

Savitribhai Phule's Contribution to Education with Special Reference to Dalit Education

Amiya Mondal¹, Russell Al Farabi^{2*}

¹Ex-Student, Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur Math, Howrah

²Assistant Professor, Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur Math, Howrah

*Corresponding Author: rf@rkmsm.org

Abstract:

Savitribai Phule was one of the greatest architects who helped to formulate the base of the modern Indian education system. Indian social mechanism, based primarily on caste identity, is responsible for creating hindrances against uniform education system, and many people who were considered 'dalit' were historically denied any right to education as well as social security. It was only after Independence that they were given the constitutional right to education. Savitribai Phule, who herself was a Dalit woman, realized the need for education after getting education from her husband. She tried to spread education among the women and downtrodden so that they could become self-conscious and able to come to the mainstream of society. Even before Independence, when no men could even imagine starting schools for women, she raised the importance of education and started schools for women and dalits. The modern Indian development of equality in the educational sectors is much more indebted to her struggle in the British colonial period. She was the first Indian woman who established schools for girls and became the First Indian woman teacher, also from the dalit community. She was the mother of modern poetry stressing the necessity of English through her poems. Her *Kavya Phule*, the first collection of poems, was published in 1854. She condemns Manu for creating an unequal society. Later, in *Go, Get Education*, she says that human beings become animals without wisdom that comes from knowledge and advocates knowledge as greater than all riches. She calls for a war cry, to rise to learn and act, and requests to learn English to become self-reliant by learning English. Thus, she is one of the towering figures who fought for human rights, equality, justice and liberty for the depressed class, along with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule.

Keywords: Caste Hierarchy, Dalit Consciousness, Aesthetics, Justice, Emancipation.

Introduction:

Despite the British Government's effort to educate every Indian citizen, dalits were marginalized everywhere. In 1948, the responsibility to promote social equalization fell upon the Indian Government after gaining Independence. Many commissions and committees were formed to eradicate inequality and raise the status of the dalits. Savitribai Phule fought for the right to education in pre-independent India for Dalits and women who were denied that. Even after independence, dalits are facing discrimination here and there. Savitribai's indomitable spirit defeated any obstacle- may it be physical, social or economic. According to history and mythology, a group of people from Western Asia came to India in ancient times. Those people are known as Aryans. They found the natural resources of India, noticed the

simplicity of its people and culture very minutely. They started war against the people of the native land and imposed all kinds of prohibitions, and marked them as Shudra after three Hierarchies - Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. One of the Aryan sages, Manu, enlisted four varnas- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, in *Manu Smriti*. Restrictions were imposed upon them so that they could never fight back. Shudras had no right to Education. It is said that out of this Shudra caste, various groups protested against this division and began to be treated as Untouchable. These groups were called fifth Varna/Ati-Shurda etc. Untouchables/Schedule Castes/Dalits are different names for the same type of people. Even during the Muslim period, upper-caste Hindus enjoyed the freedom of Education, but lower-caste dalits were left out of the rights to education, the right to property and any luxury required in human life. In the British period, the high Caste people tried to deny giving equal rights to these people. Due to few chances of getting education and employment, the consciousness of Dalit identity and the need for education was highlighted by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Savitribai Phule was born 60 years earlier than Dr. Ambedkar and was responsible for bringing a sea change in Indian caste and gender-ridden society.

Article Reviewed:

Chimurkar (2015) highlighted Savitribai Phule's importance in the realm of education and social reformation. The article highlighted how She fought against barriers that prevented women and Dalits from coming forward and Mrs. Phule's entry with the hope of light (education) for all. This article also showed Phule's stand against child marriage, Sati-practice and untouchability. She advocated for equality between men and women and rose to support widow re-marriage. The other half of society (women) today is much more indebted to her while the question of gender equality is raised.

Pandey (2015) showed in her article how Savitribai Phule played the role of a crusader by neglecting evil practices of the Indian male-dominated society where women were forced to stay behind the curtain. She also showed another caste-based section of society that had historically been denied equality and educational opportunity. Dr. Renu Pandey highlighted Savitribai Phule's emergence as a revolutionary figure to eradicate any kind of social injustice through education. Education is known as the only and one weapon that gives hope to those who are hopeless, power to the weak, equality to the neglected, and respect to the humiliated.

