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Thoughts of Savitribai Phule in women's education and capacity building

Arjun Bhowmik* and Debdip Bhattacharyya

Department of Education, University of Kalyani, Pin-741235, West Bengal, India.

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Abstract

Savitribai Phule was the first female teacher in India, a social reformer and a poet. The objectives of the study are to find out the thoughts of Savitribai Phule regarding women and social status; to study the contributions in the field of women's education and capacity building, the role as a social reformer and the relevance of her ideas in present day situation. The research method is qualitative in nature and associated with the historical research procedure. Content analysis technique is used to address the specific research questions. The study revealed that her writing, speeches, and organizations like the Mahila Seva Mandal to raise awareness about women's rights and inspire them to fight for their place in society. She was a revolutionary Indian educationist and social reformer who significantly impacted women's education and capacity building in 19th century India. Her ideas like universal education, critical thinking, gender equality, caste annihilation and concept of night school are very significant and relevant in present education system.

Keywords: Women's Education; Social reformer; Capacity Building

1. Introduction

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family". Women face a wide range of biases in society against them-unequal opportunities to education, employment and asset ownership (Christabell, 2009). The concept of women's education and capacity building has been a major concern of all over the world. Education plays important role in our life as it is one of the confounding factors of human development (Ghosal & Guha, 2017). Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender based discrimination (Mohi-ud-Din, 2018). Women empowerment, referring to the empowerment of women in our present society, has become a significant topic of discussion in regards to development and economics (Pathak, 2016). Education is an important instrument for increasing and improving the chances of women's employability and for empowering women as they learn to think for themselves, become confident and also develop the capability of recognizing more acutely the areas of exploitation (Mandal, 2021). Capacity building, broadly speaking, is a procedure or activity that enhances an individual's or organization's ability to accomplish the stated goals. It improves each person's capacity and abilities to reach their greatest potential and lead a happier, more fulfilling life (Sivadasan, 2012). Capacity building of women by means of SHG is furnishing the advantage to the particularized and also to the household and community as an entirety by collective action for improvement (Juster & Chepkemboi, 2019). Capacity-building of girls lead to their empowerment and the reorientation of roles played by them in our society (Karim et al., 2021). Only when women are empowered through capacity building and educated can they contribute to the fullest extent of their abilities, which is necessary for India to become a developed country (Singh, 2014).

Savitribai Phule was the first female teacher in India, a social reformer and a poet. She was influential in advancing women's rights in India. She is credited for starting the feminist movement in India. She worked to end unfair treatment and discrimination against people on the basis of gender and caste. Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule believed that

*Corresponding author: Arjun Bhowmik

education might be used to improve the lot of socially downtrodden groups. In India, she and her spouse were the first to educate women.

On January 3, 1831, Savitribai Phule was born in the Maharashtra village of Naigaon, in the Satara district. Her Khandoji Nevse Patil and Lakshmibai were the parents. When she was nine years old in 1840, she married Jyotirao Phule (Mahatma Jotiba Phule). In addition, Jyotirao Phule was a brilliant writer, social activist, anti-caste social reformer, and thinker. Jotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule were childless. A child of a Brahmin widow was adopted by them. That child's name was Yashawant Rao. Phule and her husband make many social services. In 1848, they established their first female school in Pune at Bhidewada, the home of Tatyasaheb Bhide. She had established eighteen schools for females with Jyotirao Phule, and in 1852 she established Mahila Sewa Mandal to promote women's rights. She also fought against the social injustices of the time such as child marriage, sati pratha and still prevalent caste system and was one of the advocates for women's right in the country. She was a feminist and also a humanist. She dedicated her whole life for the betterment and upliftment of the society.

