

THE STUFE LEGENDS ARE MADE OF CYNTHIA STEPHEN

The story of the continuing struggle for modernity and education for Indian women and the caste-oppressed, cannot be narrated without mentioning the role of Savitribai Phule, the wife of the social revolutionary Mahatma Jotiba Phule. Ten years before the birth of the celebrated Pandita Ramabai - the pioneering women scholar, writer, social worker and path-breaking campaigner for women's right-savitri Phule, a woman from the shudra Community, had earned for herself the distinction of being the first woman teacher in the country. During her long and illustrious public life, she also published four books, including two volumes of poetry, headed the Satyashodak Samaj after Mahatma Phule passed away, and broke new ground in socio-cultural creativity.

The Phules lived in Maharashtra at time, when the closely enmeshed religious, political and social structures were under the control of brahmanical and caste-feudal forces. As Phule has stressed in many of his writing, the highly restrictive caste structures of society subjugated the toiling castes and communities, exploiting their labour, ignorance and fervour. The condition of women of all castes and classes was even worse. They were devalued as individuals and treated as chattels, providing domestic, economic and sexual labour in their family setting. There was no public role for them.

That Phule himself was educated is a miracle, since he was from a shudra caste

and education was still a distant dream for shudras and atishudras. The young Phule's intelligence and eagerness to study had impressed two of his neighbours, one a Muslim teacher and the other a Christian, who encouraged his father to put him in a school where he performed very well. Meanwhile, he was married to Savitribai, even before he turned 13. The next year he was admitted to the Scottish Mission School in Pune. This exposed him to an English Education and he read Thomas Paine's famous book *The Right of Man*. The book made a powerful impact on him. He was also inspired by the work of Christian missionaries in India, by Shivaji, Martin Luther, and George Washington. He had a friend, Sadashiv Govande, who along with Walvekar, another friend, became the core team to work on a number of innovative ideas for social change. At a very young age, Jotirao had revolutionary thoughts about education, especially of women. He insisted upon Savitribai taking time off from her household duties to read and write; he became her first teacher.

The Phule couple had to face stiff opposition for their educational activities, especially promotion of women's education. According to the tradition, justified by many brahmanical texts, women were not to receive education, because it was believed "they would start writing letters to all. The food her husband ate would turn to worms and he would die an untimely death." But Phule was not in thrall of such



misogynistic superstitions. He had started dreaming of freeing people from brahmanical patriarchy and caste enslavement. To this end, he began to work on several fronts. He published the first challenging critiques of brahmanical religion, campaigned for mass education, and most important of all, stressed the need for the oppressed people of India - street, shudras and atishudras - to come together to smash slavery. For this, he founded a society called the Satyashodak Samaj. He was convinced that the existing reform movements within Hinduism were insufficient to bring any radical change. He formulated a belief in a compassionate Creator who was interested in the liberation of all human beings, irrespective of caste, class and gender. His religious vision was finally propounded as the Sarvajanik Satya Dharma, or the Universal Religion of Truth.

Phule's dearest dream was to see the women of India would be able to enjoy their full human rights. And what better way to achieve this than to empower them through education? He told

his friend Sadashiv Govande, "The Lord was pleased to excite in me a desire to better their condition through means of education. Female schools are more necessary than male ones."

Savitribai was Jotirao Phule's first, and most important ally in the fulfillment of this vision. She stood like a rock by his side in this mission. Some schools for girls had already been started in India by the Christian missionaries in cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Nasik, Ahmednagar and Surat. The girls who went to these schools were usually Christian, orphans or from low castes and poor families. But the fact very few girls alien missionaries. There were no government or private schools for girls run by Indians.

The Phule couple decided to start school for girls, especially from the shudra and atishudra community so that parents of girls could send their daughters without bothering much. But there were Christian missionaries.

In 1846-47 Savitribai with another woman, Fatima Sheikh, started in a formal school in Ahmednagar and did quite well. So Phule decided that Savitribai and would train as teacher and run the school.

As a teacher

A building was found in Pune to house the school which started in 1848, with nine students and a headmistress. Sadashiv Govande sent books from as its headmistress. Sadashiv Govande sent books from Ahmednagar. It functioned for about six months and then had to be closed down.

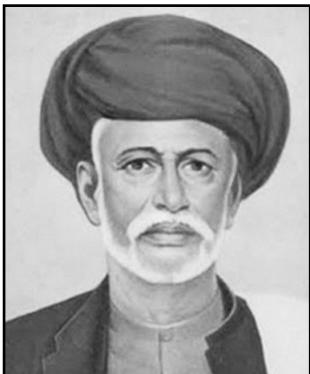
Another building was found and the school reopened a few months later. The young couple faced severe opposition from almost all sections. Savitribai was subject to intense harassment everyday as she walked to school. Stones, mud and dirt were flung at her as she passed. She was often abused by groups of men with orthodox beliefs who opposed education for women. She braved this onslaught for many weeks. Her response was, "God forgive you. I am doing my duty. May God bless you!" But later, fed up with constant harassment and vicious opposition, she almost gave up. But Phule gave her hope, love and encouragement. She went to school wearing an old sari after she reached there. Finally, the pressure on her eased when she was compelled to slap one of her tormentors on the street, after which she was left alone. Later, a peon was employed to escort her to and from the school.