Patel (2017) showed Savitribai Phule's educational role in British colonial India. It deals with Savitribai Phule's struggle to establish social harmony by establishing schools for Dalit-Muslim-and-girl students and the various difficulties that She had to face in a Caste based, unequal society dominated by males. Education is shown as the base of wisdom and development. This article showed how education could help realize the importance of education not only for individual development but parts of society that were deprived of education for thousands of years. This article also shows that education which could defeat all malpractices, was deprived of a large section of society as part of a social system, and how Savitribai Phule broke that wall and brought light to others who were deprived of it- through evaluation of the mind, self-respect, practical and vocational training of girls and lower caste students.

Murali (2018), in his article "Philosophy of Education- Ambedkar, Savitribai Phule, Jyotiba Phule", highlighted the importance of education for social justice, intellectual, social and moral democracy. It upheld the Deweyan concept of society as democratic- a fraternal and moral community based on values of liberty, equity, fraternity and human dignity, human values, principles of rationality and enquiry.

Kamei (2019), in this article, “Women and Education: Contribution of Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai for women Education in India”, portrayed Phule as a radical reformist of social traditions that tried to suppress a larger section of society (i.e., women) from getting education. The way Savitribai Phule fought against societal shackles is praise-worthy, bold, and daring. She fought for equality on the ground of gender. Equity was one of her ideals, needed for the Dalits and suppressed class. This article also deals with ideals of liberty, equity and brotherhood in a society affected by Patriarchy and Brahminical System and highlights education as the way to emancipation.

Katke (2019) showed Savitribai Phule as a true social reformer in colonial India. It shows how she fought for the education of women and downtrodden people by establishing schools and playing role as the first women teacher. She was shown as a prominent Indian social reformer, educationist, and poet who played an instrumental role in women's education and empowerment during the nineteenth century. A leading figure of Maharashtra in the social reform movement, she is considered an icon of Dalit campaigning against untouchability and worked actively to abolish caste and gender discrimination.

Nallamuthu (2020), in his article “Savitribai Jyotiba Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Thanthai Periyar Crusaders and Architects of Modern India”, highlighted the above-mentioned activists’ countless reformative exercises towards financial, instructive, social correspondence, freedom, brotherhood and women empowerment in the Indian Culture. This social scientific research article shows how these incredible pioneers’ progressive commitments for the reason for social and sexual orientation equity helped to build modern Indian temperament in the broad Hindu social milieu.

Das and Das (2021) showed that educational Contribution of Savitribai Phule in 21st century India highlighted Savitribai Phule as a prominent social reformer who helped others. Her husband established schools for girls and Shudras and Ati-Shudra community students. In a Patriarchal society, she brought a new kind of social change where all people were treated on the ground of equality, social mobility, and educational opportunity. Not only this, but She also played the role of a responsible citizen by helping and serving plague-ridden patients by sacrificing her life. This article highlights a women’s struggle for education for community students.

Garaian and Sen (2021), in their article “Savitribai Phule the first lady Teacher and Social Reformer in Nineteen century of India”, portrayed Savitribai Phule not only as a social reformer but also as a woman, author and poet’s contribution towards society. The great human value and spirit was found in her while she was serving the Plague-ridden human beings and died by Plague also. Her poem Go, Get Education showed the thrust for educating women and other section of society that was denied education.

Objectives of the study:

- O1.** To study Savitribai Phule’s contribution to social mobility through education.
- O2.** To review the status of Dalit Education in pre-independent India.
- O3.** To find out how Education helped in collective identity-making in the Dalit community.
- O4.** To study the need for education of Dalits to eradicate caste barriers.

Research Methodology:

This study is qualitative, and the qualitative content analysis technique is used to address the specific research questions. The researchers have used some primary and secondary sources to formulate this article.

