

SATYASHODAK SAMAJ: FORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Ch.Bikshapathi,
Sr.Lecturer in Political Science,
Sardar Patel College,
Secunderabad.

ABSTRACT:

The Satyashodhak Samaj was a dynamic and growing organisation with a larger mission of social change and the empowerment of lower-caste groups in the 19th-century in Maharashtra. The samaj aspired to protect the rights and welfare of people who were marginalised and oppressed in society, especially those who had been harmed by the caste system. A printing press was started to educate the people about the issues faced by the downtrodden people. It became the main platform for the depressed classes to discuss their problems. It gave the courage and direction to the marginalised people to fight for their rights and problems.

Keywords: Shudras, bureaucrats, upliftment, discrimination, printing press.

Introduction:

The Satyashodhak Samaj was an important social and reformist movement that originated in Maharashtra, in the 19th century. This movement was started by the renowned social reformer Jyotirao Phule in reaction to the ingrained societal injustices and inequalities brought on by the caste system. Jyotirao was born on 11th April 1827 in mali (shudra) community in Pune. He was awarded the title "Mahatma" for his innumerable social services and reforms like women's education of all castes, widow remarriage, establishment of orphanage, etc. He wrote numerous books for upliftment of the shudras and downtrodden people in India. The renowned 'Gulamgiri' book was also one of his writings, in which he explained the Aryan invasion through Hindu mythology and dedicated it to the Americans who fought for the abolition of slavery. He condemned the chaturvarna system because depressed class people faced serious discriminations and atrocities in social, economic, political and cultural realms due to the chaturvarna system. He founded Satya Shodhak Samaj to fight against this discrimination and inequality based on caste system.

Reasons behind formation of satya shodhak samaj:

One of the main causes of the Satyashodhak Samaj's founding was the widespread social injustice and discrimination that lower-caste people faced by higher communities. In traditional Hindu culture, members of lower communities faced prejudice and low social standing. The samaj arose in opposition to Brahmanical authority's domination in a number of societal spheres, including religion, governance, and education. The Brahman elite was perceived as maintaining social hierarchy and reaping disproportionate benefits from the British colonial government.

Jyotirao Phule and other Satyashodhak Samaj founders were motivated by a need to change and confront the societal norms and customs that oppressed lower-caste people. They aimed to overcome the inequities and inequalities that the caste system entailed. The organisation sought to encourage education and enlightenment among the lower castes, especially the Shudras. Phule thought that education would strengthen these communities and give them the ability to oppose the repressive social structure.

Due to these reasons the satyashodhak samaj was formed on 24 September 1873 by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule.

Composition of Satyashodhak Samaj:

Bombay and Pune and its neighbouring villages provided the majority of the samaj's funding. Within one or two generations, members frequently relocated to Pune and Bombay. Caste diversity was a defining feature of the Samaj. The Mali community, a large farming caste in Maharashtra, provided the leaders and a large membership, the group also included people from a number of other castes like Sali, Mahar, Shimpi, Kumbhar, Muslim and Vanjari.

The Satyashodhak Samaj's members had a variety of jobs. A sizable portion of the members worked as contractors and merchants in the business sector. Others worked for the government as clerks, head writers, police inspectors, even a deputy collector. Some of them were professionals, such as doctors and lawyers. The Samaj featured students, showing that the next generation was participating. Some people were continuing their education, enrolling in matriculation, engineering school, and other educational programs. Students from low-income homes were encouraged by samaj to pursue their education.

Prominent leaders:

- Jyotirao Phule, The Samaj's founder and guiding force, who shaped its philosophy and course.
- Krishnarao Bhalekar was an important participant in the Samaj's leadership conflict and an independent thinker.
- Vishram Ramji Gholay presided over the Samaj for a year and actively supported a number of initiatives, including educational ones.
- Narayan Meghaji Lokhande was a significant activist and polemicist who supported the goals of the Samaj by focusing on concerns of labourers and workers.
- Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru was a leader in social and religious reform movements and a member of the Telugu Mali community in Bombay. He assisted in establishing the Samaj's Bombay branch.

Activities of satya shodhak samaj:

The Samaj was committed to encouraging education among the lower castes, particularly those who were regarded as Shudras. It intended to make education accessible to these people and raise awareness. The group had access to a printing press that was used to produce pamphlets outlining the society's objectives and the challenges that shudra people faced as a result of Brahmin domination.

Krishnarao Bhalekar, a significant Samaj member, hosted debate tournaments. These activities were intended to inspire people to participate in thoughtful conversations and debates. Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru, a prominent member, established a women's institute in Bombay. This demonstrates a dedication to social advancement and women's education.

Members of the Samaj participated actively in discussion and debates, both inside the community and through media like the DeenBandhu newspaper. A variety of social, religious, and political topics were discussed during these discussions. The Samaj challenged the supremacy of Brahmins and other upper castes in a variety of sectors of society by advocating for the rights and social advancement of lower-caste people.

Some participants, such as Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, stressed the value of Maratha identity and strove to bring together diverse Marathi-speaking people. The Samaj made an effort to oppose and contest the impact of Brahmanical customs, rites, and practices that oppressed lower-castes.

The Satyashodhak Samaj acted as a centre for lower-caste community members to come together and organise themselves. They were given a platform to vent their problems and promote social change. The samaj's ambition to use media and communication to convey its message and raise awareness of its cause, it is shown in its interest in buying a printing press and launching a non-Brahman newspaper. This was viewed as a strategy to sway public opinion. Vyanku Baloji Kalevar and Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru provided the printing press to the satyashodhak samaj.

ROLE OF PRINTING PRESS:

The printing press's main function was to publish and spread information about the Satyashodhak Samaj's goals and objectives. It attempted to raise awareness of the samaj's aims and objectives among the general public and the British colonial authorities. The press was used to disseminate information about the challenges and problems that the Shudras were experiencing as a result of the activities of Brahman government bureaucrats. It served as a forum for bringing attention to societal problems and unfair treatment of Downtrodden people. Publication of educational materials aiming at advancing literacy and knowledge among the lower castes was probably one of the press's primary purposes.

One of the samaj's most profound goals was the intention to use the media to launch the first non-Brahman newspaper. This publication acted as a channel of information,

support, and mobilisation for the cause of the society. The media may have been utilised to spread social reform concepts, question Brahmanical supremacy, and fight for the rights and dignity of lower-caste people. The society may have used printed materials and media as an attempt to obtain support from not just its current members but also from the general public who were sympathetic to their cause.

CONCLUSION:

In the 12th century, basaveshwara's anubhava mantapa was established for the discussion of social, economic, political and spiritual issues in a democratic and secular manner. Similarly in the 19th century Mahatma Jyotirao Phule established Satya Shodhak samaj to mobilise and to give the spirit of fighting for their rights. This samaj strived for providing education, equal justice, social and political rights for shudras. The printing press started by the samaj served various functions, including disseminating information about the organisation's mission, drawing attention to social problems and injustices, promoting education, fighting for social reform, and launching a non-Brahman newspaper Deenabhandhu to further their cause and garner support. This influenced oppressed classes and some intellectuals all over the country.

References:

1. Caste, Conflict and Ideology, Rosalind O'Hanlon , 2002
2. Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of the Indian Social Revolution, Dhananjay Keer , 1997
3. Jotirao Phule and the ideology of social revolution in India, Gail Omvedt, 2004
4. Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule, Jotīrāva Govindarāva Phule , 2002
5. Jyotiba Phule A Modern Indian Philosopher, Archana Malik-Goure , 2013

