

Chapter-1

Introduction

Introduction

In the social and educational history of India Savitribai and her husband Jyotiba Phule stand out as an extraordinary couple. Both of them were engaged in a passionate struggle to build a movement for equality between men and women and for social justice. Recognizing that knowledge is power and without it lower castes and women cannot progress, they strived to spread education among them. Savitribai Phule was a teacher, social reformer, and a poetess of Marathi. She strived hard for women's education and rights along with her husband Jyotiba Phule. Savitribai Phule was first lady teacher in a girl's school. She is known as a harbinger of modern Marathi epic. In 1852, she founded a school for untouchable girls. She is known as the pioneer of women's education but much has not been written about her. There is no doubt that Savitribai got inspiration and education from her husband but later on she developed her personality independently.¹

Birth and Childhood

Savitribai Phule was born on 3th of January in 1831 at Naigon in Maharashtra for 50 km from Pune. Her father's name was Khandoji Nevase Patil and her mother's name was Laxmi. She was the oldest daughter of her father. Savitribai spent her childhood like any other girl like playing, laughing but later on she had shown some remarkable qualities. She was fearless, courageous and promising from childhood. So got limitless pleasure facing the dangers Savitribai was expert in games and swimming. She was very clever to take aim by gulel and stone and she brought fruits in this way. If any young boy teased any weak boy, she would beat him surely. Wandering in the forest, knowing the names of wild plants and wild animals she liked them very much².

Once at the time, Savitribai saw in the forest that a snake was climbing the tree to eat the eggs which were in the nest. Savitribai took a big stone and taking aim she

¹Kumre Mansaram, *Kyaranibai Savitribai Phule*, Jai Saiva Prakashan, Nagpur, 2006, p.12.

²Maali M.G., *Kyaranibai Savitribai Phule*, Prakashan Vibhag, Suchana or Prasharan Mantralaya, Bharat Sarkaar, New Delhi, 1994, p.4-7.

threw it on the snake. The snake attacked turning back. Rest of the children ran to houses and fetched the young people. But Savitribai continuously attacking the snake, was telling, scoundrel you will eat the eggs, eat the stick now, take one more. Then Khandoji came and took her home.

When Savitribai was young she did not know writing or reading. One day as she was flipping the pages of an English book her father saw Savitri and he became angry and he threw the book out through the window. It is true that Savitribai did not oppose her father and she brought it back going silently and she decided that she would read it one day sure. In 1840, when she was nine years old, she had married a boy named Jyotiba Phule who was 13 years old. He was a strong supporter of women education. He knew education can be an instrument for the independence and freedom of women, therefore, he educated Savitribai himself.³

Savitribai Phule was a great teacher, social reformer, and a poetess of Marathi. She did important deeds for women education and rights with her husband Jyotiba Phule. Savitribai Phule was first lady teacher in a girl's school. She is known a harbinger of modern Marathi epic. In 1852, she founded a school for untouchable girls. Savitribai is remembered as a wife of Jyotiba Phule a co-operator of his mission. It is certainly a significant thing but there is a big fault that Savitribai deeds and her leadership are ignored. There is no doubt that Savitribai got inspiration and education from her husband there was her interest, eager and devotion. There is also a great truth about her devotion; labor, and surrender were behind her deeds⁴.

Role of Savitribai Phule for education and society

The next responsibility of Savitribai Phule took Jyotiba's friends name Paranjape and Bhawalkar. Savitribai got his teaching training from the schools of Pune and Ahmednagar. In this way, Savitribai was first teacher and a head teacher of India. A universal of Indian women start seeing her effort going out of the house.

Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule founded first girl's school in 1848 in Maharashtra approximately six or seven girls whose age was between 4 to 6 years and

³Maali M.G., *KyaranibaiSavitribaiPhule*, PrakashanVibhag, Suchana or PrasharanMantralaya, Bharat Sarkaar, New Delhi, 1994,p.8-10.

⁴KumreMansaram, *KyaranibaiSavitribaiPhule*. Jai SaivaPrakashan, Nagpur, 2006, p.12.

their names were AnnapurnaJogi, Sumiti Mokashi, Durga Deshmukh, Madhavi Dhanna, SonuPawar and jarnakardle took their admission in this school. From 1848 to 1851 Savitribai and Jyotiba founded eighteen schools.⁵ They opened first and 18th schools at Pune in Maharashtra Savitribai Phule was first teacher and head teacher of the first school established in these schools. This school was founded on third July 1851. Her assistant teachers were Vishnu Pant Moreshwar and Vitthal Bhasker in the very opening of that day there were only eight girls but soon a number of girls increased 48.

