



The Role of Savitribai Phule in Women Education & Empowerment-A Sociological Study

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Abstract:

Savitribai Phule was the first female teacher who opened the first women's school in India and constantly fought against the caste system and worked towards the empowerment of women through education. When Savitribai Phule got married, she was uneducated and her husband Jyoti Rao Phule used to teach here at their home. After primary education, her husband asked for his friends' help to help her attain higher education. Later Savitribai took admission to a teacher training program, after that she received the title of a first woman teacher, she also started teaching girls in Maharashtra after that. The study's objective is to describe and evaluate Savitribai Phule's Contributions to women's education and empowerment in India and to identify the role of Savitribai Phule's in Indian Feminist Movement. The study is based on the secondary data. This study helps to understand the contribution of Savitribai Phule to women education and empowerment and to know about the social reforms of Savitribai Phule.

Keywords: Social Reform, women, education, feminist, social change, women empowerment.

Introduction:

As we know, Savitribai Phule is often called the mother of Indian feminism. She was a formidable activist, educationalist and a great feminist. She has done a lot for women's education in India, including constructing the first school for women. Along with her husband she dedicated herself to the cause of women empowerment. As a social activist she worked not only for gender-related issues but also against caste discrimination. Her work in the field of women's education paved the way for generations of women to seek knowledge and economic independence that teaching brings. Savitribai Phule is a very famous name in India because of her contribution to the field of education. She is the first woman teacher in India and is an icon for teachers across the world. She is not only known for her contributions to the education sector but is also seen as an eminent personality in the field of women's rights and activism. In addition, she was an educationalist, social reformer, and poet, often writing in her native language Marathi. In this article, we talk about and examine the influential life of Savitribai Phule as well as the contributions she made to Indian society and the Savitribai Phule was the first female educator, teacher and feminist of India.

Review of literature:

- **Santoshkumar M Katke(2019)-** Savitribai advocated widow remarriage, tirelessly against social evils like child marriage and sati pratha, two of the most sensitive social issues that were gradually weakening the very existence of women. She also made an effort in bringing the child widows into mainstream by educating and empowering them and advocated for their re-marriage. Such pursuits also met with strong resistance from the conservative upper caste society.
- **Sourav Chandra Garaian(2021) :** Savitribai Phule was an important social reformer and leading character of the then Maharashtra. She was the first lady teacher of the first girl's school in India. Not only a teacher, she was a great social reformer. In the nineteenth century she was a power source of women's education and women empowerment. She was also a founder of modern Marathi poetry. At this crisis time she and Jyotirao Phule established a girl's school with nine students in 1848 at Pune in Bhide Wada and she also taught in this school. She did not stop there, she raised her voice against the practice of child marriage, sati pratha and child widows for the betterment of the human race and society. At the same time, she promoted a positive attitude towards widow remarriage. She was an idol of Dalit and Mang community like Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. She also moved against untouchability and ruled out the discrimination grounded on caste and gender.

Objectives of study:

The major objectives of the present research are:

- To know the feminist philosophical thoughts of Savitribai Phule.
- To know the role of Savitribai Phule in Women education & empowerment through establishing equality in India.
- To know about the social reforms of Savitribai Phule

Methodology:

The study is based on the secondary data collected from books, published research articles, newspapers, journals and the websites, etc.

Early life of Savitribai Phule:

Savitribai was born on January 3, 1831, in Naigaon (presently in Satara district) in British India in a farming family to Khandoji Neveshe Patil and Lakshmi as their eldest daughter. Girls in those days were married off early, so following the prevalent customs, the nine-year-old Savitribai was wedded to 12 years old Jyotirao Phule in 1840. Jyotirao went on to become a thinker, writer, social activist and anti-caste social reformer. He is counted among the leading figures of Maharashtra's social reform movement. Savitribai's education started after her marriage. It was her husband who taught her to read and write after he saw her eagerness to learn and educate herself. She cleared third- and fourth-year examinations from a normal school and became passionate about teaching. She took training at Ms Farar's Institution in Ahmednagar. Jyotirao stood firmly by the side of Savitribai in all her social endeavors.

Meaning of empowerment:

Women's empowerment can be defined as promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others.

Meaning of feminism:

A feminist is someone who supports equal rights for women. feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities. It's about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights.

The contribution of Savitribai Phule in women education and empowerment:

Savitribai Phule was a pioneering teacher, feminist and anti-caste discrimination activist. She is formally recognised as India's first female teacher. Savitribai played a pivotal role in women's empowerment with the support of her husband Jyotirao Phule.

