

JOTIRAO PHULE AND VITHALRAO SHINDE

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BY

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As his reading widened he began to see how human lives were being stunted by superstition and bigotry and how religion in contemporary life had enslaved women, persons born in lower castes and, more particularly, the untouchables. He wanted to undertake work to bring about social change and improve the conditions of life of the deprived sections of society. His mind had been opened to the liberal and humanist movements of the day and even at that age he had arrived at certain basic ideas on religion and morality based on (i) a belief in one God for all, (ii) observance of a common moral code by all, (iii) the value of social equality, (iv) the principle that doing good to others is virtue and harming others is sinful, and (v) the need to set an example of community service and spread of education.

In 1848 an incident occurred which hurt his self-respect and made him acutely aware of the condescending and contemptuous manner in which the Bramhans of the day looked upon persons of other castes. He had to leave a wedding procession of a Bramhan friend because some of the other participants objected to 'this sudra' walking alongside with them. However, immediately there was no apparent, overt change in Jotirao's attitudes towards Bramhans or toward the plan of work he had worked out for himself. Even later he always made a distinction between Bramhans and Bramhanism. It was the latter that was the target of his attack.

He started a school for sudra and untouchable children the same year. This earned him the displeasure of all castes including his own caste. Under pressure of the community Jotirao's father had to ask him to leave the parental home. Jotirao and his wife set up a separate home in 1849. In 1851 he started three girls' schools. In 1852 he was honoured for his service in the field of education. In 1855 he started a night school. These ameliorative, educational activities were harmless and yet they angered the Bramhans as well as the other upper caste Hindus who did not like the idea of untouchable children or women being given the benefit of education. In 1855 he wrote his first book - a play - entitled 'Tritiya Ratna'. The play emphasized the importance of education particularly for those who had not traditionally taken to education. At the same time it attacked the bramhans and their deliberate exclusion of



other castes from the benefits of education. As a result of his many reformist activities the angry orthodox elements felt provoked to make an unsuccessful attempt on his life. In 1858 he withdrew from the direct management of the schools that he had started. In 1860 he helped in carrying out a widow marriage. In 1863 he established a Foundling Home for abandoned children. While these activities were going on Jotirao had also kept up his reading and study of the social situation. While in 1855 he had written the play 'Tritiya Ratna', in 1865 he published the second edition of a book by Mr. Tukaram Tatya Padwal on the caste-system exposing Bramhan manipulations of the system and their effort to keep the other castes servile to serve their own selfish ends. This book drew heavy fire and by now Jotirao had become disillusioned about being able to solve the problem of the Sudras within a system headed by Bramhans. He was turning away from reformist and social service activities to assume a more militant role.

In 1868 he published his ballad on Shivaji and another one on the Cunning of the Bramhans. The first one extolled Shivaji as the 'Sudra' king who had the good of the people at heart - as different from the Bramhan Peshwas who later usurped political power and exploited the Sudras. The second one - as the title suggests - exposed the 'cunning of the Bramhans and the manner in which Bramhans as priests, as record-keepers, and as small bureaucrats exploited the poor peasant by their wile and in collaboration with the shop-keeper and money-lender.

By 1873 his militant anti-Bramhan stance had crystallised. He published a book entitled 'Slavery' again elaborating the same theme. During this year he also established the Sathyashodhak Samaj to spearhead a movement of awakening among the 'Sudra' and 'anti-sudra' castes. He had by now become the butt of all the irony and bile that contemporary orthodox Bramhan writers could heap upon him. Jotirao's own writing was vitriolic and bitter.

In 1875, when the orthodox Bramhans of Pune opposed the procession of Dayanand Saraswati, Jotirao supported it though he himself did not find the message of Dayanand sufficiently reassuring or acceptable. Between 1876-82 he



worked as a Member of the Pune Municipality. As a member he campaigned against grant of licences to new liquor shops. He also submitted a memorandum on education to the Hunter Commission. In 1883 he published his book the Peasant's Whipcord which was a trenchant criticism of the role of the Brahman in the pauperization of the peasant and the need for the peasantry to unite against Brahmanic machinations. In the following two years Jotirao attempted unsuccessfully to securely establish a periodical which would serve as the mouthpiece of his movement. He published two issues of Satsar.

