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***Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj and Dr.  
B. R. Ambedkar – Thoughts and works***

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# **Journal of Research and Development**

*A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Peer Reviewed Journal*

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*On*

*Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj and  
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar – Thoughts and works*

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**CONTENTS**

Sr. No.	Paper Title	Page No.
1	Dalit Autobiography: A Hope for Freedom <b>Mr. Pandit Mahadevrao Shinde</b>	1-3
2	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Thoughts on Education and Today's Education <b>Prof. Nagnath S. Navgire</b>	4-5
3	Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj: A Great Social Reformer <b>Prof. Devendra Vitthal Madane</b>	6-7
4	Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule and Rajarshi Shahu thoughts on women empowerment. <b>Dr. Chandrajit Bhalchandra Jadhav</b>	8-10
5	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's thoughts and work on Women Empowerment <b>Dr. Ahilya Bharatrao Barure.</b>	11-12
6	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's views on agriculture and social justice <b>Mr. Yogesh Maruti Kharat</b>	13-15
7	Rajarshi Shahu thoughts and work on sports. <b>Dr. Archana M. Falke</b>	16-18
8	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Thoughts and Works of Women's freedom <b>Mr. Sachin Namdev Chavan</b>	19-20
9	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Efforts For the Welfare Of Women Workers <b>Dr. Chandrakant Sandipan Chavan</b>	21-25
10	Educational Thoughts & Contribution of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj & Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar <b>Dr. Ayodhya Pawal</b>	26-27
11	Pune Municipality Corporation & Mahatma Jotirao Phule <b>Prof. Mallikarjun Pandurang Kasabe</b>	28-30
12	Impact of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Conversion: Special Reference to Beed and Osmanabad districts <b>Dr. Raghunath Venkati Ghadge</b>	31-32
13	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar And Temple Entry Issue- Religion In Question <b>Dr. A. Faridagani</b>	33-35
14	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Thoughts on Education <b>Dr. V. B. Dode</b>	36-37
15	Mahatma Phule: Life and Work <b>Dr. Milind Mane</b>	38-40
16	Impact Of Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana On Socio-Economic Development Of The Beneficiaries- With Reference To Kalaburagi District. <b>Dr. Sangappa. S. Rampure, Mahadevappa</b>	41-46
17	Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Agricultural Policy <b>Shivasharanappa</b>	47-48
18	Dr. Ambedkar's Thoughts on Education : An Overview <b>Dr. Nasreen B.L. Shaikh</b>	49-50
19	Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj: A Great Economic Thinker & Social Reformer <b>Dr. Muthe P. R.</b>	51-53
20	Political Philosophy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and its contemporary relevance <b>Vijay N. Patil</b>	54-56
21	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as a Social Reformer and Nation Builder <b>Dr. (Ms.) Subhashree Panda</b>	57-58
22	Jyotirao Phule Views on followers of Truth <b>Dr. Sunil Raosaheb Raut</b>	59-61
23	Dr B. R. Ambedkar's Thoughts on Gender equity and Social reforms. <b>Laxman Baburao pawar</b>	62-63



## **Mahatma Phule : Life and Work**

**Dr. Milind Mane**

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**“Without Knowledge, wisdom was lost; without wisdom morals were lost; without morals development was lost; with development wealth was lost; without wealth shudras are ruined; all these disasters are due to lack of knowledge”**

(vidyevina mati geli, mativina gati geli, gativina vitta geli, vitta vina shudra khchle, evde anarth eka avidyene kele.)

Mahatma Phule

(Shekaryancha Aasud-1881)

Indian society gained knowledge of new ideas, ethics, material progress and western education after the arrival of Britishers in India. In 1818, the British annihilated the Peshwa and established British rule. After the establishment of British rule in India as a whole and alternatively in Maharashtra too, it came in contact with the western culture. As a result of the educational policy pursued by the British, a well- educated and intelligent generation emerged and the well-educated become aware of the ideas of freedom, equality, brotherhood, humanity and liberalism. While living he began to look at social and religious matters. From that began the process of social awakening and modernization. A class of social reformers emerged for social and religious awakening. The railways, post offices and telegram, roads built by the British here helped in bringing about social cohesion. Mahatma Phule began social awareness in Maharashtra in 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the twentieth century the tradition was carried forward by Lokhitwadi, Jagannath Shankar Sheth, Balshastri Jambekar, Bhanu Daji Lad, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in real sense. It seems to be going on even today. Mahatma Phule is to be considered one of the most important social reformers in Maharashtra. His performance in the social movement is revolutionary. He dedicated his life to fighting for social change by eradicating ignorance from the society. He succeeded in this struggle. That is why his performance is revolutionary. This paper aim to focus to study life and work of the earliest and great social revolutionary Mahatma Phule.

