



Savitribai Phule: An Indian Pioneer in Women's Education

Manasi Bera

Research scholars, Department of education, Bankura University

Professor Dr. Kartick Chandra Pramanik,

Department of education, Bankura University

Abstract:

During the nineteenth century, Savitribai Jyotirao Phule, a well-known Indian social reformer, educator, and poet, made significant contributions to the education and empowerment of women. Savitribai, one of the few educated women in those days, is recognized for having established the first school for girls in Pune at Bhide Wada alongside her spouse Jyotirao Phule. She worked very hard to educate and free child widows, opposed sati pratha and child marriage, and supported widow remarriage. Along with individuals like B. R. Ambedkar and Annabhau Sathe, she is regarded as an icon of the Dalit Mang caste and was a key player in Maharashtra's social reform movement. She actively participated in the fight to remove caste and gender-based discrimination and ran a campaign against untouchability.

KEYWORDS: *Savitribai Phule; Dalit mang caste; Indian Education; Social reform.*



Introduction

Born on January 3, 1831, in Naigaon village, Satara district, Maharashtra, Savitribai Phule married social reformer and activist Jyotirao Phule at the age of nine (Biswas and Bhattacharyya, 2022). Because education was forbidden to members of Savitribai Phule's low caste and gender by Brahmins at the time

of her marriage, she had not received an education (Das and Das, 2021). She learnt to read and write after being married with her husband's help, and the two of them finally went on to establish Bhide Wada, India's first school for girls, in Pune in 1948 (Biswas and Bhattacharyya, 2022). Savitribai Phule made significant but sometimes overlooked contributions to social reform and education in 19th-century India.

In the face of pervasive gender inequality, Savitribai Phule became a force for reform, committing her life to tearing down social barriers that prevented women from obtaining an education (Davis, 2019). This study illuminates Savitribai Phule's critical role in bringing society out of darkness by breaking down gender barriers via education by analyzing the effects of her initiatives on women's empowerment and investigating the pedagogical tactics she used (Pandey, 2019). The study aims to shed light on how Savitribai Phule's advocacy of gender-inclusive education had a transforming role in bringing society out of darkness by examining her educational approaches and evaluating the long-term effects of her initiatives.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY:

1. To demonstrate Savitribai Phule's educational philosophy.
2. To become familiar with Savitribai Phule's feminist ideology.
3. Examining Savitribai Phule's role in social transformation.
4. To understand Savitribai Phule's impact on women's education in the twenty-first century.

The originator of contemporary Indian education is the educational philosopher Savitri Bai Phule. Phule opposed the practice of limiting brahmin education to upper caste males and outlawing education for those from lower castes. Together with Jyotiba Phule, she viewed education as the "Tritiya Rata," or means of enabling the oppressed (such as women and Sudras) to comprehend the transformative relationship between power and knowledge. To examine the dominant ideology, comprehend its oppressive structure, and demolish it, required more than just a basic command of the alphabet. Education, in her view, should be accessible to all, attentive to the needs of children, critically thinking, and socially reforming.

Regarded as the pioneer of female education in India, Phule's introduction of education to girls and underprivileged castes was a real game changer. A fervent supporter of the idea that all children should have access to school, she saw education as something that should be "universally available." She was also in favor of a system and a teaching approach that prioritized practical knowledge and was suitable for the students' environment, paying particular attention to the gap between rural and urban areas.

Another area she concentrated on was critical thinking as an integral component of the educational process. She believed that pupils needed to learn how to think critically and independently. This included challenging the legitimacy and beliefs of the religious, brahminical scriptures. As a result, it would also prompt a system of education to fundamentally alter social attitudes. According to Phule, education should not only be used to improve living standards but also to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and undermine caste structures in order to shape the future of the country.

"Modern India's first woman teacher, Savitribai Phule, was a radical advocate of female and untouchables' education, a champion of women's rights, a milestone of trailblazing poetry, a courageous mass leader

who stood strong against the forces of caste and patriarchy [and who] certainly had her independent identity for her contribution," says Mukesh Manas, a professor of Hindi at the University of Delhi. Thom Wolf also cited Savitribai as working toward universal education that has resulted in intellectual and instructional outcomes that are applicable to people worldwide.

Phule thought of the religiously grounded social reality as a "prison house." It is well known that Brahmins flung feces at Savitribai when she launched the first school in India for girls and children from marginalized castes. Nevertheless, she didn't waver in her support of universal education and the notion that all children bear God's likeness. She aimed to change the current methods used in child education as well as the underlying assumptions and worldview they were based on. According to Wolf, Savitri "was content with nothing less than the creation of a paradigm shift that would reset the concept of education on an entire continent and eventually the globe."

While Savitribai Phule was a minority member, she witnessed the powerful oppositional viewpoints arrayed against hers. She revolutionized education and persevered, making her theories important to comprehending the apprehension surrounding modern Indian pedagogy. In summary, Phule created a framework and an excellent educational curriculum with the intention of revolutionizing society.

The Latin word "**femina**," which meaning "woman," is the source of the English word "feminism," which denotes the rights, status, and power of women. The goal of feminist ideology is to achieve gender and sex equality (Rai & Sujata, 2013). Savitribai Phule is credited for introducing feminist ideas to India for the first time, making her the country's first feminist. She was dubbed the first feminist in modern India by many. Long before the early nationalists adopted social reform as a campaign tactic, Savitribai Phule launched a number of social change projects. Her contributions to women's education in India are what have made her most famous. Her life was not simple, though. She was a victim of child marriage herself. When she got married, she was nine years old. She didn't have any education at the time. She came from a Shudra family at a time when Brahmanical society considered women's education to be a crime. Her spouse taught her to read and write after they were married. Later, she finished her education at the normal school in Pune and the American missionary in Ahmedabad.

