

Indian educator Fatima Sheikh

January 10, 2022

In news– 191st birthday of Fatima Sheikh was observed on 9th January 2022.

A brief note on Fatima Sheikh-

- She was **India's first Muslim woman teacher** and was a **colleague of Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule**.
- She was born on 9th January 1831 in Pune and was considered to be a feminist icon in pre-independent India.
- She **co-founded the Indigenous Library in 1848** which was one of India's first schools for girls along with the Phules.
- In Pune, **Sheikh along with her brother Usman offered their home to the Phules**, who had been evicted for attempting to educate people from the lower castes.
- Along with Savitribai Phule, she **taught communities of marginalized Dalit and Muslim women and children** who were denied education based on class, religion, or gender.
- The efforts that she put in, working alongside the Phules, to provide opportunities to those born in the lower caste, got recognised as the **Satyashodhak Samaj (Truthseekers' Society) movement**.
- In 2014, Sheikh's achievements were featured by the government in the form of a profile in Urdu textbooks, along with other such exemplary and resolute educators of her time.

Jyotiba Phule-

- He was **born in the Mali family of Poona in 1827**.
- **The Malis belonged to shudra Varna** and were placed immediately below the peasant caste.

- He was educated at a Marathi school with a three year break at a mission school in Poona.
- Phule completed his English schooling in 1847.
- He was married at a young age of 13 to a girl of his own community, Savithribhai Phule, who was chosen by his father.
- **He fought against the social stigma prevalent in the society during the nineteenth century.**
- He was the harbinger of unheard ideas for social reforms.
- He wanted the British government to abolish Brahmin Kulkarni's position, and a post of village headman (Patil) filled on the basis of merit.
- Phule wanted the Brahmin bureaucracy to be replaced by non-Brahmin bureaucracy.
- **He organized lower castes under the banner of Satya Shodhak Samaj.**
- He **started awareness campaigns that inspired the personalities like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi,** who later undertook major initiatives against caste discrimination.
- He **wrote mainly in Marathi and that too in a Marathi meant for the masses.**
- **In Brahmanache Kasab (1869) Phule has exposed the exploitation of Brahmin priests.**
- In **Gulamgiri** (1873) he has given a historical survey of the slavery of lower castes.
- In 1883, he published a collection of his speeches under the title **Jhetkaryarlcha Asud (The cultivator's whip-cord)** where he has analysed how peasants were being exploited in those days.
- A text of his philosophical statement can be found in **Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak** (A book of True Religion For All) published in 1891.
- Dhananjay Keer in 1974, penned down his biography titled, 'Mahatma Jyotiba Phule: Father of Our Social Revolution'.

- Maharashtra Krishi Vidyapeeth at Rahuri, has been renamed Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth.

Savithribhai Phule-

- She was **born on 3 January 1831 at Naigaon in Maharashtra's Satara district.**
- Shei was not educated at the time of her marriage, as she was from a backward caste and a woman.
- **Savitribai Phule was taught by Jyotiba at their home.**
- Later, **she took a teacher's training course at an institute run by an American missionary in Ahmednagar and in Pune's Normal School.**
- During that time there were only a few missionary schools which were "open to all" and Brahmins were the only caste group that received an education.
- In this context Jyotiba and Savitri **opened a school for women in 1848 which was the country's first school for women started by Indians.**
- She then started teaching girls in Pune's Maharwada, along with Sagunabai, a revolutionary feminist and a mentor to Jyotiba.
- Savitribai was also **a poetess and published Kavya Phule in 1854 and Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar in 1892.**
- In her poem, "**Go, Get Education**", she urged the oppressed communities to get an education and break free from the chains of oppression.
- In 1852, Savitribai started the **Mahila Seva Mandal** to raise awareness about women's rights.
- Savitribai called for a women's gathering where members from all castes were welcome and everybody was expected to sit on the same mat.
- Jyotiba and Savithribhai also started the **Home for the Prevention of Infanticide** in her house, a place where Brahmin widows could deliver their babies safely.
- In the 1850s, the Phule couple initiated two educational trusts – the Native Female School, Pune and The Society

for Promoting the Education of Mahars, Mangs and
Etceteras.