In 1878 he opposed the proposal of the Pune Municipality to incur lavish expenditure on the Farewell Function of Lord Rylton, when it could not fulfill its obligation to provide education. The same year he was honoured by the public of Pune as a Mahatma - a Great Soul. In 1889, while he was ill in bed, he put together his idea of new faith - the Sarvajanik Satya Dharma. This is a slim volume which broadly sets out the basic principles of the new religion he had visualized and indicates how the various rituals of birth, marriage and death should be performed by the members of the Satya Shodhak Samaj.

Jotirao died in 1890.

Vithal Ranji Shinde was born in 1873 in a Maratha family settled in Janakhandi. His father was a primary school teacher. His grand father who had come to Janakhandi with no means of sustenance had worked as a farm worker and gradually acquired a farm of his own and a house befitting a person of substantial means. While the grand father was alive and for a few years thereafter until he was twelve years of age Shinde lived a life of comfort. But his devout father was not worldly wise and partly through misplaced generosity and partly as a result of carefree spending he lost the assets that his father had built up within a period of eight years.

Shinde completed his high school education by the age of nineteen in 1892. In spite of the impoverished circumstances at home he had done well at school and stood first in his high school at the Matriculation examination. He had also



read all the religious and mythological books that his father had bought during the earlier period of affluence. Shinde also had the opportunity of meeting and observing all the warkari pilgrims, the sadhus, keertankars and fakirs who visited their house in his childhood. He was also influenced by the natural piety and sincerity of his parents.

Since Shinde had done well at his high school examination he was immediately offered the post of a teacher in his school. He worked as a teacher for one year from 1892-93. In 1893 with the encouragement and recommendation of his teacher Shinde went to Pune for college studies. His stay in Pune was made possible because of a scholarship given to him by the Maratha Education Society and later by the Maharaj of Baroda. But despite this assistance Shinde had to live a life of constant financial stringency. He was also not happy with the highly competitive and impersonal system of education at the college level. He did not do well as a student and in fact took five years to complete a four year programme. But despite this he read widely. He was influenced by the writing of Agarkar, Johan Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer and under their influence went through a phase of agnosticism and rationalist humanism. He was greatly troubled by his loss of faith. But then he read Max Muller and came in contact with the theistic, human and rational-liberal teachings of the Prarthana Samaj. This brought him back to theism and liberalism in social as well as religious matters. In 1898 Shinde completed his first LL.B. and then proceeded to Bombay to study for his second LL.B. He also continued his contacts with the Prarthana Samaj and participated in their prayer meetings.

In 1900 an opportunity arose for a young Brahma/Prarthana Samajist to study Comparative Religion at the Manchester College, Oxford. Shinde got the fellowship on the recommendation of Dr. Bhandarkar. His two-year stay in England between 1901-1903 proved decisive in many ways : i) it helped to clarify and broaden his liberal religious outlook, ii) gave him a sense of confidence in his own abilities, iii) acquainted him with the systematic and organized way in which Christian religious groups organized their activities, and iv) aroused in him a conviction that



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a truly religious life has to be a life of service of the poor and needy. He also got the opportunity to participate in the International Conference of Unitarians and Liberal Religious Thinkers.

In 1903 he joined the Prarthana Samaj as a Pracharak. Soon he developed many religious activities and also initiated service activities among the poor in Bombay. He received encouragement in his work from Sir Naraya Chandavarkar and gradually the work received the support of the women from the affluent families in Bombay including the daughter of the Governor of Bombay. In 1905 he decided to concentrate his efforts on the amelioration of the conditions of untouchables and in 1906 he founded the Depressed Classes Mission which later became the Depressed Classes Mission of India. His increasing involvement in untouchability work raised some questions about the time he had to take away from the normal activities of the Prarthana Samaj. But since the senior members of the Samaj were appreciative of his untouchability work no problems arose until in 1908 his nationalist sympathies compelled him to make a feeling reference to the long sentence of transportation that was imposed on Tilak. The 'moderate' leaders of Prarthana Samaj felt this would embarrass their position vis-à-vis government. Certain other events took place and in 1910 finally Shinde was relieved of his position as prasharak of the Prarthana Samaj.

He now gave all his time to the Depressed Classes Mission, developed several schools and hostels for untouchable children and undertook to expand the work in other regions of the Bombay Presidency as well as in Madras and Bengal. He worked for almost ten years from 1907 to 1917 to get the Indian National Congress to adopt a resolution condemning untouchability and finally succeeded in his efforts in 1917. In the meanwhile the work of the Depressed Classes Mission had received much recognition and Shinde had come to be recognized as the foremost of workers in this field. He was an able speaker and a good organizer and publicist. He had been able on the one hand to impress upon influential persons in the community the immediacy of the untouchability problem and on the other



to raise a young group of untouchables who could now take up leadership of their own cause.

