

## **R. N. Chavan : An Eminent Satyashodhak Thinker**

**Sunilkumar Kurane**

Principal, Tuljabhavani Mahavidyalaya, Tuljapur, Dist.-Osmanabad, MS, India

---

### **Abstract**

Although R. N. Chavan strongly believed that every movement, party or organization created on the basis of caste distinctions was harmful to social and national integration and progress, he recommended the implementation of the report of the Mandal Commission by calling it a means of transforming the social structure. Taking a step further, he even justified the partiality to the Dalits and Untouchables in granting justice and rights.

**KEYWORDS:** R. N. Chavan, Satyashodhak, Thinker

---

### **Introduction :**

R. N. Chavan is one of the honest, prominent twentieth century social reformer and thinker-writers in Maharashtra. He was most honest and pioneering social reformer and thinker-writer in the Protestant Movement for the exploited classes in the society. He focused the social transformation and integration by his consistent writing, thinking and leadership. He stressed the multi-dimensional progress of the society and this was the main stream of his thoughts. The four important aspects of his thought are reading, introspection, thinking and writing. He believed that society could achieve the difficult goal of multi-dimensional progress through education, spread of education and educational awakening. He has written assiduously and minutely to appeal people to practice the humanity as well as social and political values. He strived by writing to remove the evils and demerits from the established society.

He never thought of minority gains and publicity. However, the so-called political leaders, social activists, thinkers and researchers did not take notice of his service towards humanity, human rights and social change. This contribution towards emancipation of the exploited classes in the society is highly laudable and hence the study of “ Ramchandra Narayan Chavan’s Socio-Political thought” through his efforts towards upliftment and empowerment of exploited classes in the society is inevitable. His exemplary contribution in the social enlightenment in Maharashtra will always have unique position in the history of the social reforms. The Government of Maharashtra conferred the title of “Dalitmitra” (A Person working for empowerment and uplift of the Depressed Classes)

### **Brief Life Sketch :**

R. N. Chavan was an eminent Satyashodhak Thinker. He was born on October 29, 1913 at ‘Udatore’ in Jaoli taluka but settled in Wai, which comes under Satara district and he was educated first in Wai and later in Pune. The Chavan family was inspired by the ‘Satyashodhak’ ideology of human welfare and had interest in the spread of education among the masses. The family also initiated and established the work of the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj in Wai. He was closely associated with the work of such institutions in Wai as Shivaji Library, the Brahmo Samaj, and

Vasant Vyakhyanmala( a series of lectures). He was working as the Secretary of the Brahmo Samaj in Wai.

After his meeting with Maharshi Vitthal Ramaji Shinde in Pune, he made reading and writing his vocation. While working as a clerk, he developed interest in reading and writing. He grew rich intellectually in the company of Karmaveer Bhurao Patil, Maharshi V.R. Shinde and Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi. In 1936, he wrote his first article on “the Brahmo Dharma and the Bahujan Samaj” in *Subhodhpatrika*. He was a prolific thinker-writers and wrote several articles on different social movements and their leadership from 1833 to 1993. He made a very valuable contribution to the Enlightenment Reforms Movement in Maharashtra.

This staunch supporter of ‘Satyashodhak’ ideology died on April 10, 1993. The tributes paid by nearly ninety thinkers and scholars from Maharashtra after his death bear witness to the influence of his unique personality on the twentieth century intellectual life in Maharashtra.

### **Impact :**

R. N. Chavan was a staunch supporter and disseminator of the movement towards enlightenment and change shaped and directed by Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu, Maharshi Shinde and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He was equally influenced by the writings of the Buddha and Saint Tukaram.

R. N. Chavan’s personality was influenced by idealism, humanism, equal respect for all religions, compassion and noble values of life owing to the three major movements around this period such as freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the ‘Satyashodhak’ movement inspired by Mahatma Phule and the Prarthana Samaj inspired by Justice Ranade and Bhandarkar.