His Life:-

Mahatma Phule was born on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1827, his parents Govindrao and Chimnabai was from Katgun a village from Satara district Maharashtra. The family belongs to Mali caste ( a low caste in the Brahminical hierarchy of Hindu society) from the flower business came surname 'Phule' from its original 'Gorhe'. Jyotirao had a brother named Rajaram, the unfortunate children lost their mother when Jyotirao was on a year old. His father denied remarrying even when the tradition of polygamy was prevalent. Govindrao's widowed cousin sister Sagunabai had nursed him with utter care. Not only did she take care of his health but she also inculcated humanism in his mind. Working as an *ayah* (care-taker) in the household of an English missionary she had closely witnessed devotion, sacrifice and commitment to the life of service of the missionary's. She inculcated the same in Jyotirao and prepared him to devote himself to the cause of the poor and downtrodden of the society. It was the need of the time to work for them because the atrocities on the lower caste by higher caste were on its height. His early education was disrupted and began once again in 1841 by the collective attempts of his father, a Muslim neighbour Gafar Munshi Beg and Mr. Lijit now he was admitted to the English School of the Scottish missionaries. He came in contact with higher caste children. Among his early friends were some Muslim children who first made him aware of injustice and high values and meanness of Hindu religion. Jyotirao felt the need to impartially examine the values of Dharma Sanstha. The beginning of English education is a very important segment of his life so his whole life got a twist. He was influenced by Christian humanitarianism, the dedicated life and work of Christian preachers as a student. Phule says, "The Scottish Mission in Pune and the Government institution helped me gain a little bit of knowledge and understand the rights of human



beings". His curiosity was aroused by discussions with Christian preachers. He had a close look at the discussions with Christian evangelists. Simultaneously, he came in contact with the autobiographies of great people like Shivaji Maharaj, George Washington whose patriotism, heroism and generous attitude impressed him. He was greatly influenced by the American thinker Thomas Paine, whose books 'Rights of Man', 'Justice of Humanity', 'Common Sense', 'Age of Reason' taught him dignity of the individual, freedom, equality, justice, natural human rights and responsibilities, intelligence etc. His thoughts became sharp and more radical. Jyotirao had also explored the essence of Paine's political and social thoughts so the term 'human rights' frequently appears in Jyotirao's writings. He was married to Savitri Phule in when he was thirteen years old and she was barely nine. She was an equal partner with Mahatma Phule in the mission of a life committed to the reform movement that took in Maharashtra in 19<sup>th</sup> century. He had spent a lifetime for the wellbeing of society and took his last breath on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1890.

At the wedding of Brahmin friend he received abusive treatment. So his life took a turn. Due to the degrading treatment of *Shudras* in the society, the misery of women, undesirable norms, traditions, inequality he become ideological. His was firm on his role that the Brahmin class was mainly responsible for the misery of the *Shudras*. Therefore, emphasis was laid on creating social awareness among the *Shudras* to improve their lives. As long as they do not become wise by learning, ignorance will not disappear, so there will be no awakening, so Phule started awakening from education. He called for the establishment of schools for Shudras and girls against the social norms of his time. On creating social awareness by describing the dire situation of Brahmins through books in Marathi language like 'Barhmananche Kasab', 'Gulamgiri', 'Shetkaryancha Asood', 'Srvajanik Satyadharma', 'Ishara', etc.. His emphasis was on awakening through actual action, not just preaching. Dr. Shobha Shinde rightly remarks in her book: Phule's vision encompassed all humanity beyond the barriers of caste, creed, religion or gender. He dreamt of the utopian society in which all inequalities would be removed and where there would be a universal brotherhood. He called upon women, the shudras and atishudras to break the shackles of slavery. He inspired all Indians to work towards the building of egalitarian society and march on the road on progress. He not only worked for female education but searched for new answers to fight the tyranny of patriarchy and the double standards practiced by a male dominated society. He had no pretensions towards philosophical premises or doctrines. He was an activist who practiced what he preached. (Shinde:48:2014)

He was the champion of the noble principals of human equality and human freedom. He is considered to be the 'Martin Luther King' of Maharashtra who revolted for social equality and human freedom.