2. Review of related literature

Pandey and Murmu (2024) studied on educational legacy of Savitribai Phule in modern day India and concluded that Phule's pioneering initiatives, such as establishing schools for girls and promoting social reform through education, serve as compelling precedents for contemporary educational interventions. Furthermore, her unwavering commitment to challenging entrenched social hierarchies and fostering critical thinking underscores the transformative potential of education as a tool for societal change. Santra and Madhu (2023) worked on Savitribai Phule: A Harbinger of Indian Society and Education and reported that her philosophy of education is relevant to the current context, which includes the goals of universal education, gender equality, the development of humanism, and the liberation of education. She is the mother of feminists in India, breaking all rules and regulations in the patriarchal society. Her creation of night schools, modern education, and the Mid Day Meal scheme has an impact on today and inspires us with life's challenges. Mandal and Farabi (2023) found that she battled against patriarchal oppression, gender discrimination, social injustice, and antiquated texts that attempted to repress women and Dalits over time. She contributed to the development of confidence among the oppressed by providing them with knowledge and attempting to bring a sizable portion of the populace back from the depths of despair. She has made a groundbreaking and commendable contribution to schooling. Her contributions to education have a significant impact on the equality-based modern educational system. Garaian and Sen (2021) conducted a study on Savitribai Phule the first lady teacher and social reformer in nineteenth century of India. It showed that the name Savitribai Phule was strongly linked to equal rights and women's education. Biswas (2020) studied on pioneer of women empowerment: Savitribai Phule. This paper is evident that religious restrictions create major barrier in the way of women education and women empowerment. Religious blind beliefs and customs were the major barrier before Savitribai in educating and empowering women.

3. Knowledge gap

From the above study analysis, the investigator found that there was no research on thoughts of Savitribai Phule in women's education and capacity building. So the problem under the study is stated as 'THOUGHTS OF SAVITRIBAI PHULE IN WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING'.

4. Significance of the study

In the current educational system, this study is highly significant and pertinent. Savitribai Phule tried to break the conventional system of education that was prevailed in the society and wanted to reconstruct it as an open and universal education system of all. She was a social reformer, poet, educationist, and first female teacher of India. Her thoughts and contributions were very significant in the field of women's education and capacity building. She helped in setting up the first school for women in India. Through this study, therefore, the contributions of Savitribai Phule to women's education, as well as capacity building of women is addressed.

5. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are following-

- To find out the thoughts of Savitribai Phule regarding women and social status.
- To study the contributions of Savitribai Phule in the field of women's education and capacity building.
- To study the roles of Savitribai Phule as a social reformer.

- To study the relevance of Savitribai Phule's ideas in present day situation.

6. Research questions

- What were the thoughts of Savitribai Phule regarding women and social status?
- What were the contributions of Savitribai Phule in Women's Education and capacity building?
- What were the roles of Savitribai Phule as a social reformer?
- What was the relevance of Savitribai Phule's ideas in present day situation?

7. Methodology of the study

The research method is qualitative in nature and associated with the historical research procedure. Content analysis technique is used to address the specific research questions.

8. Findings and Discussion of the study

8.1. Objective 1: To find out the thoughts of Savitribai Phule regarding women and social status

8.1.1. Women's rights

Savitribai Phule believed that women's rights are fundamental and not privileges. She championed the rights of women to choose their own lives, including marriage and education. She actively protests against child marriage, widow immolation (sati). She also supported widow remarriage and fought against female infanticide. Her writing, speeches, and organizations like the Mahila Seva Mandal to raise awareness about women's rights and inspire them to fight for their place in society.

8.1.2. Mahila Seva Mandal

In 1852, Savitribai Phule started Mahila Seva Mandal, which worked to make women more aware of their human rights, the value of life, and other social problems. She went on to organize a successful barbers strike in Mumbai and Pune against the prevailing practice of shaving of widows' heads.

8.1.3. Social status

She also challenged the notion that women were inferior to men and advocated for their equal status in society. She supported inter-cast marriages and did not view premarital pregnancy as a crime, rather supporting the girls involved. She recognized that three basic needs were also crucial for their empowerment, such as food, health and clothing.

8.2. Objective 2: To study the contributions of Savitribai Phule in the field of women's education and capacity building

Savitribai Phule was a revolutionary Indian educationist and social reformer who significantly impacted women's education and capacity building in 19th century India. She was the first female teacher in India. She and her husband, Jyotirao Phule, built the first girls' school in Pune in 1848. She worked as a teacher for girls and women from different social backgrounds and castes. The upper castes strongly opposed her because they believed that educating these groups especially woman was sinful. To ensure that women from all social strata had access to education, the couple founded several schools for females, including ones in nearby villages. Savitribai Phule was created two educational trusts in the 1850s. These later operated other schools for both boys and girls, but Savitribai's focus remained on the education and advancement of women. She wrote a lot of poems, diaries and letters. Two books titled Kavya Phule and Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar contain her poetry. She has encouraged women in several of her poems to become self-sufficient, educate themselves, and stand on their own two feet.