### **Books and Publications :**

R. N. Chavan’s oeuvre includes *Sulhab Lagna Sanskar Vidhi* (1946), *Gostirup Santa Charitramala* (1951), ‘*Satyashodhak*’ *Jotirao Phule* (1952), *Mahatma Jotirao Phulekrut Sarvajanic Satyadharmasar* (1973), *Maharshi Vitthal Ramji Shinde Yanchya Kahi Athwani* (1975), *R. N. Chavan-Nivdak Vangmaya* (1986), *Karmveer Bhaurao Patil-Shodh ani Bodh* (1987), *R. N. Chavan Vichardarshana* (1987), *R. N. Chavan Akshar Shradhanjali – Pushpa Pahile* (1994), *Janajagaran* (1995), *Sevito Ha Rasa, Vatito Anika-Bhag- 1*(1996), *Sevito Ha Rasa, Vatito Anika-Bhag-2* (1997), *Sevito Ha Rasa, Vatito Anika-Bhag-3* (1998), *Prabhodhan* (1999), *Parivartanchi Kshitija* (1999), *Maharshi Vithal Ramji Shinde-Shodh Va Bodh* (2001), *Loknete Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj Kal Ani Karya* (2002), *R. N. Chavan Yanche Vichardhan* (2003), *Mahatma Phule Shodh Va Bodh* (2004), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar–Shodh Va Bodh* (2005), *Satyashodhakchi Chintanika* (2006), *Shakakarte Shri Raja Shivchatrapati* (2007), *Mahatma Phule Yanche Navadarshan-Ek Toulani Abhyas* (2008), *Mahatma Phule, Satyashodhak Samaj Va Samajik Prabhodhan* (2009) etc.

He wrote more than 1000 articles in such prestigious Marathi journals & newspapers as *Subhodhpatrika*, *Lokrajya*, *Sadhana*, *Asmitadarsha*, *Navbharat*,

*Deenbandhu, Rastraveer, Gavgad, Maratha, Satyashodhak, Jagruti, Yugkarta,, Krantisinha, Shivaner, Kamgarjagat, Sakal, Pudhari, Satara Samachar*, etc. After his death, right from the first Death Anniversary, the Chavan family inaugurated the tradition of “Akshar Shraddhanjali” (A tribute in the Form of Writing) and published in all 17 volumes editing his published and unpublished articles till April 10, 2009.

Different renowned Marathi scholars and thinkers such as Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, Dhananjaya Keer, Archarya P. K. Atre, Dr. G. B. Sardar, Dr. Y. D. Phadake, Dr. Baba Adhav, Dr. Hari Narake, Dr. A. H. Salunkhe, Dr. S. S. Bhosale and others have made use of rare resources provided by R. N. Chavan.

He was mainly preoccupied with the socio-historical background of the Enlightenment, the analysis of intellectual pursuits of social reformers in Maharashtra, the comparative analysis of different reform movements and social reformers, the greatness of work of the Saints, the analysis of the rise, development, nature and function of religions thoughts, etc. R. N. Chavan made the study of almost all the intellectual trends in the country.

### **Style of Writing :**

Like a thorough researcher, he aimed at reaching the very roots of different urgent problems; he sought truth and expressed his analysis using illustrations.

His personality was enriched by subtle power of observation, versatility and avid book reading; it was characterized by analytical process of reason and sense of balance; his writing was similarly characterized by sense of control and sense of synthesis.

R. N. Chavan's style was characterized by moderation, balanced attitude, comparative perspective, revolutionary fervour, sense of objectivity, disinterestedness and pure reason.

It was R. N. Chavan who persuaded Laxmanshastri Joshi to write an essay on Mahatma Jotirao Phule, the great 19<sup>th</sup> century social reformer, in 1947; it was he who drafted its manuscript and wrote introduction to the book on November 10, 1947.

### **Important Thought :**

It must be admitted that it was R. N. Chavan who did the most valuable work of exposing the cultural conspiracy of the elites of isolating the Dalit Community (the Depressed Classes) from the Bahujan Samaj (the Other Backward Classes); he did this by his constant expression of the view that there is no absolute dualism between Mahatma Phule and Shahu Chhatrapati.