Savitribai Phule in promoting gender equality and social reforms:

- Savitribai introduced several innovative measures in teaching with a special focus on curriculum and teaching methods. They introduced stipends for students to motivate them to attend school. Also, regular parent-teacher meetings were arranged to educate parents on the importance of education. Special emphasis was given to subjects like English, science, mathematics and social studies.
- A crusader for women empowerment, Savitribai Phule's contribution in the field of women education has left an evergreen mark on India's historical pages. At a time when India was plagued with women's outraged modesty, she acted as a messiah for all those women who were living a life of servitude. Savitribai Phule exhorted women and people from the backward castes to get education as a means to break free from the shackles of socially-constructed discriminatory practices.
- Initially, Savitribai started teaching girls at Maharwada in Pune. Here, Sagunabai, Jyotiba's mentor and also an activist, supported Savitribai's efforts in this direction. Later, the couple along with Sagunabai, started their own school at Bhide Wada, which became India's first girl's school run by Indians.
- Consequently, the number of girls in their schools became higher than the boys enrolled in government schools in Pune.
- Encouraged by improved enrolment, the couple opened a total of 18 schools for girls across Maharashtra from 1848 to 1852. Recognising this feat, the British government honored them. Afterwards, the couple opened a night school for women and the children of those from the working-class community. They set up 52 free hostels for poor students across Maharashtra.
- Besides education, the couple involved themselves in several social service activities. On September 24, 1873, they set up Satya Shodhaka Samaja, a platform which was open to all, irrespective of their caste, religion or class hierarchies, with the sole motto to bring about social equity.
- As an extension, they started, 'Satya Shodhak Marriage' where the marrying couple has to take a pledge to promote education and equality. Likewise, widow re-marriage was also encouraged. Simple ceremonies without priests solemnizing the wedding were conducted. Awareness programmes against dowry were also organized. They also dug a well at their courtyard for untouchables, who had no access to public drinking water facilities.
- Savitribai, a true feminist, set up Mahila Seva Mandali to raise awareness among women against child marriage, female foeticide and the sati system.
- At the time, widows were often sexually exploited and pregnant widows suffered even more physical abuse and humiliation. To address this problem, the couple set up 'Balyata Pratibandak Gruha', a childcare centre for the protection of pregnant widows and rape victims. Savitribai also encouraged the adoption of children borne out of such sexual abuse.
- When Jyotiba died in 1890, Savitribai set a new precedent by lighting her husband's pyre, amidst all opposition.
- She opened an ashram for widows and orphans. She organized a boycott by barbers against the tradition of head tonsuring of widows. Savitribai appealed to women to come out of the caste barriers and encouraged them to sit together at her meetings.

Role in women education and empowerment:

Savitribai Phule was the Pioneer of women's education and Indian feminist movement. Savitribai Phule is considered to be one of the pioneers of the feminist movement in India. She started the first-ever school for girls in the country in 1848 at Bhide Wada, Pune. Her efforts to spread awareness about women's education saw her face boycotts and abuses mostly from men at the time. Jyotirao Phule, her husband, was one of the pillars of support to her in her journey to spreading awareness about the importance of women's education and uplifting the status of women and India. Phule was married to Jyotirao Phule at the age of nine when she was not literate. By 1851, Phule had set up three schools and was the teacher of 150 students. She would go on to establish 17 schools in the country and although most of them were for upper-caste women, she and her husband set up schools for Dalit and lower-caste women as well. Phule encouraged women to attend school by offering them stipends.

Women's education was not the only thing Phule wanted Indians to take up. She also fought against social injustices of the time like Sati, child marriage and the still prevalent caste system and was also one of the first advocates for women's rights in the country. She opened a well for 'untouchables' at her residence in a defiant act against the caste system and also started a care centre for pregnant rape victims called 'Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha'. Phule also set up a 'Mahila Seva Mandal' where women would gather and she would raise awareness about women's rights.

Apart from being a pioneer of Indian feminism, Phule was a plague warrior. She helped several people when the bubonic plague hit the world, opening up a clinic with her son, Yashwant, in 1897 to help patients. The plague ended up being the reason for her demise as she passed away on March 10, 1897. She was also a hard-hitting, radical writer and poet who questioned the brahminical hegemony and openly criticised social evils at the time like Sati, child marriage, class distinctions, gender inequalities and the caste system.

Savitribai Phule: the India's first female Feminist:

As Savitribai Phule was breaking the stereotypes, her own struggles inspired her to fight for others and become India's first Feminist. She is also regarded as the mother of Indian Feminism. She also established a community named Mahila Seva Mandal for raising awareness about women's rights. She also demanded a place where all women can gather without facing discrimination based on their caste or gender. She also opened a shelter called 'Home for the prevention of Infanticide', dedicatedly for women. It was established so that Brahmin widows can freely deliver their children and give others the opportunity to experience motherhood by putting their child for adoption.

Conclusions:

The relentless efforts of Savitribai in curbing the age-old evils of society and the rich legacy of good reforms left behind by her continues to inspire generations. Her reformative works have been recognised over the years. A memorial was created in her honor by the Pune City Corporation in 1983. India Post released a stamp in her honor on March 10, 1998. The University of Pune was renamed after her in 2015 as Savitribai Phule Pune University. Search engine Google commemorated her 186th birth anniversary on January 3, 2017, with a Google doodle. The Savitribai Phule award is awarded to women social reformers in Maharashtra. The life and pursuits of Savitribai Phule are inspirational to many people. Her efforts in the areas of women's education, ending class discrimination as well as abolishing age-old practices of child marriage, Sati, dowry and child infanticide transformed the way society viewed women and their role in society.

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