Independently, because of the war and the drive for recruitment the British government had found it necessary to restart the enlistment of Mahars in the army. This also helped to rouse the consciousness of untouchables.

When, therefore, the British government initiated talks in 1917 for the transfer of effective power in a limited way to elected members of provincial assemblies different groups began to ask for protected representation in the assemblies through a provision of reserved quotas. Shinde as a nationalist found himself generally opposed to separate electorates. He found that his position was not acceptable on the one hand to the untouchables - particularly the Mahars - and on the other hand to the non-Brahman Party. He tried to play the difficult role of a reconciler bringing both the groups into the main nationalist stream. He partially succeeded but in the bargain began to face opposition in his own organization - the Depressed Class Mission of India.

After a few years of strained relations he finally resigned from his various posts in the Depressed Classes Mission in 1924. For ten years thereafter he worked as a missionary of the Brahma Samaj. He was also active in the Peasant Struggle in Satara and participated in the Vykom Satyagraha and the Civil Disobedience Movement. Between 1934 and 1944 he stayed largely at home in Pune due to ill health, wrote his Memoirs and helped in consolidating the Brahma Samaj work in Wai and Satara. He died in 1944.



## SECTION II

As can be seen Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) and Vithalrao Shinde (1873-1944) both began with an interest in the area of untouchability but their subsequent work developed along entirely different lines. They were both involved in bringing about a change in the religious consciousness of people, but the paths they pursued were very different. One of them, Phule, moved from social service to establishing a new religious faith. The other, moved from the experience of a religious awakening to that of service of the deprived and the depressed. Jotirao rejected the caste ridden and Brahman dominated Hinduism of his day, rejected also the modifications sought to be effected in it by the Arya Samaj, the Brahma Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and other religious reform movements, rebelled against the basic Hindu hierarchical system and priest dominance and sought to establish a new faith based on Truth as the ultimate value and characterized by rationality, the value of social equality and the abolition of an exclusive hereditary priestly class as an intermediary between an individual and God.

The religion that Phule sought to establish in the latter part of his life - Sarvajanic Satyadharma - was not very different from the one that Shinde embraced early in his youth - the Brahma Samaj. Both these religious statements rejected idol worship, were theistic, were humanist, rejected the exclusive right of any individual to know and interpret God's will or the way to please God, both advised the individual to seek answers to ethical problems in life by consulting their conscience with the value of Truth as a witness, both rejected a religious hierarchy dividing society into strata of more evolved or purer and less evolved and, in that sense, less pure individuals with their purity determined by birth, and both denied the existence of any one book that was divine in its origin and was therefore holy and not to be transgressed. Basically both were inspired by a theistic humanism and had been influenced at different stages of their life by Christian missionaries. Yet Phule who had witnessed the rise of



Bramhoism had not found it to be a satisfactory answer to the problems he had identified. One reason for this rejection was that while Bramhoism preached theistic humanism and rejected the authority of religious scriptures it had not totally denied the Vedas. In fact the Bramhos found much inspiration in the Upanishads. To Phule the Vedas represented the Aryan heritage and in his battle against inequality he had identified the Aryans as the culprits and associated Bramhan dominance with Aryan dominance. He conceived of all non-Bramhans as non-Aryans who had been defeated and enslaved by the Aryans. Bramhoism was to him, therefore, not sufficiently separated in its origin from its Bramhanic or Hindu origins. He had for the same reason rejected Arya Samaj as a possible alternative to decadent and self-righteous Bramhanism.

This was in fact a basic difference between the positions and approaches adopted by Phule and Shinde. Phule's life shows a distinct division into two phases - the first one characterized by his efforts to see change being brought in by following the path of social reform through education and service of the downtrodden and efforts at improving the condition of women in Hindu society. These were typically the concerns of social reformers of his day. He thought that the main enemies of this change were the Bramhans and truly enough the Bramhans of his day made no secret of their claim to superiority and many tried to justify the inequalities in society as God ordained. Lokahitwadi was an exception who was trying to fight a battle in which he had no strong associates but had many opponents. Later Agarkar tried to carry on the fight as a



liberal and a rationalist but with little success.