The inspector of school Dadova Pandurang inspected on 16th of October in 1851 and inquired the progress of the girls. Though it was not a long time, the number of girls was remarkable. The first annual school exam was held on 17th of February in 1852. When the second exam was held on 12th of February in 1853 at Pune in Maharastra for seeing this exam organized in Pune there was a great mob of men. Approximately 3000 men were in the school & more than it was out of the school. Two hundred and thirty-seven girls sat in this exam. The accounts of college inspected it was found that was begun from a number of rupees in 1947.

The Government also proved a number of rupees 900 from Dhakshina Prize fund. A report is available in the museum about the opened schools. A report is available in are Archive library (London) related the exam which was held in 1858. Understanding the importance of Jyotiba Phule British Government respected him by giving a shawl on 16th of November in 1852.

Phule centralized their attention to making commercial education for the girls. So that, they might be standing on their feet and could think. They made such a system. It was a serious problem of that time to leave the school by the students. Phule and his friends searched for practical salvation. The great conditions of leaving school were poverty and lack of interest towards education. They managed to give salary to the students and they created the syllabus so that it was needful for the poor. They launched a scheme in which it was told to them by the benefits of education. This effort was not limited to this place only they brought an illiteracy scheme for the parents also. And in this way, they made a complete education plan.

⁵Banait Suyog, *The Rebel Flame*, My creations publication, 2015.p.52-57.

The reasons for dropping out schools were castes, panchayats, blind belief, and poverty. The Phule Couples searched the plan for the salvation of the reason. It is very useful today. Recently the Maharashtra government started attendance allowances for the girls and boys of Adiwasi not to drop out the schools. Matangchhatra wrote an autobiographical essay when she was only fourteen years old. This essay is so significant that it has been known a milestone in Marathi Literature. It may be starting of Modern Dalit Literature. She wrote that Brahmin said that they only have right to study Vedas. Non-Bhramanhas do not right to study Vedas.

The editor of Gyanodya read this essay, he wondered much and affected his revolutionary ideas. He published in two parts in his newspaper. In March 1855, this essay published in the report on Bombay presidency education. In the work of teaching Savitribai Phule had to face strong opposing of the society. She had to hear abuses of men but she kept on doing her great work. The people made disrespectful comments on her and sometimes she was beaten by stones and mud. This great lady Savitribai had two sarees for changing in the school in case of getting a saree dirty on the way. After that, she continued her work without break confirm. Savitribai reached the victims that action was explained of by Balwant Sakharam Kohle in his memory.

Because I am doing my pious work to educate my sisters so you throw the stone and dung on me. They seem me like flowers. May God bless you? Seeing this role Savitribai remarks:

*They get the destination
Whose dreams are alive?
With hope a man gets
Rise not from wings.*

As gold comes out in the fire the some women like Savitribai gave something to the society on the basis of struggle and sacrifice.

Some poet has said:

Friends the great personalities came out from misfortunes

The spring has no meaning which does not strike to stone⁶.

Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule had done yeomen service for the girls Education and other social works, with the foundation of Satyashodhak Samaj and famine sufferings men for widows etc. It was a tradition of Hindus to marry in early age in 19th century. So many women became widows at that time. According to the religious traditions, widows were not remarried in 1881. It was seen in the Gazette of Kolhapur that widows had cut their hair of the head and they have to live very simple. Savitribai and Jyotiba wanted to give their rights. Seeing it they started a movement for the widows not to cut their hair. This movement was against the barbers⁷.

There was no safety for women so they were badly and they were also victims of oppression. In some cases women were sexually oppressed by their own relatives. The pregnant women many times had to lose their pregnancy. Many women had to sacrifice by the fear of giving birth to a girl. Once Jyotiba checked women for doing suicide named Kashibai and promised her that he would give his name to the coming baby. Savitribai also permitted that lady to live in her house and served her. After the birth of child Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule adopted and gave his name. They named the child Yashwant and made him a doctor. Seeing the oppressions on the women Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule founded a center for the safety of women. They named his center 'Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha' which they opened in 1863.

