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Savitribai Phule: The mother of Indian Renaissance

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Abstract : In India, the position of mother is considered as the highest and her role is crucial in upbringing the family and society, but in history of India except very few names like Gautami, Jijabai and so on, where is the mother, her role, who is the mother and why mother was not highlighted for her contribution to society? All these questions are arising again and again in my mind and heart. In this patriarchic historical writing society of India only fathers are highlighted as Father of Indian Renaissance, Father of the Nation, Father of Social Revolution,¹ Father of Modern India and so on. I started researching mother and her role by revisiting the pages of Indian History and I found a clue to my questions and there are women who played a major role in the progress of society. In 19th Century India we have social and religious reform movements and this period is called as Indian Renaissance, during this period Savitribai Phule come forward and played a crucial role of mother to uplift the society for the progress of the complete nation.

Index Terms - Savitribai Phule , Gowtami, Jeejabai, Davadase, Mali, Backward

INTRODUCTION

During 19th Century the conditions of India was worse which were continuing from past many years, on one side tribal's, peasants and rulers were fighting for their independence against British rule, and on the other side common society was suffering with social evils and economic problems. To say, in true words country was in dark era where women were treated as mere slaves. They don't have their own life to live and they have to live to serve their husband and family. Upon those social problems, social evils such as illiteracy, sati system, devadasi system, prostitution, child marriages, polytheism, polygamy, caste burden, untouchability, widowhood, zamindari system and other number of problems made women's life miserable.²

The early attempts at reforming the conditions under which Indian women is linked were largely conducted by men, By the late 19th C their wives, sisters, daughters, and others affected by campaigns, such as that for women education and other related issues had themselves joined in many movements. In this situation there arises Savitribai Phule as the candle light in 1948 by establishing the first school for girls along with her husband and this year has become the landmark for the beginning of the fight for equal rights and justice in India from common society.

Savitribai Phule was born in the backward Mali community and was able to express herself in most radical and eloquent terms broke all the traditional shackles of 19th century India to herald a new age of thinking and contributed considerable in adding glory to the mission of modern India social scenario. One of the earliest crusaders of education for girls, and dignity for the most vulnerable sections of society — dalits, women and widows and become the first dalit woman educationist, the first woman teacher, the first poet and the foremost emancipator of women and altogether she was the great dalit woman social reformer of 19th Century, India.³

Savitribai hails from an agricultural family in a depressed society of Navgoan, Satara district in Pune. Pune become the centre of Peshwas after Shivajis rule, orthodox Brahmins and Bhattas during 17th and 18th Centuries. Their religion did not permit female education. Even after the end of Peshwas rule Brahmin and Bhatt dominated Pune and many times fought with Britishers in educational matters. Especially in the case of women, according to them if women gets education means either it become sin or she will go to hell. This kind of thought they had and considered it was against their religion. During in those conditions even Europeans efforts were also failed in imparting education to women.⁴ In such circumstances Savitribai received education and knowledge from her husband Jyotirao Phule later joined formal school and took 'Teacher's Training' from 'Normal School' and become the first women teacher of India, 19th Century.

SAVITRIBAI PHULE AND HER CONTRIBUTIONS:

The works of scholars such as two books of M. I. Mali's entitled 'Kranthzfyothi Savithribai Phule' published by Majestic Prakshan in 1980 and "Savitribai Phule — Samagra Wangmay" 1988, published by Ambedkarite Buddhist Book Publishers, Dr. K. P. Deshpande's, Agnifule -Savitribai Yanchi Kavita: Swaroop Ani Sameeksh, 1982,⁵ published by Ambedkarite Buddhist Book Publishers, N. G Pawar's book entitled 'Savithribai Phule - Ashtpylu Vyaktimattav, published by Padmagandha Prakashan in 2004, Dr. Kiran Nagatode's Karma Yogini Savitribai Phule, published by Deelipraj Prakashan, 2013,⁶ and all of these works are in Marathi language, also number of other published research works on her and articles, information available on website and theatrical works has given clear picture to appreciate Savitribai Phule and her contributions in the fields of social reforms, education and literary writings to understand her as Mother of Indian Renaissance.

SAVITRIBAI PHULE AS SOCIAL REFORMER

The works of scholars like M. U. Mali and N. U. Pawar has given clear picture to appreciate her important role as social reformer.