#### **His work:-**

1. School for girls:- Phule started a school for girls in Pune city in 1848 which did not last long. After that he had started three schools. He needed a teacher to teach in this school so he taught his wife Savitribai and sent her to school to teach. The upper caste people did not tolerate that a Shudra woman is running school by leaving her footsteps. They tried each and every means to disturb them but his wife Savitribai accompanied him with great courage in his mission. The credit of the beginning of the first school for girls in India goes to Phule couple.
2. Independent School for Untouchables:- Phule came to know the importance of wellbeing of the untouchables when he was in missionary school. He thought education can bring drastic change and can make them aware of their rights as human beings and that finally resulted in the development of the country. So he started school for them in 1851.
3. Social revolution:- Phule set a goal of social revolution against casteism, untouchability and so on in Maharashtra. He organized some young men, but came to know the lacunas that they can't fight against the armed forces and Britisher so he abandoned the path and decided to change the society through social revolution. In his mission many times he was opposed, treated with contempt and abused by the traditionalist, but he did not deviate from the accepted work. He was conferred the title of 'Mahatma' just for his social revolution by the people of Mumbai.
4. Emancipation of women:- The social status of women in Maharashtra was very poor in Phule's time. The notion that existed at that time for women that she is only objects of pleasure and enjoyment. The woman is inferior to man and her work is limited to child and kitchen. Her condition is worrying; she



did not have the right to education. The notion that education would be corrupted if they were educated. Phule took a stand that should change this.

5. **Child Murder Prevention Home:-** The custom of Child marriage was prevalent during his time. In the outbreak of epidemics, thousands people were killed living behind his young widow wife. These young widows were fall prey to the lust of some close relatives and became pregnant. The widow woman used to throw the baby in order to save themselves from the societal disgrace because it was taboo for widows to give birth. Phule witnessed the condition and began this prevention home in his own house. He declared the widows to come and have a safe birth, everything will be kept secret and their children will be taken care of. He was assisted by Lokhitwadi, Bhandarkar and Tukaram Padwal.
6. **Adoption of a widow's son:-** Phule couple was childless. He was advised to remarry for the sake of heir by his relatives whom he denied. He adopted a son by the Brahmin widow from his prevention home. He named the child Yashwant and taken care of him and later Yashwant was married to a Brahmin widow in 1889.
7. **Member of Pune Municipality:-** Phule was a member of Pune Municipality for six years. As a member he looked after the interests of the poor. In the meeting he presented his opinions fearlessly.
8. **Establishment of Satyashodhak Samaj :-** In the nineteenth century the lower class people were treated very badly by the upper caste. He established Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873 to lessen to sufferings of lower caste people. He was the president and treasurer and its membership was open to all.

Other than the above works, he opened his water well for the untouchables, he ran orphanage, his opposition to alcohol, he declares clearly that he is enemy of Brahminism and not Brahmins, his attempts for widow remarriage, he launched library, his attempts for the prevention of untouchability, his improvements for farmers, his work for labour movement, his financial help for draught relief, he opposed the custom of Sutti and polygamy. All his works and movements created consciousness in the lower classes. His attitude of tolerating any injustice is exhausting. He strengthened the voice of untouchables and taught them organize resistance. Mahatma Phule's attacked the legacy of the upper caste and the dominance of the priests, his courage and social revolution was unprecedented. He upheld the principles of humanity and equality throughout his life. He started an all-out movement for the liberation of the *Shudras* which were crushed under the guise of evil norms, traditions, superstitions, atrocities and ignorance in the society. He will always be remembers as a pioneer of social revolution.

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