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Slavery
by
Mahatma Phule

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Preface

by The Author Himself

"The day that reduces a man to slavery takes from him the half of his virtue,"

- Homer.

"Our system of Government in India is not calculated to raise the character of those subject to it, nor is the present system of education one to do more than over-educate the few, leaving the mass of the people as ignorant as ever and still more at the mercy of the few learned; in fact, it is an extension of the demoralizing Brahmin-ridden policy, which, perhaps, has more retarded the progress of civilization and improvement in India generally than anything else."

- Col. G.J. Haly, *'On Fisheries in India'*

"Many ages have elapsed since peculiar resources were afforded to the Brahmins; but the most considerate cosmopolite would hesitate to enroll them amongst the benefactors of the world.

They boast of vast stores of ancient learning. They have amassed great riches, and been invested with unbounded power, but to what good end? They have cherished the most degrading superstitions and practised the most shameless impostures. They have arrogated to themselves the possession and enjoyment of the rarest gifts of fortune and perpetuated the most revolting system known to the world. It is only from a diminution of their abused power that we can hope to accomplish the great work of national regeneration."

- Mead's *'Sepoy Revolt'*.

Recent researches have demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that the Brahmans were not the aborigines of India. At some remote period of antiquity, probably more than 3000 years ago, the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahmin Race descended upon the plains of Hindoostan from regions lying beyond the Indus, the Hindoo Koosh, and other adjoining tracts. According to Dr. Pritchard, the Ethnologist, they were an off-shoot of the Great Indo-European race, from whom the Persians, Medes, and other Iranian nations in Asia and the principal nations in Europe like-wise are descended. The affinity existing between the Zend, the Persian and Sanscrit

languages, as also between all the European languages, unmistakably points to a common source of origin. It appears also more than probable that the original cradle of this race being an arid, sandy and mountainous region, and one ill calculated to afford them the sustenance which their growing wants required, they branched off into colonies, East and West. The extreme fertility of the soil in India, its rich productions, the proverbial wealth of its people, and the other innumerable gifts which this favoured land enjoys, and which have more recently tempted the cupidity of the Western nations, no doubt, attracted the Aryans, who came to India, not as simple emigrants with peaceful intentions of colonization, but as conquerors. They appear to have been a race imbued with very high notions of self, extremely cunning, arrogant and bigoted. Such self-gratulatory, pride-flattering epithets as 'arya' 'bhudev' etc., with which they designated themselves, confirm us in our opinion of their primitive character, which they have preserved up to the present time, with, perhaps, little change for the better. The aborigines whom the Aryans subjugated, or displaced, appear to have been a hardy and brave people from the determined front which they offered to these interlopers. Such opprobrious terms, as Sudra 'insignificant,' 'Mahari' - 'the great foe' atayanj, chandal etc. with which they designated them, undoubtedly show that originally they offered the greatest resistance in their power to their establishing themselves in the country, and hence the great aversion and hatred in which they are held. From many customs*

foot note:

[* A most remarkable and striking corroboration of these views is to be found in the religious rites observed on some of the grand festivals which have a reference to Bali Raja, the great king who appears to have reigned once in the hearts and affections of the Sudras and whom the Brahmin rulers displaced. On the day of Dushara, the wife and sisters of a Sudra, when he returns from his worship of the Shumi Tree and after the distribution of its leaves, which are regarded on that day as equivalent to gold, amongst his friends, relations and acquaintances, he is greeted, at home with a welcome "Let all troubles and misery go, and the kingdom of Bali come." Whereas the wife and sisters of a Brahmin place on that day in the foreground of the house an image of Bali, made generally of wheat or other flour, and when the Brahmin returns from his worship of the Shumi Tree he takes the stalk of it, pokes with it the belly of the image and then passes into the house. This contrariety, in the religious customs and usages obtaining amongst the Sudras and the Brahmins and of which many more examples might be adduced, can be explained on no other supposition but that which I have tried to confirm and elucidate in these pages.]

