

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule & Savitribai Phule: Pioneers of Women Education For Empowerment of Women in India

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Abstract

India is the land of great thinkers and philosophers who enriched the Indian heritage with their contribution in the form of literature, arts, knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, India is to be considered as a token of ancient knowledge and wisdom. Apart from this, this is a land of social thinkers and activists who pioneered in the social change and social transformations which leads towards building of 'Modern and Democratic India'.

Among these social thinkers, we have to mention the name of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule as pioneer of women education in India. Mahatma Phule's progressive thoughts and active contribution in initiation of women education is unparalleled and unequivocal. Due to Mahatma Phule's and Savitribai Phule's great pains taking efforts all the Indian women have opportunity to take education and empower themselves. Both of them devoted their whole life for the education of Indian women from all socio-religious sections.

This article is an attempt to present the contribution of Mahatma Phule and Savitribai Phule in women education for empowerment of women in India. In this, we will see the various efforts made by Mahatma Phule for initiation of girls' schools, Savitribai Phule's cordial contribution in noble cause of women education and the educational as well as social philosophy of Mahatma Phule regarding social status of women, gender equality and women empowerment. It also describes the writings of Mahatma Phule which illustrated the basic thought of 'Social Equity and Equality' which is the base of Indian Democracy.

(**Key words:** Mahatma Phule; Savitribai Phule; Women education; Women empowerment etc.)

Introduction

India is the land of philosophers and various religious cultures and witnessed many social reforms which were helpful in foundation and upgradation of 'orthodox India' to 'Modern Democratic India' where everyone has equal opportunity to grow and develop through education. But from Vedic period to start of British period, it is noted that the deprived class in Hindus and women were not allowed to take education. There was no provision of getting education to every one irrespective of religion, caste or class and Gender. The women education has been totally banned in India. In this period, the great revolutionary and Pioneer of women education - Jyotirao Phule was born on 11th April 1827 in Pune district of Maharashtra. His father and forefathers

were famous florists in Pune; because of this they got their family name "Phule" over previous family name "Gorhay". He has completed his primary education in vernacular Marathi School. His father Govindrao has discontinued Jyotirao's education by listening conventional views of upper caste peoples. As a result of this, Jyotirao asked to work in his father's farm. He was married at the age of thirteen with Savitribai who was merely eight years old and she was daughter of Zagde Patil of Kavadi village which was near Pune. At that time, who knows that this couple would create great historical and educational contribution for the emancipation and empowerment of women and depressed class?

Rise of Mahatma

Despite of discontinuation of education, Jyotiba Phule has keen interest in education which made him to read more and more books. By

observing his love of seeking knowledge, two neighbors viz. Baig Munshi and Rev. Legyet advised Govindrao Phule to continue Jyotiba's further education. Jyotiba got admission in the Scottish Mission High-school after a gap of three years. He was greatly influenced by the missionary teachings of equality and brotherhood during school education. He was impressed by the biographies of Shivaji Maharaj and George Washington. Along with this, he has deep impact of Thomas Paine's book 'Rights of Man'. His thinking made him to compare the discrimination among the Indian people and injustice on the basis of caste and gender. Paine's teachings made him to think about the social injustice and gave him direction to evolve the ideas about equality based society.

An incident in 1848, gave a boost for Jyotiba's life to become a revolutionary social reformer in India. In 1848, Jyotiba has been invited to attend marriage of his upper caste friend. During the procession, the invitees had noticed presence of Jyotiba along with them; they humiliated and insulted Jyotiba because of his lower caste. This incident made Jyotiba restless and ignited him to revolt against the social discrimination of the basis of caste and untouchability. Jyotiba's social work has two different aspects, the first one is related with education and empowerment of women and other one is related with the fight against social inequality, untouchability and education of depressed class. In this article, we are focusing on his social contribution for women education and their empowerment.