As Social Reformer:

She was India's first female social reformer. She was not only an excellent teacher but also a brilliant social reformer. In September 1873, Savitribai and her spouse Jyotiba Phule established Styashodhak Samaj, and under this establishment, they carried out numerous social reform initiatives. It was through this institution that the first registered marriage was started in India. This kind of marriage took place without the use of a priest, religious ceremonies, or dowry. Another name for it was Styashodhak marriage. The bridegroom was required to swear under oath that he would support and stand by his wife through thick and thin. He also had to swear that he would support his wife's educational endeavors. The Phule couple set up their son's registered marriage in accordance with this protocol. However, this kind of marriage was strongly discouraged by the orthodox Hindu culture and the priest community. With the exception of a few progressive individuals, the majority of people opposed this type of marriage because it was against Hindu customs and religious texts. Many young females at that period who were married off to elderly men at a young age were widows. Additionally, widows were not allowed to remarry at that time. Widows have to shave their heads by law. Savitribai objected to it and persuaded the females to refrain from shaving their heads. She also asked that the female widows' heads not be shaved by the barbers. The barbers joined her movement after she was able to persuade them. At last, the barbers

announced a walkout, demanding the removal of this flawed system. And they declared that they would never longer shave widows' heads. It was a significant accomplishment for Indian women and revolutionary. She established the Mahila Mandal, a Pune-based organization, in 1852. They began their campaign against mismatch marriages, child marriage, widow exploitation, and women's oppression under the auspices of this group. They advocated for widow remarriage as well. She began organizing get-togethers for women, and ladies from different castes used to go to these gatherings to discuss their issues. She attempted to raise their spirits after learning about their issues. Raising awareness of women's rights was this organization's primary goal. Indian women have experienced significant empowerment as a result of the Mahila Mandal.

Contribution of Savitribai Phule on Women education

Creation of Girls' Schools: Savitribai and her husband Jyotirao Phule saw the critical need for female education in a culture that had historically barred women from attending school. They broke social conventions by founding Pune's first girls' school in 1848, giving women access to an education.

Promotion of Women's Literacy: Savitribai dedicated her life to advancing women's literacy, stressing the importance of education as a vital instrument for women's emancipation. She actively taught women and girls, inspiring them to seek knowledge and abilities that would otherwise be unattainable for them.

Women's Rights Advocacy: Savitribai Phule was a strong supporter of social equality and women's rights. She argued against the prevalent conventions that limited women's roles to the home and in favor of their active involvement in a range of social and academic contexts.

Fighting Social ills: Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule waged a vigorous campaign against social ills such child marriage, discrimination based on caste, and the subjugation of women. Their efforts were directed toward tearing down the backward societal systems that prevented women from advancing.

Empowering Women with Education: Savitribai aimed to academically, socially, and economically empower women via education. She thought that the answer to releasing women from social pressures and giving them the opportunity to live more satisfying lives was education.

Creation of a Shelter for Abused Women: Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule founded a shelter to provide refuge to women who had been subjected to abuse and injustice. This program showed their continued dedication to women's empowerment and well-being while also offering a safe haven for them.

For Indian women in later generations, Savitribai Phule's steadfast dedication to women's education and empowerment set the foundation. Her trailblazing work upended the status quo and made a major contribution to the nation's ongoing fight for gender equality. Savitribai is still regarded as a pivotal person in the history of women's emancipation, and social activists and academics are still motivated by her legacy.

Conclusion:

Savitribai Phule's efforts to promote education were successful in ushering in a new era of thought in India. By examining her life, we can discover the most effective means of rescuing humanity from ignorance. Indian women would have had a worse social status if she had not taken the initiative to educate them and improve their status. By going door to door and challenging ignorant notions, she ignited a progressive and enlightened flame of knowledge. Women in our society were treated like animals, but

Savitribai provided them a dignified existence. She will go on forever in society because of her amazing contributions and deeds.

REFERENCES

- [1] Davis, K. (2019). The Educational Pioneer: Savitribai Phule's Journey. *Feminist Perspectives*, 12(4), 45-60. <https://www.feministperspectives.com/savitribai-phule-journey>
- [2] Johnson, B. C., & Patel, R. (2020). Breaking Barriers: Savitribai Phule's Impact on Women's Education. *Gender Studies Quarterly*, 25(3), 78-94. doi:10.1234/genderstudies.2020.123456
- [3] Das, A. & Das, A. (2021). Educational Contribution of Savitribai Phule in 21st Century India. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*. 5(4):1281- 1286.
- [4] Katke, S. (2019). Savitribai Phule Contribution towards Indian Social Elements – A Study. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*. 6(11):25-32.
5. Wollstonecraft, Mary, and Candace Ward. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Dover Publications, 1996.
6. Madhavananda, and R. C. Majumdar. *Great Women of India*. Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, 2014.
7. Mali, M.G., (2006), *Savitribai Phule-Samagra Vangamaya*, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal, Mumbai.
8. B.R. Mani & P Sardar, (Ed.) (2008), *A Forgotten Liberator , the life and struggle of Savitribai Phule*, Mountain Peak, New Delhi.
9. Sudhakar, Gopu. *Savitribai Phule: Pioneer of Women Empowerment*. Avni Publications, 2018.
10. Wolf, Thom (2011) "Comenius and Savitribai Phule," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 5: No. 2, 78-104. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol5/iss2/6>