traditionally handed down to us, as well as from the mythological legends contained in the sacred books of the Brahmins it is evident that there had been a hard struggle for ascendancy between the two races. The wars of Dev and Daitya, or the Rakshas, about which so many fiction are found scattered over the sacred books of the Brahmins, have certainly a reference to this primeval struggle. The original inhabitants with whom these earthborn Gods, the Brahmins, fought, were not

inappropriately termed Rakshas, that is the protectors of the land. The incredible and foolish legends regarding their form and shape are no doubt mere chimeras, the fact being that these people were of superior stature and hardy make. Under such leaders as Brahma, Purshram and others, the Brahmin waged very protracted wars against the original inhabitants. They eventually succeeded in establishing their supremacy and subjugating the aborigines to their entire control. Accounts of these conquests, enveloped with a mass of incredible fiction, are found in the books of the Brahmins. In some instances they were compelled to emigrate, and in other wholesale extermination was resorted to. The cruelties which the European settler practised on the American Indians on their first settlement in the new world, had certainly their parallel in India on the advent of the Aryans and their subjugation of the aborigines. The cruelties and inhuman atrocities which Purshram committed on the Kshetrias, the people of this land, if we are to believe even one tenth of what the legends say regarding him, surpass our belief and show that he was more a fiend than a God. Perhaps in the whole range of history it is scarcely possible to meet with such another character as that of Purshram, so selfish, infamous, cruel and inhuman. The deeds of Nero, Alaric or Machiavelli sink into insignificance before the ferocity of Purshram. The myriads of men and defenseless children whom he butchered, simply with a view to the establishment of his co-religionists on a secure and permanent basis in this land, is a fact for which generations ought to execrate his name, rather than deify it.

This, in short, is the history of Brahmin domination in India. They originally settled on the banks of the Ganges whence they gradually spread over the whole of India. In order, however, to keep a better hold on the people they devised that weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste, and the code of cruel and inhuman laws, to which we can find no parallel amongst other nations. They founded a system of priest craft so galling in its tendency and operation, the like which we can hardly find anywhere since the times of the Druids. The institution of Caste, which has been the main object of their laws, had no existence among them originally. That it was an after-creation of their deep cunning is evident from their own writings. The highest rights, the highest privileges and gifts, and everything that would make the life of a Brahmin easy, smooth - going and happy - everything that would conserve or flatter their self-pride - were specially inculcated and enjoined, whereas the Sudras and Atisudras were regarded with supreme hatred and contempt, and the commonest rights of humanity were denied them, Their touch, nay, even their shadow, is deemed a pollution. They are considered as mere chattels, and their life of no more value than that of the meanest reptile; for it is enjoined that if a Brahmin "kill a cat or an ichenumon, the bird Chasha, or a frog or a dog, a lizard, an owl, a crow or a Sudra" he is absolved of his sin by performing the "chandrayana prayschitta" i.e., a fasting penance, perhaps for a few hours or a day and requiring not much most heinous offence he could commit, and the forfeiture of his life is the only punishment his crime is considered to merit. Happily for our Sudra brethren of the present day our enlightened British Rulers have not recognized these preposterous, inhuman and unjust penal enactments

of the Brahmin legislators. They no doubt regard them more as ridiculous fooleries than as equitable laws. Indeed, no man possessing even a grain of common sense would regard them as otherwise. Any one, who feels disposed to look a little more into the laws and ordinances as embodied in the Manawa Dharma Shastra and other works of the same class, would undoubtedly be impressed with the deep cunning underlying them all. It may not, perhaps, be out of place to cite here a few more instances in which the superiority or excellence of the Brahmins is held and enjoined on pain of Divine displeasure:

- The Brahmin is styled the Lord of Universe, even equal to the God himself. He is to be worshipped, served and respected by all.
- A Brahmin can do no wrong.
- Never shall the King slay a Brahmin, though he has committed all possible crimes.
- To save the life of a Brahmin any falsehood may be told. There is no sin in it.
- No one is to take away anything belonging to Brahmin.
- A king, though dying with want, must not receive any tax from a Brahmin, nor suffer him to be afflicted with hunger or the whole kingdom will be afflicted with famine.
- The feet of a Brahmin are holy. In his left foot reside all the (holy pilgrimages) and by dipping which into water he makes it as holy as the water at the holiest of shrines.
- A Brahmin may compel a man of the servile class to perform servile duty, because such a man was created by the Almighty only for the purpose of serving Brahmin.
- A Sudra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from state of servitude; for being born in a state which is natural to him, by whom can he be divested of his natural attributes ?
- Let a Brahmin not give temporal advice nor spiritual counsel to a Sudra.
- No superfluous accumulation of wealth shall be made by a Sudra, even though he has the power to make it, since a servile man who has amassed riches becomes proud, and by his insolence or neglect he gives pain even to Brahmin.
- If a Sudra cohabit with a Brahmin adulteress, his life is to be taken. But if a Brahmin goes even unto the lawful wife of a Sudra he is exempted from all corporal punishment.

It would be needless to go on multiplying instances such as these Hundreds of similar ordinances including many more of a worse character than these can be found scattered over their books. But what can have been the motive and objects of such cruel and inhuman Laws ? They are, I believe, apparent to all but to the infatuated, the blind and the self-interested. Anyone who runs may even read, them. Their main object in fabricating these falsehoods was to dupe the minds of the ignorant and to rivet firmly on them the chains of perpetual bondage and slavery which their

selfishness and cunning had forged. The severity of the laws as affecting the Sudra and the intense hatred with which they were regarded by the Brahmins can be explained on no other supposition but that there was, originally between the two, a deadly feud, arising as we have shown above, from the advent of the latter into this land. It is surprising to think what a mass of specious fiction these interlopers invented with a view to hold the original occupiers of the soil fast in their clutches, and rule securely for ages yet to come through the means of their credulity. Anyone who will consider well the whole history of Brahmin domination in India, and the thralldom under which it was retained the people even up to the present day, will agree with us in thinking that no language could be too harsh by which to characterize the selfish heartlessness and the consummate cunning of the Brahmin tyranny by which India has been so long governed. How far the Brahmins have succeeded in their endeavours to enslave the minds of the Sudra and Atisudra, those of them who have come to know the true state of matters know well to their cost. For generations past they have borne these chains of slavery and bondage. Innumerable Bhat writers, with the selfsame objects as those of Manu and others of his class, added from time to time to the existing mass of legends, the idle phantasies of their own brains, and palmed them off upon the ignorant masses as of Divine inspiration, or as the acts of the Deity Himself. The most immoral, inhuman, unjust actions and deeds have been attributed to that Being who is our Creator, Governor and Protector, and who is all Holiness Himself. These blasphemous writings, the products of the distempered brains of these interlopers, were received as gospel truths, for to doubt them was considered as the most unpardonable of sins. The system of slavery, to which the Brahmin dominancy, so lately as that of the time of the Peshwa, my Sudra brethren had even greater hardships and oppression practised upon them than what even the slaves in America had to suffer. To this system of selfish superstition and bigotry, we are to attribute the stagnation and all the evils under which India has been groaning for many centuries past. It will, indeed, be difficult to name a single advantage which accrued to the aborigines from the advent of this intensely selfish and tyrannical sect. The Indian Ryot (the Sudra and Atisudra) has been in fact a proverbial milch cow. He has passed from hand to hand. Those who successively held sway over him cared only to fatten themselves on the sweat of his brow, without caring for his welfare or condition. It was sufficient for their purposes that they held him safe in their clutches for squeezing out of him as much as they possibly could. The Brahmin had at last so contrived to entwine himself round the Sudra in every large or small undertaking, in every domestic or public business, that the latter is by custom quit unable to transact any concern of moment without his aid.