Savitribai served the women eagerly and she wanted to take care of widows and her babies. She nursed the entire woman alike without any kind of discrimination. Savitribai Phule and Jyotiba Phule founded a SatyashodhakSamajon24th of September in 1873. Savitribai was the most dedicated lady for this center. This institution wedded on a nominal expenditure of girls without any priests and dowry . The friend of Savitribai Bajubai Nimberkar's daughter Radha or activist Sitaram Jabaji Alhat's marriage was first Satyashodhak Marriage. Savitribai bore all the expenses on this historical occasion.

⁶Bodh Shantiswaroop, *SavitribaiPhuleki Amar Kahani*, Publication Samyak publication, New Delhi, first edition 2016, p. 82.

⁷Maali M.G., *KyarantibaiSavitribaiPhule*, Prakashan Vibhag, Suchana or PrasharanMantralaya, Bharat Sarkaar, New Delhi, 1994.p.56.

These types of marriage were similar to registered marriages. All the priest of the country opposed these marriages and they want to took this matter into the court. Savitribai and Jyotiba Phule had to face difficulties regarding the registered marriage, as people were against it, but they firmly stood upon it. On 4th of February 1889, they married their adopted son Yashwant according to this system. This marriage was first inter-caste marriage in modern India. According to this Satyashodhak vivah, the bridegroom promises his wife that he would support his wife at every step of life, even in the field of education also. Radha was a daughter of Ganova Krishnaji Sashane. Savitribai called Radha at her home before the marriage. She supported the education of her daughter-in-law, namely Radha, by maintaining all house hold activities.

In 1877, Maharashtra was facing a dreadful drought due to which there is a lot of scarcity of food. In the meantime, it was impossible to sit silently for SavitriBai and Jyotiba Phule as they wanted to help others. However, they faced harsh situation from a long time, they collected money by visiting village. With the help of Dr.Shivappa and his friends, they opened 'Victoria Balashram', where one thousand poor and the needy persons were served with food. Savitribai with her companions cooked this food by herself.⁸

SavitriBai and Jyotiba Phule managed a hostel for the students who came from outside. A student called Lakshman Karad Jaya lived in that hostel and could feel the pains and worries of Savitribai likes as his mother. He wrote in his memories, I never saw such a kind woman named Savitribai. She gave me more love than a mother. Savitribai pictured the current condition of the famine of Maharastra in her poem in the following line:

*Dried the trees and plants
And this world reined
Animals die in forests
And man in homes, a bad
Smell spread by those spoiled
And drought Shudra and atiShudra
Suffer. But satisfied the person*

⁸M.G., Maali , *KyarantibaiSavitribaiPhule*, PrakashanVibhag, Suchana or PrasharanMantralaya, Bharat Sarkaar, New Delhi, 1994.

*Of pure from food says many
Kind of wonderful Katha
Presenting fearful scene of
Dharma and karma, tell a lie
About purans⁹.*

After famine of 1886 and in 1887, Jyotiba Phule suffered from a heart attack and which paralysed his right side completely. Savitribai looked after him day and night. He became fine and he started again to do work in his organizations. This was a time when they were facing a financial crisis. The business of the 'Poona Construction and Contracting Company' had hit a low, sources of income were drying up and the expenses were tremendous. The sources of money were becoming less and expenditure was increasing as they get worried how to manage their schools and their organization.

Maintaining Jyotiba Phule's health was costing too much for Savitri Bai. The couple was at their wit's end, with the expenses over the illness, the maintenance of the hostel, home for prevention of infanticide, Satyashodhak Samaj and the education of the children. There came a time when they had no money to pay even for treatment and Dr. Vishram Ramji Ghole provided treatment for free.

During these misfortunes Jyotiba Phule died on 28th of November in 1890. At the time of Jyotiba's death, Savitribai was with him. According to his will, Jyotiba wished that he should be cremated covering with salt instead of burning on a pyre. But the officers of municipality did not allow him to cremate on the residential land, and since there was no other option, his body was consigned to flames. Whoever holds the *Titve* (earthen pot) during the last journey is considered the successor of the deceased and gets all the property of the deceased. Knowing this, Jyotirao's nephew came forward and started contesting Yashwant's rights to hold the *titve*.