- 1) Educational Reforms
- 2) Establishment of Women Organization Working committee 1860
- 3) Widow Remarriages started in 1865
- 4) Child Infanticide Abolition committee
- 5) Started Orphanage Home
- 6) Opened the 'Houd' (Well) for Shudra Atishudra, 1968.⁷

SAVITRIBAI PHULE: THE FIRST GREAT WOMAN TEACHER OF INDIA :

Jyotirao Phule appointed Savitribai Phule his wife as teacher in the first school for girls at Rhidewada, Budwarpet, Pune in 1848 A.D. She becomes the first great women teacher of India. Dr M. (I. Mali in his book "Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule", 1980 wrote — "In the History of India Savitribai Phule Stands as first woman teacher and first women leader of Women Liberation Movement".⁸ 'Savithribai, the school mistress has nobly volunteered to devote herself for improvement of female education without any remuneration. We hope that as the knowledge advances the people of these country will be awakened to the advantages of the female education and they will cordially assist in all such plans as calculated to improve the condition of those who have hitherto been unaccountably neglected by the tyranny of prejudice which has no foundation in the sacred law of the country and which has no voice of reason for its support nor hand of expediency for its plea.'⁹

Savitribai Phule, along with her husband Jyotirao Phule faced severe opposition from almost all sections. She as the first lady teacher of India at the time when minor orthodox caste people used to look down was't easy and was subject to intense harassment every day as she walked to the school. stones, mud and dirt were flung at her as she passed. But Savitribai Phule faced everything courageously. Rashtramata Savitribai Phule, who gave her entire life for:

- Educating the females
- Educating the untouchables
- Educating the poor
- Educating the workers
- Educating the labors
- Educating the senior citizens
- Educating all the people of all the age groups from all the castes and communities...

SAVITRIBAI PHULE LITERARY ACTIVITIES :

Savitribai Phule become first versatile woman writer of 19th Century, India for her pioneering works in literary world. She has put together her valuable writings and got published. According to K. P. Deshpande 'Savitribai Phule is unmatched poetess of nineteenth century; her writing have ocean deep meaning and historical importance. 'Savitribai Phule is not only a teacher and an activist but also a great writer.'¹⁰

N.G Pawar in his work 'The Literature of Mahatma Phule and Savitribai Phule' says that their writings are rich sources of Marathi literature which presents the period of exploitation of women, downtrodden and common masses of India during those times.

Braj Ranjan Ma & in his edited work along with Pamela Sardar 'A Forgotten Liberator The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule' published by Mountain Peak Publishers, 2008, writes 'Savitribai Phule: A pioneer of engaged poetry'¹¹

Sunil Sardar and Victor Paul present translations of Savitribai Phule 's five poems written in Marathi in the essay titled "Pioneering Engaged Writing" wrote walked to the school. Stones, mud and dirt were 'Savitribai Phule was the first Dalit woman, in-fact the first Indian woman whose poems drew a:tfpt@Jjn the British Empire. She was the mother of modern poetry stressing necessity of English and education through her poems'¹².

The literary writings of Savitribai Phule are:

1. Kavyaphule — Collection of poems, 1854
2. Bhavankashj Subodh Ratnakar, 1892
3. Jyotirao's Speeches, Edited by Savitribai Phule, 25th December 1856
4. Savitribai's Letters to Jyotirao Phule
5. Speeches of Savitribai Phule, 1892
6. Regular writer of 'Gruhini' Magazine

All these writings has been collected together in a one hundred and ninety-four paged volume — ‘The complete works of Savitribai Phule’ edited by Dr. M. (I Mali).

SAVITRIBAI PHULE VIEWS ON CASTE:

- Dividing human beings into caste system itself is FOOLISHNESS (MURKTHA).
- Selfish people for their benefits they took the help of caste.
- Since thousands of years so called upper caste kept sudras and atisudras far away from knowledge, property and political conditions. That is why many foreigners invaded our country. Many times we have lost our battles. For this only and so called Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are responsible. ¹³

The Renaissance period is considered as the greatest period in the History of the world though which ever be the part of the world or period, either 15th Century Italy, Europe or 19th century India, Asia because it removed dark age and brought modernism with scientific knowledge. The main strands of this awakening were felt intensely in the social, religious, cultural, economical and political domains because people lost confidence totally in existing rule, administration,¹⁴ customs and traditions from ancient times. In such conditions there arises Savitribai Phuleto spread the light of liberty, equality, fraternity and to empower the downtrodden community, women and Society on the whole.

Savitribai Phule is Modem India’s first women social reformer, teacher, a radical exponent of mass and female educationist, a champion of women’s liberation and courageous mass leader who took on the forces of caste and patriarchy certainly had her independent identity and contribution. It is indeed a measure of the ruthlessness of elite-controlled knowledge-production that a figure as important as Savitribai Phule fails to find any mention in the history of modern India. Government of India honoured her by publishing a postage stamp on 10th March 1998 exactly after hundreds years of her death. ¹⁵

The time when women were mere objects-to-be-used, education for women was considered no less than a punishable crime; she dared to speak against the unpardonable boundaries imposed on women in Indian society. Savitribai Phule ignited millions of lives, for which today’s ¹⁶ women and everyone should be grateful to her. So therefore, I would like to consider Savitribai Phule as ‘Mother of Indian Renaissance’.

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