



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON IMPACT OF SAVITRIBAI PHULES SOCIAL REFORMS ON WOMENS DEVELOPMENT IN INDIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract: This paper explores the profound social reforms and contributions of Savitribai Phule to the advancement of women in Indian society. Born on January 3rd, 1831, in Naigaon village, Maharashtra, Savitribai Phule, along with her husband Jyoti Rao Phule, dedicated themselves to empowering women, particularly those from marginalized communities. She staunchly advocated for women's education, viewing it as a powerful tool to combat social discrimination. Through her pioneering efforts, she laid the foundation for significant societal change. She started teaching girls in Pune and fought off those who opposed girl education at that time.

Key words: Savitribai Phule, Social Reforms, Women Education Development, Indian Society.

Introduction

Savitribai Phule, born on January 3rd, 1831, in Naigaon village, Maharashtra, emerged as a pivotal figure in India's social reform movements of the 19th century. Despite facing numerous challenges and societal opposition, Savitribai, alongside her husband Jyoti Rao Phule, embarked on a mission to uplift women and marginalized communities through education and social reform. This paper delves into Savitribai Phule's remarkable contributions to women's development in Indian society.

Early Life and Education: Savitribai Phule was born to Lakshmi Bai and Khandoji Nevse Patil in Naigaon village, Maharashtra. At the tender age of nine, she was married to Jyoti Rao Phule, a visionary social reformer. Despite her early marriage, Savitribai's thirst for knowledge remained unquenched. Encouraged by her husband, she pursued education and training, eventually becoming India's first female teacher. Her journey into education marked the beginning of her lifelong dedication to empowering women through knowledge.

Establishment of Schools: In 1848, Savitribai and Jyoti Rao Phule established the first indigenous school for girls in Pune, Maharashtra. Despite facing ostracism from both family and society, the couple remained undeterred in their mission. They provided education to girls from all castes, including those considered untouchable. Their efforts expanded with the establishment of multiple schools, aimed at breaking the chains of illiteracy and social oppression.

Advocacy for Women's Rights: Savitribai Phule was a vocal advocate for women's rights in a patriarchal society plagued by oppressive customs and traditions. She actively campaigned against practices such as child marriage, sati, and the mistreatment of widows. Savitribai's unwavering commitment to social justice extended to promoting widow remarriage and providing support to marginalized women. Her advocacy laid the groundwork for gender equality and women's empowerment in India.

Legacy and Recognition: Savitribai Phule's tireless efforts and unwavering dedication to social reform earned her widespread recognition and accolades. In 1852, the British government honored the Phule family for their contributions to education, with Savitribai being acclaimed as the best teacher. Posthumously, her legacy continued to inspire generations, leading to the renaming of the University of Pune as Savitribai Phule Pune University. Her remarkable life and achievements continue to be commemorated through various tributes and memorials across India.

Review of Literature

Sourav and Subir (2021) discussed in this study on “Savitribai Phule the first lady teacher and social reformer in nineteenth century of India”. Savitribai Phule was an important social reformer and leading character of the then Maharashtra. She was the first lady teacher of first girl's school in India. Not only a teacher she was a great social reformer. In nineteenth century, she was a power source of woman education and woman empowerment. She was also a founder of modern Marathi poetry. At this crisis time she and Jyoti Rao 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 paratha and child widows for the betterment of humans 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 rule out the discrimination grounded on caste and gender.

Rita (2021) describes in his study on “Savitribai Phule: A Great Social Reformer”. Savitribai Phule whose mission in life was to support the downtrodden women. She is an inspiration for all women undergoing suffering in various fields in society. To alleviate the position of women, women should get educated. Education was the prerogative of the elite caste, and to initiate the process of the transformation of society, both men and women should be educated. The life of Savitribai Phule is an inspiration for the student and the teacher, the parent, and the community at large. With the dynamic backing of her liberal minded husband, Mr. Jyoti Rao Phule, she embarked on a mission to cleanse society of the age-old superstitious evils, which debarred the welfare of the lower caste people. Savitribai encountered various challenges from the elite class, which she faced with a steadfast determination, and paved the path for the education of women in India.

Katke (2019) Conducted a study entitled “Savitribai Phule Contribution towards Indian Social Elements – A Study”. In this study it was mentioned that Savitribai Jyoti Rao Phule was a famous Indian social reformer, educator, and poet who played an active role in the education and empowerment of women in the 19th century. Savitribai is one of the few educated women of this time and is responsible for having founded the first girls' school in Pune, Bhide Wada, with her husband Jyotirao Phule. She went to great lengths to raise and emancipate child widows, opposed child marriage and Sati Pratha, and advocated the remarriage of widows. As a major protagonist of Maharashtra's social reform movement, she is considered an icon of the Dalit Mang caste along with B. R. Ambedkar and Annabhau Sathe. She campaigned against untouchability and actively campaigned for the abolition of caste and gender discrimination.