Analysis and discussion:**Condition of Dalits in Pre-Independent India:**

Dalits or the untouchables were an integral part of Hindu society. Shudras were the lowest of the law of the Hindu community. Shudras, or the outcastes, were again divided into two categories-touchable and untouchables, also known as Dalits. They were entirely out of mainstream society, unlike touchable shudras. However, they were given equal status after independence. In ancient India, the Hindu social order attached them to all the negative and inferior statuses like ignorance, immoral behaviour, darkness, etc. During the medieval period, the invasions of Turks, Afghans, and Mughals deteriorated the condition of the Dalits because of the constant pressure from the new invaders and the old high-caste people. Centuries of oppression, ignorance and exploitation (from the pre-Maurya period, 6th century B.C.) made them socially frail, economically poor, and educationally unconscious of their potentiality. After the arrival of the British, the condition of the Dalits began to change. With the introduction of modern education and a humanitarian Outlook, there appeared some philosophers and thinkers who tried to revive the untouchables to include them in the greater Hindu community. They tried to include the untouchables in the Hindu community in the name of Sanskritization. Mahatma Gandhi took initiatives to elevate the condition of the Dalits, or the untouchables, through his social and political movement. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's revolutionary arrival and his constant struggle to develop the consciousness of the dalit people changed the whole discourse of Dalit upliftment. In the 1911 census, it was proposed that 24% untouchables of the total Hindu population and 16% of the total population should be separately given some assistance for their upliftment. This decision was the turning point for the dalit people for making them socially and politically strong. During the Independence movement, this dalit untouchables came under the name of the depressed class, which wanted separated representation from the Hindu community under Ambedkar's leadership. According to the communal award of 1932, these depressed class groups were scheduled for specific representation in the electoral system and Central government jobs in the name of scheduled caste.

Caste as a barrier to getting education: The dalit emancipation, which started after the arrival of the British, was constantly being interrupted because of the social hierarchies of the Indian social system. Even after Independents and getting special provisions, dalit people's presence was very poor in academics and government jobs. The high caste mentality still failed to accept them properly and equally. Everywhere they were facing caste discrimination. After partition, their condition became even more vulnerable than earlier. Under the Pune Pact of 1932, their political condition began to change, and after the introduction of the Schedule Caste and Scheduled Tribe Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989, caste oppression became officially illegal. However, they are constantly striving to get equal opportunities in every sphere of society.

Savitribai Phule's struggle against social discrimination: Savitribai Phule was born in 1831 in the Satara district of Maharashtra. She fought against caste and gender discrimination. She and her husband started Satyashadhak Samaj -Society of Seekers of Truth in 1873, which started anti-caste, anti-Brahminical movement in Maharashtra, supported inter-caste marriage and did not support the inclusion of Brahmin in marriage for sanction and approval. Savitribai Phule and her husband tried to reform the society and started educating girls and lower caste people, started widow remarriage and stopped shaving their heads. She advocated education for self-reliance. She was taught at home by her husband,

got training at an American Missionary Institute, and started teaching girls in Maharashtra. She started schools in Bhidewada with the help of Sagunbai. They taught students Mathematics, Science and Social Science, unlike Brahminical Vedas and shastras. She advocated education to fight against social evils like caste inequality and gender discrimination. Though she faced threats, abuse, mental and physical torture, she never lost hope. She left home with her husband and started a school with nine girls in 1848. Then they also set up two more schools; by 1851, there were 150 girls students. She started a regular School with her friend, Fatima Sheikh, in 1849, where all were treated equally. In 1852, she started Mahila Shabha Mandal to inform women of their rights. She started Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, where widows and rape victims could deliver babies safely. Thus, Phule was one of India's earliest social and educational reformers.