Chiplunkar and later Tilak who were the main Bramhan leaders and who led nationalist opinion were both socially conservative to the point of being reactionaries in the eyes of the non-Bramhans who were sensitive to this issue. In his second phase, Phule had become bitterly anti-Bramhanic. He always made it clear that he was not anti-Bramhan but that he was anti-Bramhanism. But the fact is that he was as pugnacious and virulent in his speech and writings as the Bramhan spokesmen were patronizing and contemptuous in theirs. Phule's perception of his contemporary society was given to him by his Bramhan detractors. They saw Maharashtrian Hindu Society as being made up of two parts, Bramhans on one side as the superior class and Sudras - a category made up of all the other castes. Phule, therefore perceived himself as a Sudra and his Sudra identity was burnt into his mind when in his youth he accompanied the wedding procession of a Bramhan friend of his and was made to leave it by some intolerant Bramhan elder. Phule continued to have many Bramhan friends and even collaborators in his work, - particularly during the first phase when he was engaged in social reform work, but even later when he was more militant in his approach to social issues. But



Phule had come to the conclusion that it was futile to seek to bring about social change by seeking the collaboration of a complacent Bramhan ruling elite. He did not use these phrases but his perception was that the Bramhans who had traditionally been the ruling class over a hundred years of Peshwa rule would not easily respond to any efforts to improve the lot of the other castes through education and opening of job opportunities in government and in educational institutions. He, therefore developed an ideology that the Bramhans and the other castes belonged to different categories whose interests were in conflict. The Bramhans who spoke of the Vedas and Vedic civilization were upholders of Aryan culture and Aryan superiority. In his view all the other castes therefore belonged to the non-Aryan category and he built up a whole theory in which Aryan expansion in India, and in Maharashtra in particular, consisted of conquest by those who now called themselves Bramhans of those who were originally anarya and were now called Sudras. These earlier Anaryas had Bali as their king. This king was defeated and cheated out of his kingdom by the Aryan Warrior. He found support for this in the folk tradition common in Maharashtra in which the return of Bali's kingdom is looked forward to. He was aware that some of the upper Sudra castes looked upon themselves as superior to others but he tried



to persuade them to see their commonality with the rest of the Sudra castes through emphasis upon the need to vanquish the common enemy - the Bramhan. The new religion that he tried to found was at once a tool of mobilization and an effort to provide a set of common rules by which day to day life could be organized in the absence of and in opposition to the Bramhan priesthood.

Shinde's self image was very different from Phule's. He saw himself as a Hindu and was proud of India's cultural heritage. In fact, after reading Max Muller during his college days he had begun to see the continuities between the religious and philosophical systems represented in the Vedas and the traditions of the saints of Maharashtra. These latter traditions were an amalgam of the Vedic and the folk traditions of Maharashtra. While Vithal whom his father worshipped could have been an incarnation of the Aryan God Vishnu, the local deities like Yellama and Taijai whom his mother and grand mother worshipped were not to be found in the major tradition of Hinduism. Later he was attracted to the message of the Prarthana Samaj which reconciled for him on the one hand the rationalistic and agnostic trends of thought so popular among the educated of his days with the theistic upbringing that he had received and on the other to



find some order in the welter of religious beliefs that characterized the Hindu tradition. Like Phule Shinde could not accept atheism as a philosophy of life. Both of them were theists and in the religions that they professed faith in existence of God was central. Both religions conceived of God not as a person but as an omniscient and omniscient entity without human attributes. In both the value of truth as the guide to human conduct was emphasized. But while Phule had found it necessary to completely cut himself off from his Hindu and Aryan heritage, Shinde never cut off this connection even later after he had completed his training at the Manchester College.

In their life backgrounds Phule had experienced relative comfort while except in the first few years Shinde had seen abject poverty. Even in later life Shinde voluntarily accepted a life of limited means whereas Phule was able to maintain the life style of a small businessman. If the objective circumstances of their day to day life were to determine their sympathies Shinde should have taken a more revolutionary position. But the critical difference in their respective backgrounds lay not in the material circumstances of their family life but in their self perceptions.