Santoshkumar (2019) describe in his study on “Savitribai Phule Contribution towards Indian Social Elements – A Study”. Savitribai Jyoti Rao Phule was a prominent Indian social reformer, educationist and poet who played an instrumental role in women education and empowerment during the nineteenth century. Counted among few literate women of those times, Savitribai is credited for founding the first girl's school in Pune in Bhide Wada with her husband Jyoti Rao Phule. She took great effort towards educating and emancipating child widows, campaigned against child marriage and sati pratha, and advocated for widow remarriage. A leading figure of Maharashtra's social reform movement, she is considered an icon of Dalit Mang caste along with likes of B. R. Ambedkar and Annabhau Sathe. She campaigned against untouchability and worked actively in abolishing caste and gender-based discrimination.

Pandey (2019) Conducted a study entitled “Locating Savitribai Phule's Feminism in the Trajectory of Global Feminist Thought”. Feminism shows shades of the first wave of feminism when she talked about the ability to reason, self-reliance, and public schools. Her feminism showed traces of the second wave of feminism as she raised her voice over shelters and marriages between castes. Her feminism also showed some valuable characteristics of third wave feminism when she talked about raising women with different identities and bringing Stree Shudra Atishudra together. Savitribai was also the first woman to put her husband's stake in the whole history of India. Her decision to light her husband's pyre must have shocked the most radical feminists all the time.

Mangala (2018) conducted a study entitled “Savitribai Phule: Revolutionary work and literature”. In this study the important issues are Savitribai's educational thinking is an era promoter. Savitribai Phule can be proudly mentioned as a positive force that shapes the female life of Maharashtra. It is glad to say that Savitribai gave prestige to the woman because of Savitribai, a noble and revolutionary spectator of her personality and activities. This light of innovation is a motivation for women who have worked in various fields and proved their mettle. Savitribai's work was challenging the difficulty of the times, Because Savitribai thought and worked for the freedom of all women and the Shudratishudra society in the world of slavery in the then orthodox society of the nineteenth century. Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule's position as a champion of the downtrodden and a supporter of teaching is inevitable in the wake of India's first teacher women's liberation movement. Phenomenal Education is a instrument for social transformation. He wanted to generate awareness in the society through education. Savitribai Phule was one of the immense educators of India who laid down the basic idea of education for humanity about 175 years before. Savitribai Phule's social and educational work is amazing and phenomenal. At the same time, Savitribai also produced literature. Her literature was enlightening the society. His entire literature was on social awareness. All literature was for the welfare of the citizens.

Jain (2016) carried out a study entitled “Caste and Education: The Vision of Mahatma Joti Rao Phule”. There major findings are the ideologies the ideologies of the anti-caste movements were geared towards the "emancipation" that all intellectuals needed for Dalits. Phule was the first anti-caste intellectual to think about education for the masses (for Dalits). He fought against Brahmanism, which is "superstition, bag of tricks, weapon of domination" (Omvedt, Dalit Visions 8). Phule is not only considered the main figure of the anti-caste movement, but also a protester for the empowerment of women His wife, Savitribai Phule, is the main contributor to the education mission for oppressed women. According to Jyoti Rao Phule, the education of women and the lower caste deserves priority as their social position and condition in society are greatly degraded.

Somkuwar (2014) discussed in his study on “Dalit Women Poets and New Themes in Poetry”. Major issues discussed in this work are as follows Dalit literature in the hands of modern women's writers has gone through a multidimensional revolutionize. Adjudging new themes and concepts it hardly remains the literature of lower classes. These modern poets writing is not only the writing of lamentation, breast-beating, praising or even consideration but also feministic, reflective, and universal. By representing universal themes in their text, they have taken the movement of Dr Ambedkar on a high peak. Their society as well as Dalit Writers from first and second generations has sky-scraping hopes from these Modern Dalit Women poets. Finally, all discussion indicates to the quote Dr Ambedkar who said, “I measure the progress of the community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.

Wolf (2011) conducted a study on Savitribai Phule. It is opined that for present day, every literate woman of India, anywhere in the world, stands as testimony to the influence of the four original and extraordinary ideas shared by Comenius and Savitribai: that education for every child, without exception, must be universally accessible, child sensitive, intellectually critical, and socially reforming. And every girl child, in any school, on any day, in India sitting at the side of boys, reading a book, exploring the Internet, learning new things. It is a

Savitribai-kind of India. Might just such a different arrangement incite a future with a different kind of social structure a world venue learning place different from the detention center house kind of culture within which Savitribai lived? If so, then I don't know the children of India may yet sing in a pleasant house, little canaries freed into a most original and extraordinary future a Comenius and Savitribai kind of future.