At this time, Savitribai courageously came forward and held the '*titve*' herself. She led the last journey of Jyotirao, walking ahead of the procession and was the one who consigned his body to the flames. In the history of India, in a thousand years, this was probably the first time a woman had performed the death rites. On 30th

⁹ Bodh Shantiswaroop, *Savitribai Phuleki Amar Kahani*, Publication Samyak New Delhi, first edition 2016, page 82-83.

November, his ashes were brought home and were ceremoniously buried in the place that Jyotirao had prepared for his burial. Savitribai erected a '*Tulsivrindavan*' on that spot. It can be seen even today. Simple stone '*padukas*' (marks of the feet of great persons) have been erected at its base. This is how Savitribai erected a memorial in the area behind their house for preserving Jyotirao's memories unto eternity. Savitribai led the Satyashodhak movement after Jyotirao's demise, working till the very end.¹² Yashwant During the course of his work, he had to travel to many foreign countries. While he was on one such foreign trip, on 6th March 1895, his wife Radha alias Laxmi passed away. Savitribai was left alone at home.

In 1893, Savitribai got presidentship of Satyashodhak Samaj which was organized in Saswad. Savitribai did much work in the famine of 1886 the next year plague speeded badly. Hundreds of men were died in this plague in all area. The government took up the task of controlling the epidemic under the leadership of an officer called Rand. Savitribai asked Yashwant to take leave and come back. She opened a hospital on the field of Sasane family. Though she knew that it was an infectious disease, then also she kept on looking the patients and served them continuously. Savitribai did this work with complete affection and with dedication. As soon as she came to know that the son of Pandurang Babaji Gaekwad in the Mahar settlement outside the village of Mundhwa was infected with plague, she visited it and rushed back to the hospital with the sick child carrying on her back. She herself caught the disease in this process, and at 9 pm on 10 March 1897, she passed away. '*Deenbandhu*' reported the news of her death with great grief and regret. Those who praise the 'heroic' act of Laxmibai, of fighting the enemy with her son strapped onto her back, however, have completely ignored the heroism of this woman who saved a sick child by taking care of him.

It is an ironical that this couple enlightened hundreds of widows lives. But their widow daughter –in- law was rendered homeless and died as a destitute in the temple of Rameshwar. Jyotiba Phule died after being paralyzed as got no treatment due to lack of money. Savitribai and her Yashwant died while serving the sick people suffering from plague¹⁰.

¹⁰KumreMansaram, *Kyarantibai Savitribai Phule*. Jai SaivaPrakashan, Nagpur, 2006, p.34.

Published in 1854, 'Kavyaphule' was the first collection of Savitri's poems. Total 41 poems are composed in this collection. Nature and social problems are the subject in these poems. Some poems are historical also. The speeches of Savitri Bai deals with the several subjects like labor, education, good conducts, addiction, and debt. "Bavankashi Subodh Ratnakar" is a collection of poems. These poems explain in the poetic language of Indian history and prose writings of Jyotiba Phule. There are 52 creations in this collection. These poems have been written in 1851 after the death of Jyotiba Phule. Savitribai Phule provided co-operation, help and company that is extraordinary and incomparable.

The contribution of Savitribai for the education as well as for social justice was unforgettable. This heritage of Savitribai will keep going in terms of empowering women forever. It is a famous poem of Savitribai:

*Go, get the education,
Be self-reliant, be industrious
Works gather wisdom and riches
All get lost without knowledge
We become animal without wisdom.
Sit idly no more, go get the education
And the misery of the oppressed and forsaken
You have got a golden chance to learn
So learn and break the chain of caste
Threw away the Brahman's scriptures fast¹¹.*

The scope of the study

The present study is focused on life and contribution of Savitribai Phule in a biographical way. It covers her birth childhood, education and marriage with Jyotiba Phule and her ideas against caste discrimination and gender justice.

Literature review

¹¹Bharati Anil, *Savitribai Phule Ki Kavitate*, Shavraj Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015, p.34.

Review of the literature provides a guideline to understand the different variables related to a particular research area. It not only provides some knowledge but also guides the researcher to explore new dimensions related to the area of research. It also provides a base to formulate the conceptual framework.