This is even true at the time. While the Sudra on the other hand is so far reconciled to the Brahmin yoke, that like the American slave he would resist any attempt that may be made for his deliverance and fight even against his benefactor. Under the guise of religion the Brahmin has his finger in every thing, big or small, which the Sudra undertake. Go to his house, to his field or to the court to which business may invite

him, the Brahmin is there under some specious pretext or other, trying to squeeze out of him as much as his cunning and wily brain can manage. The Brahmin despoils the Sudra not only in his capacity of a priest, but does so in a variety of other ways. Having by his superior education and cunning monopolized all the highest places of emoluments, the ingenuity of his ways is past finding out, as the reader will find on an attentive perusal of this book. In the most insignificant village as in the largest town, the Brahmin is the all in all; the be-all and the end-all of the Ryot. He is the master, the ruler. The Patell of a village, the headman, is in fact a nonentity. The Koolkurnee, the hereditary Brahmin village accountant, the notorious quarrel-monger, moulds the Patell according to his wishes. He is the temporal and spiritual adviser of the ryots, the Soucar in his necessities and the general referee in all matters. In most instances he plans active mischief by advising opposite parties differently, so that he may feather his own nest well. If we go up higher, to the Court of a Mamlutdar, we find the same thing. The first anxiety of a Mamlutdar is to get round him, if not his own relatives, his own relatives, his caste men to fill the various offices under him. These actively foment quarrels and are the media of all corrupt practices prevailing generally round about these Courts. If a Sudra or Atisudra repairs to his Courts, the treatment which he receives is akin to what the meanest reptile gets. Instead of his case receiving a patient and careful hearing, a choice lot of abuse is showered on his devoted head, and his prayer is set aside on some pretext or other, Whereas if one of his own castemen were to repair to the Court on the self-same business, he is received with all courtesy, and there is hardly any time lost in getting the matter right. If we go up still higher to the Collector's and Revenue Commissioner's Courts and to the other Departments of the Public Service, the Engineering or Educational etc., the system is carried out on a smaller or greater scale. The higher European officers generally view men and things through Brahmin spectacles, and hence the deplorable ignorance they often exhibit in the concluding portions of this book what expedients are employed by these Brahmin officials for fleecing the Coonbee in the various departments to which business or his necessities induce him to resort. Any one knowing intimately the workings of the different departments, and the secret springs which are in motion, will unhesitatingly concur with me in saying that what I have described in the following pages is not one hundredth part of the rogueries that are generally practised on my poor, illiterate and ignorant Sudra brethren. Though the brahmin of the old Peishwa school is not quite the same as the Brahmin of the present day, though the march of Western ide and civilization is undoubtedly telling on his superstition and bigotry, he has not as yet abandoned his time cherished notions of superiority or the dishonesty of his ways. The Beef, the Mutton, the intoxication beverages stronger and more fiery than the famed Some-juice, which their ancestors one relished as the veriest dainties, are fast finding innumerable votaries among them.

The Brahmin of the present time finds to some extent, like Othello, that 'his occupation is gone.' But knowing full well this state of matters, is the Brahmin

inclined to make atonement for his past selfishness ? Perhaps, it would have been useless to repine over what has been suffered and what has passed away, had the present state been all that is desirable. We know perfectly well that the Brahmin will not descend from his self- raised high pedestal and meet his Coonbee and low-caste brethren on an equal footing without a struggle. Even the educated Brahmin who knows his exact position and how he has come by it, will not condescend to acknowledge the errors of his forefathers and willingly forego the long-cherished false notions of his own superiority. At present, not one has had the moral courage to do what only duty demands, and as long as this state of matters continues, sect distrusting and degrading sect, the condition of the Sudras will remain unaltered, and India will never advance in greatness or prosperity.