Education and Preparation of Savitribai Phule

After taking interest in emancipation of downtrodden, Jyotiba has started a school for girls from lower castes. But there was no lady teacher for teaching in this school, therefore, Jyotiba has started to teach Savitribai and prepared her as lady teacher who become first women teacher in India. As a teacher Savitribai was harassed and insulted by the then orthodox people from upper castes. They tortured her by throwing stones and dirt, but Savitribai stood firmly by her husband and the contributed equally for the noble cause of education of women and underprivileged. Even they had been forced to leave their house, at that time also, Savitribai was stood along with Jyotiba.

Initiation of Girls' Education

In 1848, Jyotirao Phule has taken a revolutionary step by starting first native school for girls in Bhide wada. In some sources the date of starting this school is mentioned as 1st January 1848 whereas in some other it is 15th May 1848 (Wikipedia and Malik-Goure-). Jyotiba has started two more schools in 1851. He was honored by Board of Education for his contribution to girls' education by offering a pair of 'Shawls' at public meeting held at Vishrambag wada on 16th November 1852. He has expanded his educational work by establishing two more schools, one for untouchables and one night schools for workers from lower caste. Along with this educational work, he has started some other activities for widow women from upper castes and tried to give them respectable life.

Contribution for women Empowerment

By observing the sufferings of depressed and women in society, Jyotiba had given weapon in the form of education for eradicating social inequalities. Along with this, he strove for the equality between men and women. The then inhumane practices like female infanticide, child marriage, lifelong widowhood and prohibition of education made the lives of women worse than the slaves. Jyotiba's efforts to educate women were closely related to liberate them from these unjustified customs and bindings.

Jyotirao encouraged and supported the movement of widow marriage. The widow marriage act of 1856 provided legal status to the marriages of widows. Jyotiba encouraged the marriage of Shenvi widow in 1864. He also supports the efforts made by Vishnu Shastri Pandit who established a society for promotion of widow remarriage. Earlier than this, Jyotiba established an orphanage for new born children of widows who become victims of man's lust and also gave them support for safe and secret delivery of child. He urged to the government for removal of this forced widowhood exercised upon the helpless women. He supported and initiated barber's bandh against shaving the unfortunate Brahmin widows.

Achieving Gender Equality by setting Own Example

Jyotiba regarded women as independent identity and felt that she was superior to man in

many ways. Jyotiba often used the term 'Surve Ekander Stree Purush' (each and every woman and man) while speaking at public gatherings. Similarly his views regarding equal rights of man and woman were reflected in the 'Satya Shodhak' wedding ceremonies.

Jyotiba had very subtle views regarding treatment for woman and man, he believed that example is better than percept. An interesting incident of his life is worth mentioning here. Jyotiba and Savitribai has no child, so the friends and relatives asked him for second marriage. He asked if they have doctor's examination and the fault found within him, whether they prepared to arrange second husband for his wife. It showed that he did not like to have double standards for men and women. Thus, he equally counted the efforts of Savitribai by setting his own example of gender equality. His visionary ideology of gender equality is still worth-praising and following in today's so called era of gender equality.

Relevance of Mahatma Phule's thoughts

The educational philosophy and pragmatic views of Jyotiba has guided for social change and promotion of equality based society. In today's modern era, his thoughts about eradication of social inequality and caste discrimination has great relevance as these discriminations have taken another form and hinders national progress and development which could lead us to mental slavery of 'Manuvadi' ideology.

It seems very depressing relating with gender equality also. There was a huge growth in the education of women but the social and economic status of women has been slightly upgraded as compared to the period of Jyotiba's contemporary society. We need thoughtful youth who consider women as companion not as a tool. Jyotiba's vision for man and woman equality was based upon humanity. Therefore, youth of India and particularly boys and man of Indian society should follow thinking of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule of considering Savitribai-his wife as companion of life not slave to him and give proper respect for every woman.

Conclusion

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule had legendary work for education of women and deprived class. They have contributed their whole

life for education of women, support to women empowerment through education, eradication of social inequalities on the basis of caste and gender. Jyotiba's thought of social justice and social equality has provided base for today's democracy. Even Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar considered Jyotiba Phule s his third Guru along with Gautam Buddha and Sant Kabir. We have adopted the teachings of Jyotiba Phule, his pragmatic way of life and critical thinking to judge the injustice in any form.

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