Thom Wolf (2012), talked about Jan Comenius (1592-1670) and Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) in his paper that both of them are father of modern education and mother of modern India education, are presented as world voice, worldview, and world venue colleagues. It is noted that though separated by centuries and cultures, Comenius and Savitribai both chose Jesus as their prototype person, their world voice. It is then argued that Comenius' mature educational worldview replaced monastic education for the privileged that neglected peasant classes with "universal education," one school system for all children; and that Phule rejected Brahmin education of only pure males which forbade education of polluted castes, radicalized by her fresh worldview of "universal rights" for all, all children created equal by the Creator of all¹².

Rahul Chimurkar (2015), wrote an article on the topic entitled Savitribai Phule: The Mother of Modern Education. In his research he focused on few facts about Savitribai Phule. That she emphasized on Secular education for social emancipation. The basic theme of her philosophy was education inculcating the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, justice and moral character among the boys and girls¹³.

¹² Wolf, Thom. "Changing Education: A note on the" Original and unusual" world voice, world view, and world venue of jancomenius and Savitribai Phule." *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 5.2 (2011): 78.

¹³Chimurkar Rahul, *Savitribai Phule: The Mother of Modern Education*, 11 December, 2015.

Bhumika Chauhan (2015), in his work *The Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule* traces the influence of liberal ideas of equality fraternity and brotherhood and other social movements on the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule¹⁴.

Archana Malik-Goure (2016), wrote that Savitribai Phule was a feminist philosopher in colonial India. She raised the problem of women's oppression and her thoughts on resolving women's domination through their own efforts and autonomy makes her join the company of other nineteenth century male feminist Philosophers. In this small work she focused on feminist philosophical aspect of her thought through her writings with special reference to Kavya Phule, moral values given by Savitri and concluded with remark on contemporary relevance of her philosophy of feminism¹⁵.

LalithaDhara (2016) talked about Savitribai's struggle and her fight against caste and gender discrimination in 19th century Maharashtra. She opined that problems could not restrain or subdue her indomitable spirit¹⁶.

Assumption or Research questions

1. What was the social condition of women and their social status?
2. What made Savitri to fight towards women education?
3. How did ideas of Savitri contribute to the development of feminist ideas later?

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To study the life and significant contribution of Savitribai Phule in history.

¹⁴Chauhan, Bhumika. *"The Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre: Knowledge-Practices, the Movement and the University"* Contemporary Education Dialogue 12.2 (2015): 177-207.

¹⁵Malik-Goure Archana. *Feminist Philosophical Thought in Colonial India. IRA-International Journal of Management & Social Sciences*, Vol.04, Issue 03 (2016) P, 579-589.

¹⁶DharaLalitha, *Social revolutionary, feminist and poetess Savitribai Phule*, Forward Press., 19 Dec.2016.

2. To understand the role of Savitribai Phule in Indian feminism, her fight for the unfair treatment of women and her efforts for education as well as equal rights for women in society.
3. To study the culture and social and economic conditions which led to the degradation of women in 19th century.
4. To study the relevance of her ideas and her struggle for women's equality.

Research Methodology

The research methodology followed in this study are historical, descriptive and analytical. All data used in the study are from primary and secondary sources such as her written works, letters, books, articles and online sources.

Organization of the work

Chapter 1, Introduction introduces along with the objectives, methodology as well as overview of childhood and role Savitribai. The methodology of research which was used in the study are described.

Chapter 2, "Poems of Savitribai Phule" deals in detail with poems Kavya Phule.. The poem and their explanations are systematically discussed in this chapter. Her poems clearly shows the bad condition of women and Shudras. Some poems strongly suggest that, education is God and English is mother without which men are like animals. Most part of her poems strongly opposes Brahmin ideology which is hegemonic over Shudras and women.

Chapter 3, "Speeches of Savitribai Phule" discusses the five speeches which she basically delivered on issues which are relevant in social economic and political spheres.

Chapter 4, “Contribution of Savitribai Phule in Indian Feminism” deals with her ideas on feminism and her solution for bringing gender justice. It also describes about Savitribai’s ideas who was responsible for the worst condition of women in India.

Chapter 5, “Conclusion” concludes all previously discussed chapters and sums up the personality of Savitribai Phule and her ideology which is relevant both in social, economic and political areas.