The educational philosophy of liberation and reformation: As an educational philosopher, she rejected the Brahminical education system that only advocated for education for the upper caste men and never allowed women and lower caste men. She saw the dream of establishing an education system that would work to provide universal education to all so that the people could become gender-sensitive, tolerant, intellectually critical and socially reforming. She thought of education as a weapon of reformation and liberation -as "Tritiya Rata" that could help women and the lower caste Dalit to understand the relationship between knowledge and power. She revolutionised the Indian education system by starting schools for marginalized castes. She believed in an equal social system that would provide universal education to all. She wanted to provide practical knowledge in a proper social context. She advocated for developing students' critical minds and independent reasoning abilities. She started questioning the authority and applicability of the ancient Brahminical texts. She also thought that education could not only change the standard of living but could also help to shape a nation's future. She was against the priestly system in society that was captured by brahmins. She saw the hegemony of the Brahminical social order as a 'religious world voice' as not universal but supported an 'intellectual world view' that actually could help to smooth the social welfare pattern. She found the Brahminical religion as a prison house. She thought pedagogy should be critical to help equality in society.

As a revolutionary poet: she wrote two inspirational books that contributed significantly to Marathi literature. Her first collection of poems was published in the name *Kavya Phule* in 1854. The collection discusses education, caste discrimination, child welfare and social reformation. Savitribai expressed the importance of education through poetry, filled with humanism. She said, "work hard, study well, and do good" to eradicate social discrimination. She gave importance to education and physical labour to acquire knowledge and property. She believed that women were in no way inferior to men and they were to be appropriately educated. She said that women were not the slaves of men. Her *Kavya Phule* brought a revolution where she stressed on the necessity of English education:

Go, Get Education

Be self-reliant, be industrious

Work, gather wisdom and riches,

All gets lost without knowledge

We become animal without wisdom,

Sit idle no more, go, get education

End misery of the oppressed and forsaken,

*You've got a golden chance to learn
So learn and break the chains of caste.
Throw away the Brahman's scriptures fast.
Phule's poetry reflected the anger of the newly emerging women in India who believed that women were not the object of male last. She described education for women as a golden chance to express themselves:
To attain self-reliance let us pledge
And accumulate a wealth of knowledge
Without learning, life is an animal existence, waste
Don't rest, get an education, make haste
She put up the question —should they be called animals?
No knowledge, no learning
No affinity for either
A brain that lies fallow
Should they be called humans?*

She also published another poetry collection named *Bhavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar* in 1852, discussing her ideas and messages. She edited and published four speeches of Jyotiba Phule in 1856. These speeches are essential pictures of Indian history. Her letters written to her husband show their friendly, mutual relationship and are inspirational sources to the modern academic atmosphere.

Role of education in making collective identity: she believed education should provide social justice, intellectual freedom, and a democratic temperament. Education was seen as a weapon to free anybody from mental and physical oppression. For constructing a sociocultural and democratic social setup, she thought that education must work to give self-respect, self-reliance and self-realization. Savitribai Phule took the initiative to spread education among the downtrodden to restore cultural and social values. Mahila Seva Mandal, which was started by her in 1852, took initiatives to raise women's consciousness about human rights, social issues, and the dignity of life. Under her leadership, a successful Barber strike was organized against the cruel practice of shaving Windows' head in Pune, Maharashtra. During the famine of 1876 to 1898, she and her husband, Jyotiba Phule, distributed food in various areas. She died of the plague while serving plagued affected children. For her contribution to the social sector, dalit consciousness became aware of the true condition and helped them build a collective identity inspired by the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. Savitribai Phule's life was an example of a genuinely revolutionary and social architect with a modern temperament. She was an epitome of empowerment, justice, equality and a 'New woman' in a 'dark age'. Dalit consciousness, through education, was ignited by her effort to educate the dalit downtrodden people of India. Swami Vivekananda, Ishwar Chandra Vidyanagar, Raja Rammohan Roy, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar all contributed to the development of women. But the candle of women's education was actually lighted first by Savitribai Phule. After getting education, the subaltern began to think about Brahminical hegemony, their position in society and their way of emancipation. The Dalit aesthetic, which espouses a war cry for writing and bringing change in society, was also indebted to Savitribai Phules' educational contribution. Savitribai Phule thus created a new way of thinking and changing society in pre-independent India, and her contribution to education is a monumental achievement in today's education system.

