

Social Revolution of Jyotiba Phule

Prelims - History of India and Indian National Movement.

Mains (GS I) - Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.

Why is in News?

Recently, the 197th birth anniversary of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was celebrated on April 11th, who is remembered as a pioneering figure in India's social reform movement.

Who is Jyotiba Phule?

- **Personal background** - He was born on April 11, **1827, in Pune**, into the Mali caste—a backward community traditionally engaged in gardening and floristry.
- Since Jyotirao's father and 2 uncles served as florists under the last of the Peshwas, they came to be known as 'Phules'.
- **Inspiration** - His early exposure to Christian missionary schools and the rationalist thought of Thomas Paine's Age of Reason helped shape his revolutionary ideas about religion, equality, and justice.
- **Social emancipator** - His personal experiences with caste-based discrimination began early.
- He worked for the empowerment of women and for upliftment of lower caste people and he preferred to work with the British government to improve the conditions of untouchables and depressed castes.

Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of Truth-Seekers)

- **Founded in** - 1873.
- **Aim** - To institutionalize his reformist vision.
- To overcome the inequities and inequalities that the caste system entailed.
- **Focus** - It was dedicated to the liberation of Shudras and Atishudras (Dalits) from Brahminical dominance, caste oppression, and gender inequality.
- Unlike elite-led reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Prarthana Samaj, which often remained restricted to upper castes, it was inclusive and grassroots-driven.
- It provided a platform for non-Brahmins to challenge hierarchical social norms and claim dignity, rights, and justice.
- **Weekly Deenbandhu** - It was main print medium of this organisation which articulated the grievances of the peasants and workers.

Jyotiba Phule was awarded the title "**Mahatma**" for his innumerable social

What are his views on religion and caste?

- In his ***book Sarvajanik Dharma Pustak*** published in 1891, his views on religious and social issues are given in the form of a dialogue.
- **Rejected sectarianism** - He said that the pernicious practice of caste is a human invention.
- He condemned the chaturvarna system because depressed class people faced serious discriminations and atrocities in social, economic, political and cultural realms due to that.
- In ***Gulamgiri (slavery)***, he drew parallels between caste oppression in India and racial slavery in America.
 - In 1868, he decided to give access to the untouchables to a small bathing tank near his house.
- **Denied supremacism** - All human beings on our planet are equipped with similar physical and intellectual facilities.
- **Critiqued senseless scriptures** - In *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak*, he mentioned that all the religious and revelatory books that man has produced on our planet, one and all, do not contain a consistent universal truth.
- **Followed secular approach** - Naturally the planet earth which we inhabit are created by one Creator.
- He wrote an abhang titled ***Manav Mahammand (Muhammad the man)***, which extolls the prophet of Islam as having liberated his people from the yoke of superstition and orthodoxy of his age.
- His approach was deeply inclusive, advocating harmony over division, and compassion over orthodoxy.
- **Supported voluntary religious conversion** - He believed people should be free to choose their religion.
- In his booklet ***Satsar (The Essence of Truth)***, he defended Pandita Ramabai's right to convert to Christianity.
- Notably, his defense was unique as it was the only one of its kind offered by a non-Christian.

Phule's view on 1857 Revolt

- He could not come to affiliate with the sepoy revolt, seeing it as a retrogression towards the ascendant theocracy of the Peshwa rule.
- He could not see a way to resolve his social revolution with the tempest of 1857.
- He felt that the obstinacy of the orthodox upper-caste Hindus would consign the Dalits back into a state of destruction.
- In *Gulamgiri (Slavery)*, he condemned the practice of slavery followed by Brahmins and during the rule of Peshwas.

What is his contribution for women empowerment and education?

- According to him, both men and women were entitled to enjoy equal rights and it was a sin to discriminate between human beings on the basis of sex.

- **Against ill practices on women** - He was instrumental in the fight against practices like *female infanticide, child marriage, and the mistreatment of widows*.
- He also condemned men who practice polygamy.
- **Established orphanages** - It was possibly the first such institution founded by a Hindu which gave protection to pregnant widows & assured them that their children would be taken care.
 - It was in this orphanage that a Brahmin widow gave birth to a boy in 1873 and Jyotirao adopted him as his son.
- **Girl schools** - In 1848, Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule co-founded *India's first school for girls in Pune*, an act of radical defiance against the conservative orthodoxy of the time.
- **Night Schools** - By 1855, Phule also started night schools *for working-class men and women*, making education accessible to laborers and farmers.
- **Inducting a taste of learning** - In his '***A Statement for the information of the Education Commission***', he had recommended various schemes for inculcating education to poorer sections among the lower castes.
 - Increase in the number of schools
 - Special inducements in the shape of *scholarships and half-yearly or annual prizes*
 - Making *primary education of the masses compulsory* up to a certain age, say at least 12 years.

What are his recommendations in economic and environmental sector?

- He was also able to see that economic strengthening of the working poor among the lower castes could be a key to overthrowing the social imbalances.
- **Involving military in civil construction** - *Constructing small dams and bunds* in such a way that this water would seep into the ground, and *only later go and meet streams and rivers*.
- This would make the land very fertile, and the soldiers in general, having got used to working in open air, will also improve their health and become strong.
- **Agricultural and farmers welfare** - Government should allow the *farmer to collect all the silt* and other things extracted from rivers and lakes, as in the olden times.
- It should also return all the *cow pastures to the villages*, which it has included in its 'forest'.
- **Environmental protection** - Government should make sure that no firewood is collected, or land tilled in the areas that belong to it.
- It should also *forbid the cutting of wood for selling* as wood for construction and *destroy the oppressive the Forest Department*.

What is his legacy?

- His vision of an equitable and inclusive society laid the foundation for many social reform movements in India.
- His work inspired generations of reformers, including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and played a crucial role in shaping modern India's commitment to social justice and equality.
- His life and legacy remind us of the power of compassion, resilience, and the unwavering pursuit of justice.

Reference

[The Hindu| Social Revolution of Jyotiba Phule](#)

