the oppressed strata of Hindu society. From this viewpoint, Jotirao endeavored to lead a social reform movement in Hindu society.

Chapter 3: Countering the Brahmanic Hinduism:

The author has focused on the framework for Hindu social reform put forth by Jotirao in this chapter. The author has already talked about his "**Bali raja**" utopia of India's transformation as an ancillary of Brahmanic Hinduism. The chapter also looks at Jotirao's social and religious philosophy, paying particular attention to his ideas on equality as



well as ‘Satyadharama.’ The chapter demonstrates that Jotirao dreamt of an egalitarian society predicated on his idea of the "Religion of Truth," which is a common form of "Reformed Hinduism." Conceivably Jotirao had to repudiate all of the Brahmanic mythology, scriptures, and opposing theories put forward by his critics to show that they were the primary drivers of the exploitation of Hindu society's lower classes.

Chapter 4: Proposing a framework for Hindu social reform:

This chapter delineated the social reform movement that Jotirao started once more for the benefit of Shudra-Ati-Shudras, particularly when Satyashodhak Samaj was established. It sheds light on the significant steps/initiatives made by the Samaj, led by Jotirao, to modify Hindu society's socio-religious-economic structure. To start a movement for comprehensive reforms in Hinduism, the chapter examines how Samaj endeavored to transform the Shudra-Ati-Shudras into a "new moral context and a pioneering agency of the reformation period." Here, the author primarily discusses Satyadhama as an option to the Brahman Dharma. Therefore, the concept of equality is vital to this outline.

Chapter 5: Initiating a Movement of Social Reform:

This chapter chiefly discusses the principles based on which the ‘Satyashodhak Samaj’ (Truth Seekers) must have been originated by Jotirao to examine the exploitation of the Brahman dharma. For the lower classes of Hindu society, the Satyashodhak Samaj seems to have been seen as the New Moral Community. Consequently, Jotirao and the samaj had already made an effort to educate the general public, concentrating on women as well as the lower classes of Hindu society. Nevertheless, the author also mentions an epilogue, which delivers a critical summary of the whole book and supports the main assumption and hypothesis.

Conclusion and Remark:

We recommend this book to various universities, social science institutions, and schools even for their further research and teaching, because the book is a very simple and lucid presentation that can be tailored, to the reader, scholars, and researchers to understand Jotirao Phule’s life struggle for Hindu reform and also mass education (especially socially and educationally backward strata) with social change. In a nutshell, this book is to be considered the intelligentsia in today’s social science field. On the other hand, this book reveals the ideal of equality which was mentioned by Jotirao in his life struggle and by which it would be achieved this is also details discussed in this book. We personally, thank the Author and Publisher who gave us such an excellent piece of writing to increase our knowledge of social change in India through Jotirao’s struggles.

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