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Kranti Jyoti Savitribai Phule's Contribution to Women Empowerment

Dr. Pooja Manchik, K. Jadhav

ABSTRACT

Savitribai Phule brought the dawn of women's education in India. She worked for the rights of women and introduced education opportunities for girls during the British India Age. Her poems raised voice against discrimination and emphasized the importance of education. She was also actively involved in protests against Sati, untouchability, child marriage and other social practices that violated human rights. Savitribai Phule emerged as one of most renowned female reformists in India. She worked for uplifting the exploited lower caste people. She also started a shelter at her house in 1863 for preventing infanticide. She also worked for the welfare of widows. Along with her husband, Savitribai started a movement to introduce the equal rights for men and women. Her devotion has set an example and has inspired many Indian women.

Keywords: Marginalization, Discrimination, Empowerment, Untouchability, British Rule

* Kranti Jyoti Savitribai Phule's Contribution to Women Empowerment

Introduction:

Savitribai Phule, the first female teacher of the first women's school in India is a pioneer figure. She relentlessly fought against the dominant caste system and worked towards the upliftment of the marginalized. She demanded dignity for all women, for which she, along with her husband Jyotirao Phule worked their entire lives. The principles of humanity, equality, liberty and justice were of utmost importance to her. During a time when women were mere objects, she ignited a spark that led to equality in education - something which was impossible before. She strongly spoke against the discriminatory foundations imposed on women, which led to their oppression. Her emphasis on secular education for social emancipation in India is the marker of her significant personality. By getting to know her better, by understanding her struggles and

hardships, we will be looking into a life that not only changed the face of education in India, but also enlightened humanity in its real essence.

Early Life and Work:

A crusader for women empowerment, Savitribai Phule's contribution in the field of education has left an evergreen mark on India's historical pages. At a time when India was plagued with women's outraged modesty, she acted as a messiah for all those women who were living a life of servitude. Born on January 3, 1831, in Nalgaon Maharashtra, Savitribai was married off to activist and social-reformer Jyotirao Phule, at a very young age. But with her husband's support and motivation, she learned to read and write. He not only helped her in attaining good education but also supported her in achieving her dream of an India where women can live with their heads held high. She set up India's first women's school. As

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education was not given importance that people were not in favor of her running a school for girls.

With her husband, she also worked towards ending female infanticide and set up a home, Kavya Pratibandhak Griha, to prevent the death of widows. She also campaigned against marriage and sati pratha, which undermined the existence of women. Rape victims were often harassed during those times, but the couple not only helped them in delivering their children but also taught them to begin a new life.

Pioneer of women education:

Today, Indian women are not behind men in any sector. They have proved themselves in each and every field like education, politics, sports, science, medicine, engineering, government sectors, social service etc. They made their names in the history of ruling the hearts of many people because of their education and wisdom. But all these women could take education because of the continuous efforts of Savitribai Phule who had taken initiative to start women education in India.

Her contribution as a poet:

Savitribai Phule was a good poet of Marathi and English. She was the first Indian woman whose poems got noticed in the British Empire. The title of her first poetry composition was 'Kavya Prakash', which was published in 1854. 'Bavan Kashi Prakash Ratnakar' was published in 1982. The theme of her poetry was centred at educational and social issues. She is known as the pioneer of Marathi poetry. She was stressing the necessity of English education through her poems.

Her contribution as a social reformer:

Savitribai Phule was a first women social reformer in India. Those days, dalits were not allowed to take water from public tanks & wells. Many times they used to remain thirsty. In 1868, Savitribai Phule & Jyotirao Phule dug a well in their house and made open for people from every caste. It was a big challenge for upper caste people. But they took a daring step. Girls were

forced to marry with old age men. After the death of her husband widows were not allowed to remarry. Their heads were shaven. Savitribai organized a strike of barbers to persuade them not to shave their heads. Particularly Brahmin women were sexually exploited by males. They were driven to commit suicide. Phule started shelter home in their own house by name Balhatya pratibandhak griha for Brahmin widows. For the awareness they put advertisement at pilgrimage places and all over the city.

Struggles:

Savitribai's struggle was fraught with many difficulties and despite that she continued her work peacefully. Men would purposely wait in the streets and pass lewd remarks. They sometimes pelted stones and threw cow dung or mud. Savitribai would carry two saris when she went to school, changing out of the soiled sari once she reached school, which would again be soiled on her way back, and yet, she did not give up. The guard who was then appointed for her, wrote in his memoirs about what she would say to those men. "As I do the sacred task of teaching my fellow sisters, the stones or cow dung that you throw seem like flowers to me. May God bless you!"

What we must remember:

Savitribai, along with Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, fought for the rights of women, peasants, Dalits and backward castes. Both of them bravely faced the abuses hurled at them by reactionary and casteist dominant forces. They carried on their struggle for gender equality and fight against caste system in spite of tremendous maltreatment by the Manuvadi and Brahminic forces.

Conclusion:

Savitribai was having unbreakable courage to face orthodox people. Devoted to social welfare, Savitribai, while taking care of patients during the third bubonic plague, herself got the disease and died in 1897. She was first woman to enter into male bastion society. She was not a conventional

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Indian devoted wife but she was a bread winner, inspiring teacher, courageous leader, brave social reformer, great thinker and critic writer. Through her thoughts and works she could bring about a complete change in all spheres of women's lives. Savitribai went on to become India's first woman teacher and headmistress. It is her struggle and story that marks the beginning of modern Indian women's public life in India.

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