Conclusion:

She herself was a dalit woman and realized the importance of education for making a strong national identity. She had seen that women and dalit were living in utter darkness, devoid of any rights to education and equality. Like a true philosopher, she identified that if the status of women and the common mass could be changed, society would automatically be changed. Like a true crusader, she fought against social inequality, gender discrimination, patriarchal dominations, and ancient scriptures that tried to suppress women and dalit people throughout the ages. She helped to create self-confidence among the downtrodden people by giving them education and tried to revive a large section of the people from the hell of darkness. Her contribution to education is not only praiseworthy but also revolutionary. The modern education system, based on equality, is deeply indebted to her contribution to education.

Works Cited:

1. Asher, Malvika. "Savitribai Phule Receiving British Accolades". *Google Arts & Culture*, 2016, artsandculture.google.com/asset/savitribai-phule-receiving-british-accolades-malvika-asher/9QEQtSU--CP2A?hl=en. Accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
2. Chimurker, Rahul. "Savitribai Phule: The Mother of Modern Education". *Countercurrents.org*, 11 Dec, 2015, www.countercurrents.org/chimurkar111215.htm. Accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
3. Das, Amit and Arjun Chandra Das. "Educational Contribution of Savitribai Phule in 21st Century India". *International Journal of trend in Scientific Research and Development*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2021, pp. 1281-1285.
4. Dutta, Kalpana. *Savitribai Phule*. All India Mahila Sanskritik Sangathan, 2021.
5. Garain, Chandra Sourav and Dr. Subir Sen. "Savitribai Phule the First Lady Teacher and Social Reformer in Nineteenth Century India". *EPRA International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research (IJMR)*, vol. 07, no. 06, 2021, pp. 326-329, DOI/10.36713/epra2013.
6. Goswami, Stuti. "Savitribai Phule Jayanti 2023: भारत की पहली महिला टीचर सावित्रीबाई फुले, जिनपर लोगों ने बरसाए थे पत्थर". *Navbharat Times*, 2 Jan, 2023, www.navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/education/gk-update/savitribai-phule-biography-education-and-history/articleshow/86455801.cms. Accessed 30 Mar. 2023
7. Katke, M. Santoshkumar. "Savitribai Phule's Contribution Towards Indian Social Elements-A Study". *JETIR*, vol. 06, no. 11, 2019, pp. 25-32.
8. Kamei, Dipongpou. "Women and Education: Contribution of Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai for Women Education in India". Pp. 01-14.
9. Malik-Goure, Archana. "Feminist Philosophical Thought in Colonial India". *IRA-International Journal of Management and Social science*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2016, pp. 579-589.
10. Mahtre U. *Kavya Phule*, People's Education Society, 2012.
11. Murali, Sreejith. "Philosophy of Education- Ambedkar, Savitribai Phule, Jotiba Phule." 2018. www.academia.edu/5053955/Philosophy_of_Education_Ambedkar_Savitribai_Phule_Jotiba_Phule. Accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
12. Murugeswasri, B. "Savitribai Phule Forerunner of Women Social Activist in Modern India". *Review of Research*, vol. 08, no. 06, 2019, pp. 01-05.

13. Nallamuthu, P. "Savitribai Jyotirao Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Thanthai Periyar: Crusaders and Architects of Modern India". *Our Heritage*, vol. 68, no. 01, 2020, pp. 4077-4084.
14. Patel, Ankit. "Contribution of Savitribai Jyotirao Phule In education Field". *AEGAEUM Journal*, vol. 9, no.2, 2017, pp. 39-46.
15. Pandey, Renu. "Crusaders of Female Education in Colonial India: A Case Study of Savitribai Phule". *International Journal of Innovative Social Science & Humanities Research*, vol.2, no. 01, 2015, pp. 01-06.
16. Pandey, Renu. "Locating Savitribai Phule: Feminism in the Trajectory of Global Feminist Thought". *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 46, no. 01, 2019, pp. 86-105.
17. "Savitribai Phule - Go, Get Educated." *Women in History*, 6 July 2022, womeninhistory.education/savitribai-phule/. Accessed 30 Mar. 2023.