

REVISITING EARLY REFORMERS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO USE OF MEDIA AND FOLK ART AND ITS RELEVANCE IN TODAY'S TIMES

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ABSTRACT

Social transformation refers to the significant and long-term changes that reshape the values, structures, and practices of a society. Such change is often driven not only by well-known reformers but also by many contributors whose efforts have remained largely unrecognized. This study aims to highlight the invaluable yet overlooked contributions of Gopal Baba Walangkar, Shivram Janba Kamble, and Kisan Faguji Bansode, who played an essential role in advancing the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Through their sustained efforts, writings, and activism, they challenged social inequalities and worked toward creating a more just and equitable society. By bringing attention to their work, this research attempts to acknowledge their role in the broader process of social change and to emphasize the importance of recognizing every voice that has contributed to societal transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Social change begins when the idea of new perspective is born. It challenges the existing system and inspires people to think differently. In the 19th century one such movement started getting its roots in the Maharashtra. The soil of Maharashtra has always been rich in justification of social change. The movement was called Satyashodhak Movement which was started by Jotirao Phule. Along with Jotirao Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, V. R. Shinde and many others worked with the same belief. However, the contribution of some individuals goes unnoticed. Here, this paper focuses on three early reformers whose contribution requires to be re-explored. Namely, Gopal Baba Walangkar, Shivram Janba Kamble and Kisan Faguji Bansode. The main focus here would be to understand how they made use of education, writings, media and folk traditions such as 'Shahiri', '*Tamasha*' to bring the change in the society.

Today's society continues to rely on writing—through books, journalism, digital media, plays and social platforms—to fight discrimination, to understand the root causes of the problems and demand social justice. The issues they raised, such as equality, dignity and basic human rights, still form the foundation for contemporary reforms. By revisiting their writings, we understand how these early reformers shaped the roots of social justice movements and how their ideas continue to inspire present day struggles for inclusivity and equality. Thus, connecting their historical work with contemporary concerns helps us appreciate their lasting influence on the ongoing journey of social transformation. This discussion focuses on highlighting the contribution of forgotten reformers who played significant role in shaping social transformation, to examine how various forms of media – such as periodicals, essays and public writings were strategically used to fight against the odds, to analyse how these reformers employed folk art and traditions to educate people, to understand importance given to Vocational education, to explore continued relevance of their methods and messages in the 21st century.

Newspapers and media:

The role of media, newspapers, folklore etc has played a vital role in bringing about social change. It is said that newspapers are mirror of the society. They depict exactly what society has to offered. Newspapers have always been a medium of reaching to the masses in large extent. Though, today the few contexts might have changed with the time motive remains the same i.e. to bring awareness. Along with newspapers, perfect use of education, folk art and through medium of entertainment these early reformers tried to enlighten the masses about the issues they faced then.

Gopal Baba Walangkar

Gopal Baba Walangkar, belonged to Ratnagiri. He was one of the pupils of Jotirao Phule. He was a writer, preacher and a pensioned soldier. He established 'Anarya Dosh Parihar Mandal' to initiate the social reform programmes. He toured Maharashtra to spread his message through *bhajans* and *kirtans*. In 1888, he started a monthly journal called '*Vital Vidhvansak*', the first monthly journal which played a very significant role in fighting the problems of untouchables. In this journal, he asked a few questions which he felt was necessary to be resolved in order to bring the social change. He also mentions the issues they faced while travelling, for water taps, stay at hospice etc. During 1893, Gopal Baba Walangkar wrote a petition to British army for enlisting the Mahars in army. In 1895, he addressed the Samajik Parishad held in Pune, where he appealed for entry of untouchables to schools, public wells and recruitment in government jobs. He also wrote through the newspapers like '*Deenbandhu*', '*Sudharaka*'. The writing in newspapers include

his letters, poems which has main theme of social inequalities which prevailed in the society. He used to write on the topics like untouchability, caste discrimination and problems of marginalized communities. He published his work under a pen name 'Pandit Kondiram'. He used to form couplets. Gopal Baba Walangkar also wrote 'Akhandas' under pseudo names like 'Das', 'Satyadas'. Through his writings he questioned the wrong rituals, inhumane treatment etc.