Once the opponents of female education realized that the Phule couple would not easily give in, they stepped up their opposition. Intense pressure was brought by the barhman on Phule's father, Govindrao, to convince him that his son was on the wrong track, that what he was doing was against the Dharma. Finally, things came to a head when Phule's father told him to leave home in 1849. Savitribai preferred to stay by her husband's side, braving the opposition and difficulties, and encouraging Phule to continue their educational work.

Cont. Next Month

सत्य शोधक समाज भारत की आवश्यक आवश्यकता 'सितम्बर माह की डायरी'

भूमिका :- सितम्बर माह अपने में कई विशेषतायें समेटे हुए हैं जैसे 24 सितम्बर 1883 को महामना फूले द्वारा 'सत्यशोधक समाज' की स्थापना, ताकि अन्धविश्वास, पाखण्ड के मकड़जाल से भारतीयों को मुक्त करवाकर भारत को प्रगतिशील देश बनाया जा सके।



आख्या :- महामना फूले ने जून 1883 में "गुलामीश नामक पुस्तक लिखी जिसमें पुराणों के खोखलेपन एवं कल्पित कहानियों का पर्दाफाश किया गया। यह कार्य कुछ उसी प्रकार का था जैसे अच्छा अध्यापक पहले विज्ञान के सिद्धान्तों का उल्लेख कक्षा में करता है फिर उन्हीं सिद्धान्तों का

सत्यापन वह प्रयोगशाला में करवाता है।

गुलामी नामक पुस्तक का जून 1883 में लेखन कक्षा के लिखित कार्यों जैसा है परन्तु 3 माह बाद सत्यशोधक समाज की स्थापना (24.09.1883) प्रयोगशाला में उन कार्यों को सत्यापन करने के समान है। महामना फूले का अधूरा कार्य 'सत्यशोधक समाज' की नीतियों पर चलकर ही आज पूरा किया जा सकता है।

यह भी स्मरण कराना है कि 1976 में लागू भारतीय नागरिकों के कर्तव्यों को यदि

संविधान में पढ़े तो वे सब कर्तव्य 'सत्यशोधक समाज' में 1883 में ही महामना फूले ने समाहित कर दिये थे।

'सत्यशोधक समाज की नीतियाँ'

1. साक्षर नहीं शिक्षित बनें, अपने समाज को भी शिक्षित करें, विद्या देने की अभिनव योजना हर गाँव, गली में खड़े अन्तिम व्यक्ति तक पहुँचायें, क्योंकि विद्या सभी विकासों का मुख्य द्वार है।

2. परम्परावादी न होकर यथार्थवादी, वैज्ञानिक धारणा के अनुयायी बनें। सावन के माह में पहले धान लगायें, कृषि कार्यों को निपटायें, काँवर यात्रा, शिव मन्दिरों में गंगाजल चढ़ाकर समय, धन बर्बाद न करें।

3. पहले जानो तभी मानो। यदि प्राण प्रतिष्ठा से पत्थर के देवी देवता में जान आ जाती है तो फिर वे मंत्र पढ़ने वाले अपने मृतक माता-पिता को जिन्दा कर्यों नहीं कर लेते हैं। स्मरण रखें कि 'ई' स्वर तो है परन्तु ईश्वर नहीं है।

4. यदि कर्मकाण्ड, पाखण्ड से लाभ

होता तो बीमारी के लिए अस्पताल एवं शिक्षा के लिए कालेजों की स्थापना करें करनी पड़ी। लक्ष्मी पूजा से धन मिलता तो भारत आज गरीब न होता।

5. नारी को सम्मान दिये बगैर देश कभी प्रगतिशील नहीं बन सकता अतः स्त्री शिक्षा पर जोर देकर पहले 50 प्रतिशत स्त्री आवादी को विकसित करना होगा।

6. अपने माता-पिता की सेवा ही तीर्थ है उनकी मृत्यु के बाद मुण्डन, तेरहवीं में पैसा कर्ज लेकर सामाजिक कुरीतियों का बहिष्कार करना एवं परोपकारी बनना।

7. महज दिखावे का भोंडा प्रदर्शन, शादी में न करके, शादी की स्मृति में पौधे लगायें। शादी दिन में करें। बेटाकार का खर्च बचाकर गरीब बेटियों की शादी एवं पर्यावरण सुधार पर खर्च करें।

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