Perhaps a part of the blame in bringing matters to this crisis may be justly laid to the credit of the Government. Whatever may have been their motives in providing ampler funds and greater facilities for higher education and neglecting that of the masses, it will be acknowledged by all that in justice to the latter this is not as it should be. It is an admitted fact that the greater portion of the revenues of the Indian Empire are derived from the Ryot's labor-- from the sweat of his brow. The higher and richer classes contribute little or nothing to the state's exchequer. A well-informed English writer state that,

"our income is derived, not from surplus profits, but from capital; not from luxuries but from the poorest necessities. It is the product of sin and tears."

That Government should expend profusely a large portion of revenue thus raised, on the education of the higher classes, for it is these only who take advantage of it, is anything but just or equitable. Their object in patronising this virtual high-class education appears to be to prepare scholars "who, it is thought, would in time vend learning without money and without price." "If we can inspire" say they "the love of knowledge in the minds of the superior classes, the result will be a higher standard of normals in the cases of the individuals, a large amount of affection for the British Government, and an unconquerable desire to spread among their own countrymen the intellectual blessings which they have received"

Regarding these objects of Government the writer, above alluded to, states that:-

"We have never heard of philosophy more benevolent and more Utopian. It is proposed by men who witness the wondrous changes brought about in the Western world, purely by the agency of popular knowledge, to redress the defects of the two hundred million of India, by giving superior education to the superior classes and to them only." * " We ask the their theory from the instances which have already fallen within the scope of their experience. They have educated many children of wealthy men, and have been the means of advancing very materially the worldly prospects of some of their**

pupil; but what contribution have these made to the great work of regenerating their fellowmen? How have they begun to act upon the masses? Have any of them formed classes at their own homes or elsewhere, for the instruction of their less fortunate or less wise countrymen? Or have they kept their knowledge to themselves, as a personal gift, not to be soiled by contract with the ignorant vulgar? Have they in any way shown themselves anxious? Upon what grounds is it asserted that the best way to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the people is to raise the standard of instruction among the higher classes? A glorious argument this for aristocracy, were it only tenable! to show the growth of the national happiness, it would only be necessary to refer to the number of pupil at the colleges and the lists of academic degree. Each Wrangler would be accounted a national benefactor; and the existence of Deans and Proctors would be associated, like the game laws and the ten-pound franchise, with the best interests of the Constitution."

Perhaps the most glaring tendency of the Government system of high class education has been the virtual monopoly of all higher offices under them by the Brahmins. If the welfare of the Ryot is at heart, if it is the duty of Government to check a host of abuses, it behoves them to narrow this monopoly, day by day, so as to allow a sprinkling of the other castes to get into the public service. Perhaps some might be inclined to say it is not feasible in the present state of education. Our only reply is that if Government look a little less after higher education and more toward the education of the masses, the former being able to take care of itself, there would be no difficulty in training up a body of men every way qualified and perhaps far better in morals and manners.

My object in writing the present volume is not only to tell my Sudra brethren how they have been duped by the Brahmin, but also to open the eyes of Government to that pernicious system of high-class education which has hitherto been so persistently followed and which statesmen like Sir George Campbell, the present Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, with broad and universal sympathies, are finding to be highly mischievous and pernicious to the interests of Government. I sincerely hope that Government will ere long see the error of their ways, trust less to writers or men who look through high-class spectacles and take that glory into their own hands of emancipating my Sudra brethren from the trammels of bondage which the Brahmins have woven round them like the coils of a serpent. It is no less the duty of such of my Sudra brethren as have received any education to place before Government the true state of their fellowmen and endeavour to the best of their power to emancipate themselves from brahmin thralldom. Let there be schools for the Sudras in every village; but away with all Brahmin school-masters! The Sudra are the life and sinews of the country, and it is to them alone and not to the Brahmins that the Government must ever look to tide them over their difficulties, financial as well as political. If the

hearts and minds of the Sudra are made happy and contented, the British Government need have no fear for their loyalty in the future.

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JOTIRAO GOVINDRAO PHULE
1st June 1873,

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