Phule despite his material well being and his education accented the categorization given by the Brahmins of his day and preferred to identify himself with the Sudra castes. He belonged to the Mali caste which was certainly lower in the caste hierarchy than the Maratha caste, but that was not the reason why he accented his status as a Sudra. It was a choice he made in his strategy of fighting the arrogance of Brahmins and brahmanism. In fact he wanted the Marathas and Kunabis also to accept this non-Aryan identity. He pronounced the theory that all the Sudra castes belonged to the non-Aryan groups that at one time were the rightful owners of the Maharashtra territory. The Brahmins, on the other hand, belonged to the conquering Aryan fold from which all the other castes must clearly distinguish themselves. His effort was to foster this separate identity and to build on it a new self-respect which was not dependent upon the hierarchical status allocated to individual castes in the Brahmanic order. He scoffed at the families of Marathas who called themselves Kshatriyas and distanced themselves from the Kunabi families by claiming for themselves a royal lineage or a royal connection. This was obviously a part of his militant strategy. His effort, therefore, to establish a religion that totally disassociated itself from the vedas, the Vedic gods and everything that the Brahmins claimed as being of Aryan origin was a logical step. This new religion, freed from the yoke of a Brahman priesthood and from the hold of the Puranas written by Brahmins



to assert their God given superiority, was a necessary sub-stratum for the ideology of equality which he was propounding. To say that this was part of strategy need not mean that Phule was insincere in his religious convictions. He was a theist; he had criticized atheistic and agnostic theories of man and the Universe. But his God did not allow mankind to be divided into high and low castes. His God was not represented through man made idols. He was omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. In day to day life God's will was best represented by truthful conduct and one's conscience was the best arbiter of what was truthful. Hence he appropriately called his new religion a religion of truth - truth which was sarvajanic in the sense that it could be established by common agreement or reason.

As against this Shinde's self-image was that of Hindu who while conscious of the inequities and addities of his religion still laid a claim to its former glories and particularly to its metaphysical speculations and the philosophies that it had given birth to. He met the needs of his conscience not by rejecting everything that was Aryan, but by accepting the need for its modification. He found a ready formulation which would meet his need in the Brahma Samaj message which earlier Phule had found wanting.



Shinde did not reject it because he did not see the need to disassociate himself from the Aryan tradition.

How does one understand or explain this difference, between these two very genuine and thoughtful persons? Was it only a difference of temperaments wherein one sought compromise and reconciliation where the other sought a confrontation and resolution of conflict? Or, were these only differences in perception to be understood in terms of their different upbringings or different castes, the fact for instance that while one was born a Maratha the other was born a Mali? That there was a basic difference in the temperaments of the two leaders is certainly a fact. It can be seen as a major variant in their respective careers as they unfolded themselves. But temperament has to be accepted by a socialologist as a given. His tools of trade are not adequate for a further analysis and a further explanation. The differences in caste status could have been a variant, but knowing the maturity and farsightedness of both the persons with whom we are dealing we would imagine that it is too tenuous an explanation of the different paths they pursued.



SECTION III

For the Sociologist the probe would become more meaningful if it is directed at the very different social contexts in which the two individuals lived. Phule was born in 1827 barely nine years after the surrender by the Peshawas to British rule. For almost a hundred years the Peshawas had ruled over the destiny of the Maratha empire and inevitably during their rule the Bramhans had gained a social and economic ascendancy quite out of proportion to their numbers. They were also among the first caste group to take advantage of the new opportunities that became available to Indians under British rule - opportunities of education and recruitment to a growing bureaucracy, opportunities of misusing these opportunities for illegitimate personal gain. Given the strong caste identities characteristic of the period one would assume that the Bramhan gate keepers to opportunity would make it differentially available to members of different castes. Even earlier, prior to British rule the Bramhans all over the country had sought to close the doors of knowledge, particularly sacerdotal knowledge and practice to all except Bramhans. Phule's writings give detailed accounts of the



manner in which Bramhans of his generation and of past generations had systematically sought to subjugate and exploit the lower castes in collaboration with sometimes the landowning and sometimes the money lending castes. Prior to British rule the power of the Peshawas must have been checked by the necessity of having to enlist and maintain cooperative relations with all the members of the Maratha Confederacy. This may have similarly limited the power of the Bramhan at the local village community. After the establishment of British rule the Maratha and other castes that had lived primarily by land rent, agriculture and service in the armies of the nobility found that the opportunities available to them were not as great in their traditional calling as the ones available to the Bramhans in theirs. The changed context did not therefore make the same difference to all the caste groups. Some were better situated to take advantage of the new opportunities than the others. Thirty years after the establishment of British rule the situation had not changed much with regard to the access to opportunity and the ability of different castes to use this access. In fact Phule's whole argument is that the condition of the non-Bramhans generally and the condition of rural peasantry in



particular had worsened considerably under British rule. For this the Bramhan alone may not have been responsible. Equally responsible was the gradual but sure assimilation of the Indian economy in the wider colonial economy. But Phule saw the urban elite, specially the Bramhans, as being responsible for it. Apart from serving in the bureaucracy the Bramhan also functioned as a money lender at the village level. He had therefore the opportunity to practise corruption and also usury.