It was R. N. Chavan who showed that Mahatma Phule's 'Satyashodhak' movement was not simply aimed at the struggle against the domination of the caste system and priestcraft, but unleashed the battle of emancipation for empowering the masses in the fields of education, religion, economy, morality, literature, agriculture, industry, politics, science, etc.

It was R. N. Chavan who highlighted the role played by Shahu Chhatrapati in reviving the 'Satyashodhak' movement which lied dormant after the death of Mahatma Phule and in performing the actual implementation of Mahatma Phule's ideology of equality and freedom.

It was R. N. Chavan who found out the source of two differing movements viz. the Non-Brahmin Movement and the Dalit Movement in the lack of a programme for the Depressed Classes in the 'Satyashodhak' Movement after Phule's death though the movement spread across Maharashtra.

Expressing his strong opposition to polytheism and theories of incarnations, he propounded the radical and progressive view of throwing off idolatry from Hinduism. His religious thought demanded the synthesis of four qualities of philosophy, ethics, conduct and reason in the concept of religion.

Although R. N. Chavan strongly believed that every movement, party or organization created on the basis of caste distinctions was harmful to social and national integration and progress, he recommended the implementation of the report of the Mandal Commission by calling it a means of transforming the social structure. Taking a step further, he even justified the partiality to the Dalits and Untouchables in granting justice and rights.

It was R. N. Chavan who draw attention to the fact that the problem of the Dalits had become political and economic; it was the sheer negligence on the part of the caste-Hindus that forced Dr. Ambedkar to initiate a separate movement, but today, there is a need to throw off dissociation between the upper and lower castes; and it was power-oriented politics of the new leadership from the Bahujan Samaj which remained responsible for the adverse and orthodox attitude of the people in the villages towards the untouchables.

Although R. N. Chavan's style is characterized by restraint and balance, it never compromises with basic ideology. Chavan repeatedly claims that Samarth Ramdas was never a Guru of Shivaji the Great on the one hand and frankly admits that Ramdas's *Dasbodh* is a significant contribution for its message of the path of action on the other. His fearlessness is reflected in his strong suggestion that there is no point in harping upon the old 'Satyashodhak' practice of trivializing Ramdas simply for he being a Brahmin.

R. N. Chavan's writing aims at maintaining social values; it will definitely enable students, researchers, scholars, thinkers to maintain objectivity and reason while doing research in social sciences.

### **Relevance of R. N. Chavan :**

"R. N. Chavan has taken cognizance of the period of 150 years during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from the historical, cultural, social, political and intellectual points of view. His writing reveals the presence of pure feelings without any egoism, these feelings provide a source inspiration to the ideology of logically pure philosophy and idealism. There is no outburst of feelings; there is no excitement; though he hated old blind practices, the objectivity and reason of his writing style has not been marred by this

hatred. This is the unique characteristic of Chavan,” says Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi in one of his introductions to R. N. Chavan’s writing.

He examined different problems such as the problems of the caste system of removal of untouchability, of conversions, of abolition of superstitions such as idolatry, charlatanry, the theory of incarnation, blind adherence to the written word etc. and suggested solutions to these problems.

R. N. Chavan’s political thought dealt with individuals, institutions, movements, the society, the state and the nation Chavan examined the role of power, leadership and politics of different social reform movements in Maharashtra, the relationship between religion and power, political concepts, values and ideologies, the politics for the masses, etc.

R. N. Chavan was exceptionally concerned with removing human oppression in terms of caste, religion, sex, race, language and bringing in human welfare.

He aimed at the study, spread and awareness of knowledge in order to achieve the all round development of society.

#### **Democracy :**

R. N. Chavan made a significant contribution to the dissemination of democratic values of social equality and social and economic justice. R. N. Chavan devoted his entire life to explore the significance of different social, religious and political movements that emerged before and after Indian Independence.