Shivaram Janba Kamble

Shivaram Janba Kamble born in 1875, belonged to a place called 'Bhamburde' village near Pune. He believed that education is the strongest tool to fight the problems they face and to achieve the progress they wished. He worked with Vitthal Ramji Shinde who was also working for the upliftment of the downtrodden people in the society. Shivaram Janba Kamble made an effort to organize untouchable together in '*Shree Shankar Prasadika Somvamshiya Hitchintak Mitra Samaj*'. Under this organisation he started school and library. In 1904, he convened a first conference of untouchables at Saswad, a village near Pune in which people from nearby 51 villages had joined. In the same year, he made some demands through a petition which mainly focused on untouchables to be admitted in public service, removal of restrictions which were put on children for attending public school and so on.

In July, 1904 great initiative by him was to start a newspaper called '*Somvanshiya Mitra*'. This journal includes the editorials, miscellaneous articles, poems and stories. The main theme was social issues but the subthemes include, Free and compulsory education, *Devdasi*, polygamy etc. He had realised the contemporary problems really well and tried to address them with this newspaper. Along with this newspaper he also wrote articles through 'Deenbandhu', 'Maratha', 'Daily Telegraph' and 'Deccan Herald' etc. As mentioned earlier he knew the importance of education due to which he realised self-improvement is a mandatory factor to improve the status in society. He was also an organizer of many petitions, conferences and temple entry movements.

Kisan Faguji Bansode

Kisan Faguji Bansode was born in Nagpur in 1870. His popular title was '*Guruvarya*'. While Shivaram Janba Kamble was working at Poona, similar work was done in Nagpur and Nagar by Kisan Fagoji Bansode and Shreepatrao Thorat respectively. In 1903-04, he founded 'Mohapa Low Caste Association'. We also get reference of 'Sanmarga Bodhak Nirashrita Samaj', the name itself suggests the motive behind this organization was to bring people on good path and to do so they should be given good education, their economic status should be improved. For the same he started vocational training of handlooms so the people will get a work and economy can be improved.

He understood that if the lady of the house is given an education whole family will be educated and he educated his wife. He taught her work of printing press. In 1907, he also established school for girls. Bansode has worked with several newspapers like 'Nirikshak Hindu Nagrik' (1910), 'Mazur Patrika' (1918). Mazur Patrika was oriented to discuss the problems of working class. In 1931, he started '*Chokhamela*' weekly.

One of the very prominent contributions of Bansode is 'Satyashodhaka Jalse'. In which he made perfect blend of folk art and traditions. He prepared a programme to spread ideas of social reforms with the inclusion of '*Povada*', '*Tamasha*', dramas, poems etc in it. The prominent dramas were '*Janaho Aika Katha*', '*Johara Maybaap*', and *tamasha* included '*Eka Sadhuchi Fajiti*', '*Paratantrya Vimochana*' etc. He made

sure to use musical instruments like 'Taal', 'Mridang' etc. By using entertainment as tool, he transformed it into an effective medium to challenge social evil such as untouchability, alcoholism, and gambling. Since the message was conveyed through entertainment, it was easily understood by the masses. With this approach, he guided people towards a righteous way of life.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores that social transformation is not shaped solely by widely celebrated leaders but also the contributors whose voices were overlooked in the mainstream history. The work done by these reformers included every sector of the society i.e. they worked for marginalized community, propagated idea of women's education and also for the improvement of the working class. Through their writings, use of folk and creative expression three of them actively challenged the injustice in the society and to make people aware of their own identities.

Even today our society is facing similar issues and we are applying the same methods to resolve these problems for instance, a drama called '*Shivaji Underground in Bhimnagar Mohalla*' which talks about the conflicts between religions and caste but at the end they give a powerful message that united we stand tall. Another instance of plays from a contemporary theatre is '*Charchaugh*' or '*Purush*'. These plays replicates issues faced by women and patriarchy respectively, the issues still prevalent in the society.

In 21st century, the government has taken initiative for skill-based education and employment, vocational training programmes, along with the schemes promoting women's education, similar efforts were already undertaken by reformers in the nineteenth century.

In today's world along with these print media and plays we have other options such as digital media through which everyone is putting forward their thoughts. Inspired by these reformers, entire generation of writers emerged who addressed issues of social inequality and other contemporary concerns in the 20th century as well. Revisiting their contributions shows the change begins with courageous ideas communicated with clarity. Their work still inspires us to put efforts to build a more inclusive, aware and socially just society.

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