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CONTRIBUTIONS OF SAVITRIBAI PHULE IN INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract:

This research article seeks to examine the contributions of Savitribai Phule, a leading social reformist, in the field of education in India. She played significant role as an educationist and also as a poet advocating social justice, women's education and empowerment in the 19th century in India. In 1848, she established the first school for the girls' in Pune. Freedom from social taboos, liberation from religious orthodoxy and malpractices were the main goals that she had fought for. Her quest continued to establish human rights and the right to pursue education. Her educational principles, focusing on gender equity, social justice, and community engagement and empowerment, persist in influencing modern educational policies, especially for underrepresented, marginalized groups and fostering inclusivity. She initiated a revolution against the ongoing conservative education system in the 19th century India which was mostly characterised by gender inequality, discrimination irrespective of caste and class. This paper aims to analyse her educational philosophy for the educational reforms in contemporary India now.

Keywords : Savitribai Phule, Education, Inclusivity, Social Reform, Empowerment, Human right

Introduction:

In nineteenth century, Indian society was highly characterised by the stratified social structure, rigorous religious practices, low status of women, deindustrialization followed by colonial rule. Poverty was everywhere, in the society, in the mind. In such situation, colonial exploitation made the society poverty stricken, illiterate and patriarchal society encroaches the freedom of women, their right to education. Awareness among the mass was absent these days.

Savitribai Phule, the first female teacher of India had never compromised her purpose. She focused primarily on equality and humanity. Savitribai Phule, the pioneer of Indian education always advocates for women education and social transformation. Phule asserted that, due to lack of education, women have not been able to accomplish self-reliance. According to Phule, women education should be a compulsory education in India. "Along with her husband, Jyotirao Phule, she established India's first school for girls in Pune in 1848, challenging the deeply entrenched caste and gender-based discrimination in education" (Sharma, 2017). During this period, women were restricted to access education, more precisely literacy, Phule not only pioneered women education but their contribution for progress of Indian society (Deshpande, 2019). She believed that integrated development of Indian society is a far off dream without development of women. Her endeavour was not limited by the educational institutions. She initiated inclusive education opposing caste oppression. "By developing curriculums that addressed social equality and gender justice, she laid the foundation for modern educational policies promoting diversity and inclusion" (Kumar, 2021). Critical thinking and empowerment have given more prominent place in ger educational practice which is aligning with the present day educational frameworks emphasizing learner centric education. In contemporary India Savitribai Phule's contribution is highly recommendable and appreciated. Her vision has echoed in the National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 highlighting unbiased and inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2020). "As India moves towards a more technology-driven and inclusive educational landscape, Phule's philosophy serves as an enduring inspiration for equitable educational reforms" (Patil, 2022).

Objective of the study:

The following objectives have been formulated for the present study:

- To highlight the educational contributions of Savitribai Phule.



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- To strengthen women emancipation.
- To acknowledge Phule's contribution in women and Dalit education.

Methodology:

This paper is primarily based on qualitative approach encompassing historical study, scholarly articles to examine the educational contributions of Savitribai Phule and its relevance in the contemporary Indian education system. The secondary sources include thesis, published journals, articles, magazines, books on Savitribai Phule.

To accelerate women empowerment and to inspire women to come forward in every role.

Contribution of Savitribai Phule:

• Realistic Approach

Savitribai Phule's educational approach was not confined within mere literacy. She thought that education should shape the mind and help to think independently. Education is the basic need of life. The retardation of the society is primarily due to lack of proper education and awareness. So, she approaches the problem with a positive mindset by elevating the education of the mass. She supposed that the school curriculum must incorporate the basic learning regarding trade and craft enables them to balance their lives comfortably. In her pedagogy she supported different cocurricular activities like painting, writing, physical activities and practiced participatory teaching learning strategy.

• A Social Reformer

As a revolutionary social reformer, she overruled the 19th century social system like the ugly forms of caste system, untouchability, sati system, widespread illiteracy, denial of women education and their freedom. In a patriarchy driven society women were labelled as segregated communities. By the following activities she set a benchmark as social reformer:

Social works

1. Opened first Women School in 1848
2. Started Native Female School in 1850 (with husband)
3. Formed the Society for promoting the education of Mahars, Mangs in 1850 (with husband)
4. Established Mahila Seva Mandal in 1852
5. Started India's First Infanticide Prohibition Home-1853
6. Started Night School- 1855
7. Satya Shodhak Samaj- 1873 (with husband)
8. First Satyashodhak marriage- 1873

• Preacher of Gender Justice

In that contemporary India, Phule raised her voice for women education and their upliftment. She also advocates for education of the low caste children. "She was the first Indian to place universal, child-sensitive, intellectually critical and socially reforming education at the very core of the agenda for all children in India. Savitribai Phule worked in tandem with her husband in the latter's efforts in eradicating the custom of untouchability and the caste system, garnering equal rights for people of lower castes, and reform of the Hindu family life."

