
Contribution of Gopalbuwa Walangkar in the Pre-Ambedkariate Dalit Movement**Prof. B. K. Bhosale***Head, Department of History, Changu Kana Thakur Arts, Commerce and Science College, New Panvel, (M.S.) India***Abstract**

The conditions of the untouchables were very deplorable in India. Due to British Rule, socio-religious reformation movement started in India. On the backdrops of this movement there was also rise of Dalit movement. Social reformers excluding Mahatma Phule, work for the education of women but non-of them work for eradication of caste system. They had the sympathy for the untouchable. Gopalbuwa Walangkar had taken hard efforts to investigate the origin and causes of untouchable. He has started the mass movement for eradication caste system. For that he had founded, Anarya Dosh Parihar Samaj. He endeavors tirelessly to awaken the untouchables and attempt to remove their mental slavery and cultivate self esteem in them.

Keywords – Untouchable, Dalit Movement, Social Justice, Caste System

Introduction

The conditions of the untouchables on the eve of the rise of Dalit movement in Maharashtra as well as in India were very deplorable. Socially, the untouchables were suppressed, oppressed and segregated; and were condemned to a sub-human level. Economically, they were totally exploited, impoverished and crippled, leading a life of slaves. Religiously, though they belonged to the same Hindu fold as of their caste Hindu brethren, they were out of the fold; they were *Avarna*, outcaste, *Antyaja*; they were impure and polluters. Educationally, they were grappling in the dungeon of perpetual ignorance. Politically, they were nowhere; were robbed of every civic and human rights. Morally, they were degraded, with no confidence, no self-esteem and were almost dead. Thus was the predicament of the untouchables. Their very existence as a human being was denied. They were almost dead.

The advent of British Rule brought a dawn of new era in India. The British also brought with them English education, western thoughts, ideas and culture which triggered an intellectual outburst leading to socio-religious reformation movements in India. On the backdrop of these movements there was also the rise of Dalit movement.

These social reformers, excluding Mahatma Phoolley and Vitthal Ramaji Shinde and including the pioneers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati and others confined their reforms to awareness and abolition of evil social practices such as Sati, child marriage, widow remarriage, forced widowhood, tonsuring, and that to was restricted to their own caste i.e. Brahmin or so. Some of them worked for the education of women. However, none of them worked for the eradication of Caste System, untouchability and uplift of the untouchables, though they knew these social evils very well. They did have sympathy for

the untouchables and they expressed that at one time or other.¹

It was Jyotiba Phooley whose awakening, inspiration and motivation gave rise to Dalit movement organised by the Dalit themselves. He was the teacher, mentor and source of inspiration for the untouchables.

Work of Gopalbuwa Walangkar:

The first of such leaders from the untouchables was *Gopalbuwa Walangkar*. He was truly the father of Untouchable or Dalit movement in Maharashtra. His full name was *Gopalbuwa Krishna Walangkar*.

He belonged to Mahar community and was from the village Ravdul near Mahad. He joined military where he passed the Normal Examination. He studied Hindu religious scriptures. He and his friends put in strenuous efforts to investigate the origin and causes of Untouchability. They strongly wanted to detect who imposed that evil practice on the Untouchables. However, they did not find any solid evidence for that in the scriptures. When Walangkar's battalion came to Pune and Mumbai he used to meet Jyotiba Phooley and discussed with him and his colleagues on the subjects such as religious scriptures, Caste System etc.

Mahatma Jyotiba propounded the theory that the foreigner Aryans i.e. the Brahmins and their allied upper castes came to India and defeated the native Kshatriyas whom they called Anaryas or Non-Aryans. They imposed upon these Anaryas very many disabilities and ignominies to suppress and degrade them. These suppressed and oppressed were the *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* (The untouchables).

In the Mahar community there was a legend that Mahar were the native people of India and the upper caste Hindus were foreigners (Paryesi). They had conquered the Mahars and degraded them. They named the conquered and degraded masses as „*Anaryas*“ and called themselves as *Aryans*. This was the same belief which was held by Jyotiba Phooley. Gopalbuwa Walangkar and his friends also finally came to conclude that the people who imposed such a cruel and inhuman socio-religious and economic restraints on the untouchables must have been the victors and the untouchables the vanquished. And, they must be deadly enemy of the Untouchables.

Gopalbuwa retired as Hawaldar in 1886 and settled in Dapoli. It is here in Dapoli that he started his mass movement of untouchables. He founded „*Anarya Dosh-Parihar Samaj*“. Gopalbuwa toured Maharashtra to open branches of his organization. He started awakening the untouchables against the injustice done to them and for their natural human rights, by way of Kirtans, discourses citing examples from the Puranas and religious scriptures.

He wrote on the human rights of the untouchables through the periodicals such as „*Sudharak*“ and „*Deenbandhu*“. Gopalbuwa endeavored tirelessly to awaken the untouchables and attempted to remove their mental slavery. He exerted himself in order to pull the untouchables out of their socio-religious slavery by organizing them, cultivating self-esteem in them and by kindling in them their individuality. He tried to infuse confidence in them by preaching them his theory that they were originally a

warrior class i.e. Kshatriya and that they became untouchables in the course of history.

Gopalbuwa published a book titled as “*Vital Vidhvansak*” on 23 October, 1888. Gopalbuwa raised many questions in this book as regard casteism and untouchability. He challenged the caste Hindus who called themselves as “*Aryas*” and also before their religious authority the *Shankaracharya* to answer the questions put forth in the book. He expounded in the book that the Caste System and untouchability were the two imaginary monsters that the so called Aryans had created. The God had nothing to do with this evil creation. The references in the Hindu religious scriptures that God has created the castes the untouchability is an absolute lie and a cheating. When in the year 1893 the Government banned the recruitment of the untouchables in the military Gopalbuwa and his *Anarya Dosh-Parihar Mandal* with the help of Justice Ranade in 1894 submitted a petition to the government requesting to lift the ban.¹¹ In this petition Gopalbuwa in an attempt to re-establish the lost individuality and dignity of the untouchables said that their (the untouchables”) forefathers were Kshatriyas i.e. warriors. During the Mahadurgadevi

References:

1. Khairmode, C.B., *Dr. Bhimrao Ramaji Ambedkar, Khand 1*, Op. Cit, pp. 155.
2. Ibid, p. 155.
3. Ibid, p. 155.
4. Ibid, p. 158.
5. Ibid, p. 205.
6. Ibid, p. 204.
7. Ibid, p. 204.

famine of 1396 there was drought for 12 years and their (the untouchables”) ancestors ate whatever they found to survive. Therefore, they become socially degraded.

The tyranny of the Peshwas further condemned them to the lowest status. The untouchables had not become untouchable by themselves. They had to compromise with the situation which reduced them to such a lowest and degraded status. In 1897 Gopalbuwa and his organization prepared a set of questions addressing the Indian National Congress and asking them what right they had to demand political reforms without bringing about social reform. It shows the vigour and boldness of Gopalbuwa and his organization.

Conclusion:

Gopalbuwa Walangkar pioneered the untouchable or Dalit movement, infusing self-confidence and self-respect in the oppressed and degraded brethren of his. He brought in a new era of self-esteem and awareness for the untouchables. He kindled a yearning for liberation from the age-long slavery of untouchability. Many untouchable youngsters joined the newly emerged movement of their emancipation.

8. PK, p. 113.
9. Khairmode, C.B., *Dr. Bhimrao Ramaji Ambedkar, Khand 1*, Op. Cit, pp. 204.
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