

# Savitribai Phule: Contributions of Social Reformer

Dr. Dola Sarkar

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Plassey College, Plassey, Nadia, West Bengal, India

## ABSTRACT

Women Education has always been regarded as one of the success pillars of the society. A society with women empowerment is found to be more progressive, flourishing, matured and open for evolution. In 19th century when India was dominated by traditional belief and the society was more patriarchal centric, Savitribai Phule was a beacon. Born to a conservative Mali family in Maharashtra was kept from any form education till her marriage to Jyotirao Phule at very young age. Her education started under the guidance of her spouse Jyotirao Phule who was always supportive of women education and empowerment. With formal education and herself being subjugated to various forms of oppression at the hands of society, she was more focussed on the reforms to ensure women empowerment. Her family even distanced themselves from her due to her reformist approach on women education which directly challenges the conservative approach of the society. In spite of many impediment she along with her husband and few like mind established many Schools and trust to focus on women education. She was aware that to reduce the oppressive attitude of the society towards women it was necessary to educate the women first and then bring about the reforms. Her methods made her a victim of harassment on the hands of orthodox believers but she persisted on her journey. She was sceptical of the society of doing any justice to the oppressed women hence she took up the cause and made sure a change does happen. Her self-esteem, belief and courage with inspiration from her husband and friends made her overcome the challenges of the society and push for social reforms of the society.

## INTRODUCTION

Savitribai Phule was the first Indian woman to become a teacher, spearheaded the feminist movement and women's education in the country. She is hailed as an important contributor to social reform and took initiative in the awareness of various causes such as child marriage, women's education and caste discriminations. Her concerted efforts raised a movement against the irrational patriarchal societal practices that was so prevalent all across the country.

Savitribai Phule was married at a very early age between 9 or 10 to Jyotirao Phule who was himself very young around 13 years of age. It was Jyotirao Phule who perpetuated her progression in the field of academics after initial education. She was hailing from a conservative family and hence was uneducated before her marriage. The concerted efforts of the couple led to creation of various schools, trusts and

institution to aide the education and empowerment of women.

### Early Life of Savitribai Phule

Savitribai Phule was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1831 in a village called Naigaon, which is about 50 kilometres out of Pune, Maharashtra. Her parents, Lakshmi and Khandoji Nevase Patil, belonged to the Mali community, known as the original inhabitants of Maharashtra, thus they are also known as Mahars, and categorised as Other Backward Class or OBC. Savitribai was the youngest of four siblings.

### Family Background

Savitribai was a part of a family who deeply believes in their traditional roots and societal norms and hence she was married at a very early age without any form of education. Being from such a backward class and understanding the situation of the oppressed in the society that she could easily draw the tangential to the

**How to cite this paper:** Dr. Dola Sarkar "Savitribai Phule: Contributions of Social Reformer" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-8 | Issue-3, June 2024, pp.833-835, URL: [www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd64977.pdf](http://www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd64977.pdf)



IJTSRD64977

Copyright © 2024 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



**KEYWORDS:** Reformist, Orthodox, Conservative, Women Empowerment, Impediment

sufferings. Her previous experience made her aware of the fine strings of the society and how biased it was. With her knowledge and education, she was able to devise proper ideas and reforms to shape the society for women empowerment certainly with substantial amount of hindrances.

### **Educational Career of Savitri Bai Phule**

- Savitri Bai was uneducated and never went to school till she was unmarried.
- She and Sagunabai Kshirsagar, Jyotirao's cousin sisters, were educated at their house by Jyotirao.
- With the completion of early education from her husband she continued her education under the guidance of Sakharam Yeshwant Paranjpe and Keshav Shivram Bhavalkar, both of whom were Jyotirao's friend.
- After finishing school, Savitri Bai enrolled in two teacher-training programmes. The first of which was at an institution in Ahmednagar which was managed by an American missionary named Cynthia Farrar while the second was at a Normal School in Pune.
- Savitribai may have been the first Indian woman teacher and headmistress who trained for that work.
- Jyotirao was a social reformer who worked for the promotion of women's education. After marriage Savitribai Phule joined on the campaign and contributed on the cause immensely. Since she was able to relate the situation of her past with ordeal of women living at the behest of the societal norms.

### **Fight for Women's Education**

Savitribai Phule and her husband saw education as a tool that would enhance the conditions of people from socially oppressed classes.

- She promoted education to eliminate the idea that women are not capable enough to be educated. Savitribai Phule and her husband recognized how important education is to fight inequality.
- Savitribai Phule dedicated her time to educating women to encourage social transformation. In 1849 she became the first female educator in India.
- The idea of educating women was considered to be evil at that time, and that's why Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule had to leave their Families in 1849, and their actions were tagged as anti-social.
- In 1851, the couple established three schools in Pune for 150 female students.

### **Pioneer of Women's Education**

- Public education was uncommon in the nineteenth century, with only a few missionary establishments that were "open to all."
- Jyotirao Phule, then 21 years old, and Savitri, then 17 years old, founded a women's school in 1848 at Bhide Wada, Pune.
- It was the country's first women's school which was founded by Indians.
- When she started educating girls in Maharwada, Pune many people opposed her.
- As she had completed the teacher's training course, the orthodox group's allegations that women cannot teach were countered.
- The education of women was considered evil at that time, so their actions were deemed anti-social by their families.
- She became the first female educator in India in 1848.
- Jyotirao and Savitri Bai had to leave their family home in 1849 as their family opposed them.
- Their teaching methods were thought to be superior to those of government schools, and the number of girls enrolled in Phule's schools rapidly outnumbered the number of boys enrolled in other official schools.
- Savitribai met Fatima Begum Sheikh while staying with a friend's family, Usman Sheikh. Fatima Sheikh and Savitribai both attended Normal School in Pune and graduated together. Fatima Sheikh became India's first Muslim female teacher.

- Jyotirao and Savitri Bai Phule founded two Educational Trusts in the 1850s.

- These were the Native Female School, Pune, and The Society for Promoting the Education of Mahars, Mangs, and Etceteras, both of which grew to include a number of schools in Pune.

- Savitribai initiated the notion of women's education in India. She has been popularly called the 'Crusader of Gender Justice.'

### **Her Impact on Society:**

Sin the era of patriarchal society with paramount traditional norms she became beacon of hope with the help of very close associates sharing the similar values and ethics. Her marriage to Jyotirao Phule at that very early age was a turning point in her life also in the broader aspect in the societal situation for women. Fortunately, she found just the perfect man in Jyotirao Phule who not only shared similar thoughts

but supported her in very tough times. The enormous pressure by the orthodox patriarchal society onto her for being educated and also for promoting upliftment of women and also her family distancing themselves from her was certainly testing times for her. She however found out support and courage from her husband and friends to withstand the situation. She not only continues her Education but also built institutions and trust to support women education. She was certain about the fact that in order to change the current situation of the women, it is imperative to provide education to women. Only proper education can bring about the change in the structure of the society is what she believed in and cared for. Her inspiring actions did prove to be helpful in the

betterment of the society that we see today where men and women are thought to be equal.

#### References

- [1] Kothari, V. (8 July 2014). "Pune university to be renamed after Savitribai Phule". Times of India. Retrieved 10 July 2014.
- [2] Mani, B.R & Sardar, P (Ed.) 2008. A Forgotten Liberator: The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule, Mountain Peak: New Delhi.
- [3] Rao, A. (Ed.). 2003. "Gender and Caste" (series), Issues in Contemporary Feminism, Kali for Women", New Delhi
- [4] <https://www.literaturemini.com/2023/02/the-first-person-to-open-womens-school.html>

