

MAHATMA JOTHIRAO PHULE CENTRE
for Studies in Social Philosophy
and Social Action

Inaugural Address

By

JUSTICE M.N. RAO

Former Chairperson, National Commission for Backward Classes
Former Chief Justice, High Court of Himachal Pradesh



ACHARYA NAGARJUNA UNIVERSITY

Nagarjuna Nagar-522510

Guntur Dist., Andhra Pradesh, India

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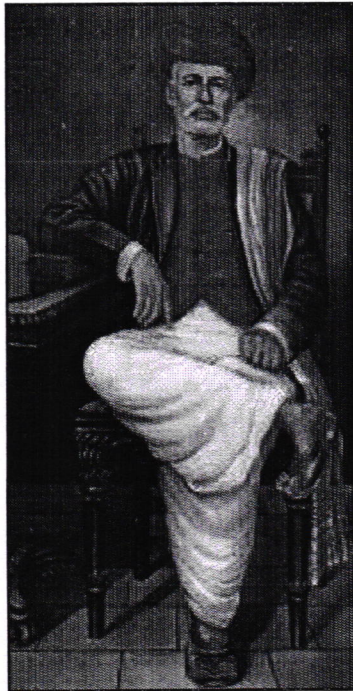
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Acharya Nagarjuna University, one of the renowned seats of learning in the State of Andhra Pradesh has done a great service to the general public and the academic community in setting up the Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule Centre for Studies in Social Philosophy and Social Action. This laudable act on the part of the University will go a long way in spreading awareness among the academic circles as well as general public about the efforts made by great social reformers to eradicate social evils, economic disparities and discrimination associated with birth and status in society, the evil effects of caste system and the deep rooted superstitions entrenched in the Indian Society.

Without understanding the social structure of the Hindu Society, one cannot appreciate the magnitude of the pioneering efforts of Phule (1827-1890) and Smt. Savitri Bai Phule (3-1-1931 ñ 10-3-1887) to bring about social transformation. In the 19th century, the British Rule was firmly entrenched. 85% of the people were Hindus by religion. The Hindu Society was founded upon caste system, the characteristic features of which are i) heredity viz., every person is assigned a particular caste by birth and what profession he should follow is determined by his birth in that caste; (ii) endogamy and exogamy i.e., restrictions as to marriage, food and occupation; (iii) gradation of castes ñ some being at the top in the social structure and others at low position. There were strict rules governing the people belonging to different castes.

The caste system in India was in existence long before the Christian era. It was sanctified by the Vedas and Manusmriti. The myth in circulation

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