Savitribai Phule made a substantial contribution to capacity building, especially with her emphasis on women's empowerment and education. Realizing that education was essential to the advancement of society; she co-founded the first girls' school in India and dedicated her life to educating women and other underprivileged groups. Her deeds paved the way for women to realize their full potential and helped remove obstacles to education. Due to an increase in the dropout rate, she began giving children stipends. She continued to be a role model for the young females. She urged and inspired them to paint, writing, join competition etc. In order to raise awareness among parents and help them

understand the value of education, she also regularly organized Parents Teacher Meetings (PTMs) and urged all parents to send their kids to school (Parveen, 2022).

8.3. Objective 3: To study the roles of Savitribai Phule as a social reformer

8.3.1. Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha

Savitribai Phule was a social reformer in India. Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha was a care centre created by Savitribai Phule, India's first female teacher and a social reformer. The centre's main goal was to give shelter and support to widows and women who had been sexually assaulted. This way, they could keep their children from being aborted and help them become independent. This was an important step in the history of women's rights and education.

8.3.2. Mahila Seva Mandal

Mahila Seva Mandal was an important group started by Savitribai Phule in 1852. The group's main goal was to make women aware of their rights, dignity, and other social problems. This was a big step in India's women education and social reform.

8.3.3. Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seeking Society)

She founded Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873 with her husband Jyotirao Phule to advance social equality, combat prejudice based on caste, and defend the rights of under-represented groups, like as women and Dalits. The advocacy organisation promoted measures such preventing child marriage, promoting widow remarriage, and support inter-caste marriages. She fought to end unfair treatment and prejudice against people on the basis of gender and caste.

8.3.4. Social services

Savitribai Phule compelled the British government to begin relief efforts during the 1897 drought, and a night school for labourers and farmers was established. Both Savitribai and Jyotirao put their social causes ahead of their own happiness, and she had worked in social services during the 1897 plague outbreak (Parveen, 2022).

8.3.5. First Infanticide Prohibition Home

On January 28, 1853, Savitribai founded the first home in India devoted to safeguarding women who might commit infanticide. At the Infanticide Prohibition Home, widows may give birth and then leave their infants (Maneesha and Biswas, 2024).

8.4. Objective 4: To study the relevance of Savitribai Phule's ideas in present day situation

8.4.1. Universal education

Savitribai Phule's ideas for free and universal education for all children, especially girls are very significant and relevant in present day education system.

8.4.2. Critical thinking

Her push for education that encourages independent thinking and questioning traditional norms is still important for fighting societal biases and promoting true intellectual freedom.

8.4.3. Gender Equality

She was fought against gender discrimination and strongly emphasis on gender equality. She fights against child marriage and Sati and for the rights of widows and the rights of people who own property and inheritances. These fights directly take on the sexist and unfairly economic world we live in.

8.4.4. Caste Annihilation

The fight against power imbalances, discrimination, and casteism in today's India should be inspired by her work with the Satyashodhak Samaj to break down caste hierarchies.

8.4.5. Concept of night school

In 1855, the Phule couple founded a night school for labourers and farmers. Phule couples established the night school to satisfy the needs of the numerous oppressed people who were only accessible at night and were unable to attend regular schools (Kasera, 2023).

9. Conclusion

At the end of the study, it is concluded that like a true philosopher, Savitribai Phule identified that if the status of women and the common mass could be changed, society would automatically be changed. Instilling the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, and moral character in the next generation of people of all backgrounds is the main focus of her educational philosophy. She has made a remarkable contribution to women's freedom and capacity building. She had strong opinions regarding women's rights to education, freedom, socioeconomic standing, and access to education. Her actions are mostly focused on the women's education movement and its dissemination. She is one of the eminent personalities whose memory illuminates the path of our nation.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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