Fifty years later the material situation had probably not changed radically, but the social context had undergone some important changes. The nationalist movement which was in its infancy during Phule's life had become an important factor in social life. Even those who did not agree with the Indian National Congress had perforce to be politically ~~ex~~ alert. Phule, like Ag arkar - the Bramhan rationalist contemporary of Phule - argued against giving a primacy to political activity and the demand for independence. Ag arkar had argued that social change must precede self-rule, Phule thought that given the conditions of his day self-rule would only mean the return of the Bramhan to effective political power. Even at the beginning of the twentieth



century when Shinde had just completed his studies the proportion of individuals in the social, bureaucratic, and professional spheres drawn from among Brahmans was still high there were Brahmans - many of them, in fact - who were not in favour of the nationalist movement. Even among those who were generally in favour of the goal of freedom there were divisions between what were then called the Moderates and the Extremists. But the overall situation was that while the Brahmans still dominated the bureaucracy, the educational institutions, the professions, the journalistic enterprise and generally the urban scene, they were also in the forefront of the nationalist movement at the local as well as at the national level.

Two changes had, however taken place, Opportunities had opened out to the other castes particularly the inter-mediate castes - consisting of the Marathas, the Jains, the Lingayats - and a sizeable number of them were now seen in the professions, in bureaucracy and in the small and medium size businesses. In fact Jotirao Phule and Bhalekar - two of the founder leaders of the Satyashodhak Samaj had themselves taken to small scale contracting as a business. A number of the first few colleagues of Phule had also been drawn from this class. Trade byway selling urban



manufacture in the rural areas and agricultural product in the urban areas had also attracted some of the intermediate castes like the Jains and Lingayats but gradually an increasing numbers of them had educated themselves in schools and colleges. The rulers of Baroda and Kolhapur had played an important role in promoting the development of educational and employment opportunities for the 'backward class' students. Marathas were among the first to benefit by these facilities. Shinde had, in fact, been able to complete his own studies primarily because of them.

Simultaneously another change had taken place in the complexion of the 'backward class' movement. Phule's concept of all the non-Brahman castes constituting a single entity had lost some of its initial appeal. Even during Phule's life-time the idea of a non-Aryan solidarity had not been found acceptable by all. Many of the leaders of the non-Brahman movement who later claimed loyalty to the Satyashodhak Samaj would not have found acceptable the idea that they were not Aryan. They were conscious of their Kshatriya identity. The Chhatrapati of Kolhapur had fought to establish his right to Vedic rites and toward the end of his life had found a greater appeal in the Arya Samaj than in the religious ideas propounded by Phule. Unlike in the



erstwhile Madras Presidency where prior to independence a Dravid consciousness had been nurtured and developed, in Maharashtra the idea of a racially distinct identity had not found roots.

Another development that took place in the second decade of the twentieth century was the declaration by the British Government of its intention to transfer in a limited way some of the subjects of administrative and political decision making to the proposed provincial legislative bodies. This changed the political context in such a way that a non-political socio-religious movement such as the one that Phule had conceived had no longer the same relevance or appeal. If you wanted to fight the power of Bramhans in society the way to do it was to enter the political arena and not to shun it. The leaders of the non-Bramhan movement therefore were engaged in demanding a system of franchise which would minimally ensure their substantial presence in the elected bodies and an effective share of the power that would now be transferred to these bodies. This new leadership paid lip-sympathy to the cause of untouchables and the depressed classes but that cause was not at the core of the non-Bramhan movement.