Role in Women Education & Empowerment

The first indigenously run school for girls in Pune (at that time Poona) was started by Jyoti Rao and Savitribai in 1848 when the latter was still in her teens. Although they were ostracized by both family and community for this step, the resolute couple was given shelter by a friend Usman Sheikh and his sister Fatima Sheikh, who also gave the Phule couple place in their premises to start the school. Savitribai became the first teacher at the school. Jyoti Rao and Savitribai later started schools for children from the Mang and Mahar castes, who were regarded as untouchables. Three Phule schools were in operation in 1852. On November 16 that year, the British government honored the Phule family for their contributions in the field of education while Savitribai was named the best teacher. That year she also started the Mahila Seva Mandal with the objective of creating awareness among women regarding their rights, dignity, and other social issues. She was successful in organizing a barbers strike in Mumbai and Pune to oppose the prevailing custom of shaving heads of widows.

All the three schools run by the Phule's were closed by 1858. There were many reasons for this, including drying up of private European donations post the Indian Rebellion of 1857, resignation of Jyoti Rao from the school management committee due to difference of opinion on curriculum, and withdrawal of support from the government. Undeterred by the circumstances Jyoti Rao and Savitribai along with Fatima Sheikh, took charge of educating people from the oppressed communities as well. Over the years, Savitribai opened 18 schools and taught children from different castes. Savitribai and Fatima Sheikh began teaching women as well as other people from downtrodden castes. This was not taken well by many, particularly the upper caste of Pune, who were against Dalits education. Savitribai and Fatima Sheikh were threatened by the locals and were also harassed and humiliated socially. Cow dung, mud and stones were thrown at Savitribai when she walked towards the school. However, such atrocities could not discourage the determined Savitribai from her goal, and she would carry two saris. Savitribai and Fatima Sheikh were later joined by Saguna Bai who also eventually became a leader in the education movement. Meanwhile, a night school was also opened by the Phule couple in 1855 for agriculturist and laborer's so that they can work in daytime and attend school at night.

To check the school dropout rate, Savitribai started the practice of giving stipends to children for attending school. She remained an inspiration for the young girls she taught. She encouraged them to take up activities like writing and painting. One of the essays written by a student of Savitribai called Mukta Salve became the face of Dalit feminism and literature during that period. She conducted parent-teacher meetings at regular intervals to create awareness among parents on the significance of education so that they send their children to school regularly.

In 1863, Jyoti Rao and Savitribai also started a care center called 'Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha,' possibly the first ever infanticide prohibition home founded in India. It was set up so that pregnant Brahmin widows and

rape victims can deliver their children in a safe and secure place thus preventing the killing of widows as well as reducing the rate of infanticide. In 1874, Jyoti Rao and Savitribai, who were otherwise issueless, went on to adopt a child from a Brahmin widow called Kashibai thus sending a strong message to the progressive people of the society. The adopted son, Yashavantrao, grew up to become a doctor.

While Jyoti Rao advocated widow remarriage, Savitribai worked 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 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.

Conclusion

Women in India have always been inspiring, whether it is now or during the times of the Indian freedom struggle. Women have always been a source of power and ideal of courage for society. There were several prominent faces in the Indian Freedom Struggle, and the role of women brought a significant change.

Savitribai Phule pursued her education in English which broadened her perspective of principles that contributed for the transformation of society. Savitribai, and her husband, Jyoti Rao was a historic couple who worked together for the empowerment of women and the oppressed classes. The couple did not have any biological child, so when Jyoti Rao was coaxed to remarry, he humbly stated that the defect in having a child may be in myself and not in Savitri. The couple adopted a boy who later became a medical doctor. They considered it their mission to purge society of the evil practices and do away with the misuse of religion as a tool to subordinate the lower castes. India is a nation which is characterized as a *karma Bhoomi*, wherein an individual's merits are a criterion for his social status. A person who is virtuous is superior and one of loose character is inferior. The exploitation of the world under the guise of antiquity must be disapproved because they are trying to gain an advantage for themselves, rather than trying to help other people do what is right. The life of women should not be restricted to her husband and children. The identity of a woman is not restricted only to her husband and children. Today the literacy rate of women is high, but are we really educated or only literate. Feminism outside the academic circle will challenge us in ways, which yet we cannot even foresee. Women must build up their identity by their contribution to society and their lives should not be restricted as being just wives and mothers of great reformers. Savitribai proved herself as a woman of substance and not as an appendage of a man. Even after the death of Jyoti Rao, she continued her mission of empowerment of women. In the famine of 1896, she compelled the British to undertake relief measures. An epidemic of plague swept Pune in 1897. Savitri was personally involved in the relief effort, contracted the disease which resulted in her death on 10th March 1897.

Academic research has given us extremely valuable insights into women's lives in different ages and different cultures. One can get a glimpse of an educated woman through the way she communicates, with other women in society, the women who collect our rubbish, deliver the laundry, and work as domestic helps and in menial jobs. Women empowerment will take new strides, when we teach our sons to treat women in a humane

manner. Savitribai Phule is an inspiration for the students, the parents, and the community at large. In her mission of social resurgence, she encountered several adversities, which she tackled sometimes through discussions and at times with debates. In every era a woman may not be blessed with a liberal minded husband like Jyoti Rao, hence a woman must light up her own life through the medium of education.

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