(Amit Das | Dr. Arjun Chandra Das "Educational Contribution of Savitribai Phule in 21st Century India" Published in *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd)*, ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-5 | Issue-4, June 2021, pp.1281-1286, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd42547.pdf)



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Satyashodhak Samaj

Both Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule established the Satyashodhak Samaj (Society for the search of truth) through which they initiated the Satyashodhak marriage practice unaided by dowry system. Through 'Satyashodhak Samaj' Savitribai, started a movement to collect food grains during the famine of 1876 and 1879 by collecting food, arranged to feed 2000 children living in the ashram.

Infanticide Prohibition Home

On 28th January 1853, Savitribai setup an Infanticide Prohibition. There was a provision for the widows to give birth to their children and raised them.

Education and Nutrition:

For proper execution of Right to Education and enhance encouragement among learners Phule allocate stipends to school going students to minimise drop out rate and set the provision of health checkup in school.

Shudra and Anti-Shudra School:

In 1849, Phule started a school for Shudra and Anti Shudra community. Here, Fatima Sheikh, the first Muslim female teacher of India taught at this school with Savitribai Phule and accomplished their goals successfully.

The Night School:

A night school was set up by Savitribai Phule and her husband Jyotirao Phule for farmers and unskilled workers to disseminate education as they could not pursue formal learning. Writer Divya Kandukuri mentioned, "Savitri Phule's teaching methods were expected to be better than government schools. The reason behind this fame was the number of girls enrolled in their schools exceeded the number of boys enrolled in government schools."

• An Author

Savitribai Phule is also known for her work as a poet and author. Being the first female Marathi poet and writer, Phule raised her voice against caste discrimination, social dysfunctional practices in her writings:

- **KAVYA PHULE (1854) (Poetry's Blossom):** It was her first work focused on English education and social taboo.
- **JYOTIRAO SPEECHES (1856) (The Ocean of Pure Gems)**
- **SAVITRIBAI LETTERS TO JYOTIRAO (1856)**
- **BAVANKASHI SUBODH RATNAKAR (1892):** A no of poems portraying the history of India and the endeavours of Jyotirao Phule
- **KARZ (Debt):** In Karz, Phule strongly opposed the idea of celebration of festivals by borrowing money and got stuck in a deep web of deceit.
- **'GO GET EDUCATION' (Ibid, 36-71):** It is the anthem of women education, women emancipation, freedom of the oppressed.



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For Savitribai Phule, writing was a mission rather than passion. She used poetry and articles as tools to mobilize the marginalized community towards self- empowerment through education. In her entire life, she continued the struggle for the rights and upliftment of Dalits and women education. Her valuable writings are inspiration for women and backward classes of Indian society. She published various books and poems, such as, Kavya Phule (1854), Speeches of Matoshree Savitribai (1892), Bavankashi Subodh Ratnakar (1892), Go, Get Education (an entitled poem) etc.

Analysis of the Study:

It is a most relevant study for present education and social system. Phule, herself was a revolution in the world of education. She reconstructed the conventional education system. Her feminist ideology is all time relevant. Her contribution for social upliftment is unignorable. She focused on the issues of down trodden section and showed the way to enlightenment. Savitribai Phule's thought on women's right, right to life, mass freedom have been reflected in Article 21 and Right to Education by Indian Constitution. The role of women in society is immense, boundless, and irreplaceable. They are one of a kind. It is the responsibility of our society to equip the mass equal educational opportunities.

Conclusion:

Savitribai Phule is a milestone in the field of Education. Her early marriage did not put up barriers in the pursuit of education had never overshadowed her education. Interestingly, her husband boosted her confidence for social work and education. Today, every educated, enlightened women feel eternally thankful to **Savitribai Phule**. She is the brand ambassador of modern women education not only in Indian context but also in terms of the need of education for empowerment for the women representing marginalized communities across the world.

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