To Shinde on the other hand the cause of the untouchable had been a life mission ever since 1905 - much before any idea of provincial autonomy had been mooted by the British. He had discovered this mission in the course of his religious work. It is likely that the group of villagers whom he addressed in a village outside Ahmednagar in 1905 and who seem unawaredly to have been responsible for Shinde's decision to dedicate himself to the cause of 'the Depressed Classes' had at some time been influenced by workers of the Satyashodhak Samaj. But Shinde's commitment was total and he had had nothing to do with the non-Bramhan movement of his day until then. In the social context in which he functioned the interests of the untouchables and the interests of the other 'non-Bramhan' caste groups were not the same. He found that he had to plead the cause of the untouchables not only with Bramhans but with all caste Hindus, including Marathas, other members of the Intermediate castes and even the other touchable backward castes. His perception of himself in relation to the community he wished to serve was different from that Phule's. Whereas Phule had tried to posit the existence of a community of interest among all non-Bramhan castes including the untouchables and had considered himself



to be part of this 'Anarya' entity, Shinde looked upon himself as a missionary of the liberal faith, represented by the Prarthana Samaj, who was trying to protect and serve and 'uplift' the downtrodden. Phule conceived of the untouchables as part of the total group to which he himself belonged and on whose behalf he had declared a revolt against the Bramhan dominated religion and society of his day. Shinde did not see this imputed solidarity though he would have wished to see the disappearance of all caste distinctions. His liberalism was inclusive and not exclusive of the Bramhans. While he saw that Bramhans were very much in the forefront he did not see them as the main enemy against which people had to be mobilised.

His objectives were two. Initially he had, in fact only one objective, viz; the liberation of the untouchables from a condition of social and economic servitude and deprivation. In this his target was the entire Hindu caste society which had to be persuaded to accept the untouchables as an integral part of Hindu society. In his own case he had arrived at this perception as a result of his early upbringing in which he saw his parents admit persons of different faiths and social standing as equals to



their house. This early influence was strengthened by the message of the Prarthana Samaj and the Liberal Religious training that he received in England. Within his experience he had seen ~~the~~ Marathas and the intermediate castes to be politically aware and organized in readiness to protect their interests against a Bramhan-dominated nationalist movement. While these groups saw themselves to be disadvantaged in relation to Bramhans, they did not see their interests to be the same as those of the untouchable castes.

Shinde's first task was thus to get the Hindus to see the moral, religious as well as political necessity of recognizing the untouchables to be a part of the Hindu body politic. Whereas, Phule had identified the Bramhan as the exploiter and therefore the target of his attack, Shinde saw the necessity of identifying foreign rule as the culprit and the source of exploitation. Unlike Phule who had seen no need to be identified with the nationalist movement, Shinde found over the years that though he was a religious missionary and a social reformer he could not really keep out of the nationalist movement and hope to serve the interests of the depressed classes and the peasantry. The



politics of nationalism was no longer a distant rumble, it was an era of short-range political opportunity - an opportunity which he felt might irreparably divide the Indian polity. If this happened the Bramhans, the Intermediate castes, the Backward Castes and the Outcastes would all be kept busy fighting each other.

His political mission was, therefore, to get the intermediate castes, who constituted the largest single segment of the population, to accept the backward and outcaste groups as their own and participate effectively in the national movement. This was as much a part of his nationalist commitment as of his social mission. Thus, if his first objective was to 'uplift' and 'liberate' the untouchables and obtain for them social acceptance and opportunity, his second objective was to bring all the communities into the mainstream of the national movement for independence. In the changed context of a move toward an elected legislature and an organized 'bahujan samaj' he did not see the relevance of an anti-Bramhan stance on the part of the 'non-Bramhan' leaders.

If Shinde spent the years between 1918 to 1929 trying to bring the 'bahujan samaj' into the national stream, he had spent the years between 1907 to 1917 trying to get the



Indian National Congress to adopt a resolution condemning the practice of untouchability. If he was sensitive to the need of bringing and retaining the 'bahujansamaj' in the nationalist main-stream he was equally conscious of the need for the national movement to take cognizance of the aspirations of the non-elite groups consisting of the small peasants and the landless outcates.

#### SECTION IV

In Shinde's life, service of the untouchables was a part of his religious quest; but this mission of service lead him into political life. Shinde sought to bring about change from within the system. He saw the ~~inequity~~ of the Hindu social order but he sought to establish continuities by bringing about a change of attitudes and practice. In this effort his 'liberal religion' provided a framework of new values. Phule saw the ~~inequities~~ and discontinuities in the Hindu (Bramhanic) social order. He sought to break away from the inequitous system by establishing a new religion.

Shinde was a reformer. A reformer takes on the roles of an educator and an advocate. Phule was a rebel and a rebel takes on the role of an iconoclast and an adversary.



