1. **Question: Discuss the role of Jyotirao Phule as a social reformer. (2017)**

**Answer:**

**Jyotirao Govindrao Phule**

Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phule was a social reformer, activist, writer and thinker. Phule was born on 11 April, 1827 in Satara, Maharashtra. His parents were Govindrao Phule (father) and Chimnabai (mother).He married Savitribai Phule. He toke education from Scottish Mission's High School in Pune. To bring reform in society he formed Satyashodhak Samaj and he had faith in Liberalism and Socialism. His publications were Tritiya Ratna (1855); Powada: Chatrapati Bhosle Yancha (1869); Shetkarayacha Aasud (1881).Jyotirao (Jyotiba) Govindrao Phule was a prominent social reformer and thinker of the nineteenth century India. He led the movement against the prevailing caste-restrictions in India. He revolted against the domination of the Brahmins and struggled for the rights of peasants and other low-caste people. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was also a pioneer for women education in India and fought for education of girls throughout his life. As social reformer his contribution is explained as follows.

1. **Women Education:** Jyotiba Phule realized education of one woman ensured the education of future generations. Accordingly, he began his mission with educating his own wife, Savitribai. He established India’s first girl’s school in Pune (Bhide Wada) in 1848. It was Inspired by Miss. Ferrar (Christian Missionary) of Ahmednager. Started schools on 15th May 1848 – Maharwada Pune (Girls School); 15th July 1849 – Naigaon (Satara); 17th September 1851 – Rasta Peth Pune; 1st December 1851 – Nana Peth Pune; 15th March 1852 – Vetal Peth  Pune(for dalits).
2. **Opposed child marriage:** In order to empower women, he strongly opposed child marriage, adolescent girl’s marriages and the cutting widow’s hair to mark her widowhood (He also organised a strike of the barbers in order to protest against the cutting of widow’s hair.
3. **Widow-remarriage:**To break free from this tradition, he arranged the first widow-remarriage in 1864. Realizing the dangers of a widow giving birth to a child conceived in unfortunate circumstances after her husband’s death, he opened a home for newborn infants in 1863 to prevent infanticides and suicides, he also adopted a boy Yeshwant from the same home. Savitribai and Jyotirao started the “Delivery Home” for women on whom pregnancy had been forced. The delivery home was called “Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha.
4. **Empowered Lower Castes**: He also made accessible water tank for the lower castes. He established the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873 in Pune to instill confidence and awareness among the lower castes. Satyashodhak Samaj sowed the seeds of development of the masses and propounded the spread of rational thinking. Jyotiba Phule inspired Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Vitthal Ramji Shinde (who propagated the Bahujan Samaj). Later, Ambedkar carried this work forward. Fight against evil practices. Mahatma Phule started organizing the farmers together to fight against evil practices and also strived for the children of farmers to get a vocational training.
5. **Empowering Farmers:** He demanded that annual agricultural exhibitions be organized, building of lakes and dams for regular water for agriculture and for gun licenses to the farmers to protect their crops. In 1888, he dressed as an Indian farmer in front of the Duke of Connaught and represented the concerns and demands of the farmers. He represented the people against the Hunter Commission in 1882. Inspired by Phule, labour leader Narayan Meghaji Lokhande established the mill-workers union in Mumbai in 1884. This is recognised as the first labour union in India.
6. **Other Contributions:** Mahatma Phule was also the member of the Pune Municipal Corporation. He restored the samadhi of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at Raigad. Thomas Pains Book “Rights of Man” and Theodore Parker book “Letter to people of U.S.” had a deep impact on his life. He published 2nd edition of Tukaram Padwal’s book Jati Bhed Viveksar. He is known as “Martin Luther of India.” At a meeting in 1888 in Koliwada Hall, Mumbai, title of ‘Mahatma’ was conferred upon him by common masses. In 1856 the orthodox Brahmins sent Shende and Kumbhar (Contract Killers) to kill him. Ambedkar in his book “Who were Shudra” described Jyotirao as greater Shudra. His message to the society is timeless: “The religion of the Creator is truth; why then so many disputes?”

**Conclusion:**

Perhaps the biggest legacy of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is the thought behind his perpetual fight against social stigma that are enormously relevant still. In the nineteenth century, people were used to accepting these discriminatory practices as social norm that needed to be enforced without question but Jyotiba sought to change this discrimination based on caste, class and color. He was the harbinger of unheard ideas for social reforms. He started awareness campaigns that ultimately inspired the likes of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, stalwarts who undertook major initiatives against caste discrimination later.