R. N. Chavan fought his battle for the spread of such democratic values as freedom, equality, justice, fraternity; he worked hard to carry forward the ideology of Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu and Dr. Ambedkar which gave prominence to making available human values and rights to the masses, especially to the depressed and the suppressed classes.

#### **Religion :**

R. N. Chavan insisted that people of all religions should take precaution to ensure communal harmony; he advocated that education and democracy should be means of national integration and creation of an entirely new and different nation; as public opinion has a decisive and sovereign power in democracy, it is the primary duty of all social workers to make it perceptive and powerful.

R. N. Chavan drew comparison between the life of Shivaji the Great who put at risk his life for securing political freedom and the life of Mahatma Phule who struggled hard to abolish religious, social and economic slavery of the masses; Chavan differentiated between politics and religion and strongly condemned the interference of religion in politics; his emphasis on moral values is quite relevant today.

#### **Welfare of Elites and Masses :**

R. N. Chavan continuously supported the progressive ideology in spite of spending his life in the city of the conservatives in Wai. He observed a sense of control

and balance in his writing. He became the father figure of the masses for his devotion to the uplift of the depressed classes, the emancipation of women and the unity of the communities. The members of the elite class enjoyed satisfaction in defaming the leaders of the masses and the social reformers. Against this background, R. N. Chavan's reflection on the Enlightenment has cast its spell on the minds of the common readers. He never adopted the casteist position of the "protector" of the masses and the "destroyer" of the elites. It was because of his sense of proportion that he studied Tukaram's *Gatha* on the one hand and Ramdas's *Dasbodh* on the other, Mahatma Phule's *Shetkaryancha Asud* on the one hand and Lokhitawadi's *Shatapatre* on the other.

Thus, R. N. Chavan's thought and work will prove very helpful for the revival and cultivation of rational, constructive and healthy traditions in Maharashtra.

— संदर्भ व संदर्भग्रंथ —

१. चव्हाण, रा. ना., 'परिवर्तनाची क्षितिजे', दलितमित्र रा. ना. चव्हाणांचे निवडक लेख, संपादक, डॉ. एस्. एस्. भोसले, महाराष्ट्र राज्य साहित्य आणि संस्कृती मंडळ मुंबई, १९९९
२. चव्हाण, रा. ना., 'रा. ना. चव्हाण विचारदर्शन', संपादक, शरचंद्र चव्हाण, आवृत्ती पहिली, १ ऑगस्ट १९८७, भोळे, भा. ल., 'आधुनिक भारतातील राजकीय विचार'(आभारावि), प्रकाशक, पिंपळापुरे अँड कं. नागपूर, आवृत्ती दुसरी, जून २००३,
३. फडके, य. दि. (संपादक), 'महात्मा फुले, समग्र वाङ्मय', महाराष्ट्र राज्य साहित्य व संस्कृती मंडळ, मुंबई, १९९१,
४. चव्हाण, रा. ना., 'जनजागरण', प्रकाशिका व संपादिका, सौ. वैशाली रमेश चव्हाण, आवृत्ती पहिली, १० एप्रिल १९९५,
५. पळशीकर, वसंत, 'सांप्रदायिकता आणि आजच्या आव्हानाचे स्वरूप', साम्ययोग-साधना, द्वारा विनोबा विचार केंद्र, अमरावती मार्ग, धरमपेठ, नागपूर, पहिली आवृत्ती, डिसेंबर २००२,
६. चव्हाण, रा. ना., 'जनजागरण',
७. सुमंत, यशवंत, 'भारतीय राजकीय व्यवस्था-प्रक्रिया आणि स्वरूप', संपादक, प्रकाश बाळ / किशोर बेडकीहाळ, आंबेडकर अकादमी सातारा, पहिली आवृत्ती, एप्रिल २००२,
८. चव्हाण, रा. ना., 'प्रबोधन', प्रकाशिका व संपादिका, सौ. वैशाली रमेश चव्हाण, आवृत्ती पहिली, १० एप्रिल १९९५,
९. चव्हाण, रा. ना., 'रा. ना. चव्हाण-निवडक वाङ्मय',