But these role types are not entirely opposed to each other in their behavioural implications. Even a rebel has to organise his following and the organizational work requires education of the followers in new values. Similarly, an advocate on behalf of an underprivileged group has to show results of his advocacy and this necessitates his taking on a partisan, insistent stand on behalf of his clients which often irritates the elite and those who hold power in society.

There was a basic difference in the manner in which Phule and Shinde related themselves to the issue of untouchability. So far as identifying themselves with the untouchables is concerned Phule in his first- social reform and social service - phase displayed the attitudes of sympathy, fellow-feeling and a total acceptance of the untouchables as persons in their families. This identity with the untouchable never underwent a change, but in his second social or cultural rebellious - phase Phule had raised more basic issue of whether social equality was at all possible in a society whose value framework was determined by Brahmins. He began to see the problem of untouchables as a part of the overall problem of inequality and interest conflict between Brahmins on the one hand and all



non-Bramhans on the other. The racial differentiation between Aryans and non-Aryans provided the ideological under-pinning for his new perception and the establishment of first the Satyashodhak Samaj and later the conceptualization of a new faith based on truth, equality and democracy was the organizational form that his protest took. While he had worked with many Bramhan colleagues in his first phase, in the second phase Brahmanhs were only allowed to be sympathisers of the Satyashodhak Samaj - not its members. In a way this contradicted the doctrine of equality which Phule cherished, but he did not seem to see the contradiction. Phule had studied religion and Bramhanic literature but out of his study the major insight he gained was how Bramhans used religions for their own benefit and for the exploitation of non-Bramhans. He thought through the framework and the basic precepts of this new religion by himself, but he was not primarily interested either in theology, metaphysics or even ethics as subjects of abstract study or contemplation.

Shinde related himself to the untouchables as a humane individual concerned about their problems and inspired by his religious convictions to serve them for their betterment. If Phule allowed untouchables to come



and draw water from his well, Shinde went with his family and lived among the untouchables. But Shinde looked upon himself as representative of the larger society who suffered among the untouchables and at the same time pleaded their cause before the larger society. He did not find the need for a new religion.. He had found the answers he needed for his religious questions in the Prarthana Samaj, the Brahmin Samaj and the Liberal Religion as developed by the Unitarian Church in England. Though Shinde did not find a new religion, his religious quest was very earnest. He began his adult life as a religious worker, continued to be involved in it even when he had ceased to be the preacher of the Prarthana Samaj, and, finally, returned to it as major preoccupation in the last decade of his life. He judged himself in terms of spiritual and religious goals.

The challenges that Phule and Shinde faced in their respective life-spans were different though they revolved round the questions of untouchability and the aspirations of the non-Brahmin castes. Phule tried to provide them with a forum to organize themselves and an ideology that would provide the basis for such an organization. He



tried to minimize the differences between the non-Brahman caste Hindus and the untouchables. His message reached all the varied strata and provided them with the necessary inspiration and the direction along which they might seek to assert themselves. But the racial and religious aspects of his ideology did not take roots among the upper strata of the non-Brahmans. Even among his contemporaries there were many who did not accept either the Aryan-non-Aryan bifurcation nor the total rejection of Hinduism. But because of Phule they had gained confidence and perspective. The anti-Brahman stance provided the common link necessary in an otherwise diversified following.

Shinde found no need to harp on the anti-Brahman theme. He did not adopt either a rebellious or a militant strategy. He subscribed to a religious and social philosophy that inspite of being universalistic had already gained a certain acceptance among the Brahman as well as non-Brahman elite. The battle that Phule had waged was now not necessary at the level of an enunciation of new values. What was necessary was to bring these values into practice. This, according to Shinde, could be better achieved by reconciliation, personal example and service.



If, as suggested above, it is permissible to say that he tried to minimize the negative strain of anti-Brahmanism in order that the non-Brahman elite should be drawn into the nationalist movement, it is equally possible to say that he used the national cause and the urgency of the national movement to bring the Brahman and non-Brahman elite closer together. He also struggled successfully to get the attention and the sympathy of the upper castes for the untouchables.

The two leaders adopted different strategies at the two points of time at which they happened to live. This does not mean that had Phule lived at the time Shinde did he would have adopted similar strategies or vice versa. Such speculation is idle with reference to particular individuals. There are, it would seem, several different types of leadership co-existent at any given period of history. Which one attains relative success or gets the centre stage to project itself is probably dependent upon the social-historical context.