

## **The Role of Social Reformers in Women Empowerment Movement in Maharashtra.**

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### **Abstract:**

The present paper entitled '*The Role of Social Reformers in Women Empowerment Movement in Maharashtra*' deals with contribution and role of social reformers for all round development and progress of women in Maharashtra. The social reformers like Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule and Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil took initiatives and played a vital role in bringing women in main stream education system in India. Early marriage system, gender based violence, poverty, patriarchal society etc. were some of the obstacles in women education in Maharashtra. Today, we see that women from the state of Maharashtra and the country are doing their best in each and every field. Development in women education could have not been possible if the social reformers like Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule and Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil etc had not devoted their lives for women empowerment and their education in Maharashtra. In pre- independence era of our country, we come across the fact that women were denied education on the ground of their inferiority to the men. It becomes our prime duty to memorize the contribution of the social reformers in Maharashtra. The above social reformers contributed much for the betterment of women in the state.

**Key words:** Social reformers, women empowerment, movement, gender, violence, poverty, patriarchal society etc...

**Mahatma Jyotiba Phule** (1827-1890) has been considered as one of the pioneers of the women education in India. He established *Satya Shodhak Samaj* in Pune. His wife Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule has been regarded as the first lady teacher for women in the state. During the era of Peshwai regime, the time of social discrimination, it was very difficult to teach or educate girls. There were many challenges to run a school for girls. Mahatma Phule identified that until and unless we educate women in the family, our nation will not be develop any more. He was of the opinion that if a woman in the family will learn she will educate the whole family and simultaneously the whole country will be

educated. In order to educate women in Maharashtra, Mahatma Phule taught his wife Savitribai Phule. Afterwards, Mahatma Phule along with his wife started a school for girls at 'Bhidewada' in Pune in 1848. It opened the doors of education for the girls of all communities in India. Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule became the first woman teacher to teach those girls in that school. The aristocrat community in Pune opposed Mahatma Phule by stating that if the women in the society will learn it will be a dishonour of the patriarchal society. Moreover, people from upper class community opposed women to step out of the house to get education. They restricted women for the household duties only. The women in the pre-independence era of India were supposed to take care of their children and cook food for the family members only. But Mahatma Phule, didn't care for the opposition of the community and continued with work for women education. In a very short span of time he became a well known social reformer in Maharashtra. The British Government appreciated his educational contribution by felicitating him on 06<sup>th</sup> October 1852. At the occasion of this felicitation, Mahatma Phule wished that women education is must for equality in the community. During the women education movement, Mahatma Phule was visited by a number of educationalists to seek his guidance for empowerment of women in India. Mahatma Phule tried to expose reality of the society. Moreover, through education he wanted to free the poor from the clutches of the upper class community. Mahatma Phule started a newspaper entitled 'Dinbandhu' and wrote a book 'Shetkaryancha Aasud'. Both raised voice against the worst condition and the exploitation of farmers, labours and workers in the country. Savitribai Phule, the first ideal woman teacher, philosopher and educationalist actively proved that education has the power to equal women with men. She established equally amongst all children in the school. Occasionally, she sold away her jewellery for the food, clothes and education of the children from the downtrodden community. She never felt herself to be different from the people from lower class community. Mahatma Phule always encouraged and supported Savitribai Phule in her work of women education. It made her the first ideal teacher and a revolutionary woman in Maharashtra. They lived a self disciplined and self controlled life and never gave any place for the tiredness in their whole life.

**Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj**, (1874-1922) is the greatest social reformer, educationalist and an ideal follower of Mahatma Phule. Shahu Maharaj immensely contributed for the development of women education and betterment of common people in

Maharashtra. He was inherited love for education from his father, Jayasingh Rao Ghatage. For the development of women education, he started a girl's school in Kolhapur. He wanted to educate people for the establishment of classless society in the state. Shahu Maharaj recognized that poverty of the downtrodden community in the state was the major obstacle in the way of their education. So in order to overcome the poverty and negative approach of common people towards education, Shahu Maharaj provided free hostel accommodation and food to the children of downtrodden community. In addition to that, Shahu Maharaj started scholarships for bright students and provided them free of cost education and clothes to the children from economically backward families. Like Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj was thoroughly convinced that poverty and illiteracy was at the root of the progress of downtrodden community. Shahu Maharaj, during his rule started more than twenty boarding schools in Kolhapur and six in Mumbai. He also made free and compulsory education for the Dalit community in Kolhapur. He always encouraged women education for which he started scholarships for girls as well. The girls studying in Rajaram College were provided free education. Once he said;

*"It has been my earnest wish and constant endeavour to educate the masses, to inspire them with a higher standard of life, to root out superstition with its canons that have led to the singularly artificial society. The inertia of the ages has to be overcome and the old order has to be changed out and out".*

In this way, Shahu Maharaj identified that empowerment of women is the foundation for the economic, social and political progress of the people in India. He vigorously tried to spread universal education irrespective of cast and religion. Prof.

Manuel Sarkisyany says;

*"Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj ranks very high among the social reformers of the world, past and present, in enunciating that social equality should be the basis of modern democracy".*

**Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar** (1891-1956) was a great philosopher, educationalist and social reformer who gave the message; *to learn, unite and struggle for the power*. He contributed for the women education in Maharashtra. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, one of the followers of Mahatma Phule and Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, born and brought up in the downtrodden community. He wrote the Constitution of India. He struggled a lot for the establishment of classless society based on the democratic principles of *liberty, equality*

*and fraternity*. Basically, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar gave emphasis on the quality higher education in India. For him, quality higher education is the basic tool for strengthening the democracy in India. He believed that like primary education, higher education should be compulsory for all communities in India. Moreover, he suggested that education at the university level should be student centered which will make them a better citizen of the country. He was of the opinion that there should be more scope for the research activities in higher education. Higher education should produce ideal students. The production of responsible citizen should be the basic aim of education. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar opined that women should be equally learned with men. He said; *“the prestige and power will come through struggle only”*. To him, the liberation of the depressed and oppressed community should be the highest goal of education.

**Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil**, (1887-1959) is a social reformer and philosopher, who established *‘Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, Satara’* and devoted his whole life for the education of women and downtrodden community in India. He said; *“there should not be a single village without a school and there should not be a single school without a trained teacher”*. He opened the door of education for everybody in the society expecting the equality in the country. Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil not only expressed his philosophy of education but also established a number of schools and colleges in all over the state. He was highly impressed with the educational views of *Phule, Shahu, Ambedkar* which encouraged him to establish a boarding school at Satara. It is named after *Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Boarding School* which was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi. He was the first socialist who started the *Earn and Learn Scheme* for the students from economically background families. He always guided students about their purpose of education and better use of it. He visits many places in Maharashtra for establishment of schools and colleges. Wherever he goes to in the community, he assures them by saying; *“give me a barren place and I will make heaven of it”*. He said; *“education is life and life is education”*. He also believed that education is a dynamic process which can produce an ideal student in the society. He emphasized on the education of women and dalit community in the state. He said; *“learn, teach and be a better person”*. Today, *Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, Satara* has more than seventy hostels are being run in all over the state out of which twelve are established only for girls.

### **Conclusion:**

In this way, the above social reformers like Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Krantijyoti Savtribail Phule, and Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil devoted their whole lives for women empowerment and quality education for women in Maharashtra. They expressed philosophy education going beyond the boundaries of all casts, creed and religion. All these social reformers believed in the power of education rather than the power of sword. Mahatma Gandhi defined education by saying “*By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and soul*”.

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