

Jyotibha phule and Savitribhai phule

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Manifest pedagogy: Jyotibha Phule along with Savitri Bhai Phule are important social reformers in Indian History. Their contribution to and impact on Modern Indian history is commendable. They were pioneers in Lower caste and Women movements which laid the foundation for later day evolution of alternative voices of the nation. There is a good possibility of both Prelims and Mains questions on them.

In news: Savitribai Phule's 187th anniversary was on 3 January, 2020.

Placing it in syllabus: Historical personalities

Dimensions:

- His Biography
- Savitribhai Phule
- His political ideology
- Their social outlook
- His writings
- Influences on him
- His contribution to dalit empowerment

Content:

His biography:

- Phule was born in **Mali family** of Poona in 1827.
- The Malis **belonged to shudra Varna** and were placed immediately below 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 young 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 started **awareness campaigns** that inspired the personalities like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, who later undertook major initiatives against caste discrimination.
- **Dhananjay Keer** in 1974, penned down his **biography titled, 'Mahatma Jyotiba Phule: Father of Our Social Revolution'.**
- The Mahatma Phule Museum in Pune has been set-up in honour of the great reformer.
- Maharashtra Krishi Vidyapeeth at Rahuri, has been renamed Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth.

Savithribhai Phule:

- Savitribai Phule was born on 3 January 1831 at Naigaon in Maharashtra's Satara district.
- Savitri **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.**
- It 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.
- They also adopted a child, Yashwant, who was born at the shelter.
- She simultaneously **campaigns against child marriage**, while **supporting widow remarriage.**

His political ideology:

- The **British rule** opened up new employment opportunities in the administration.
- The **political power at local level was also being given to the Indians.**
- Phule who had worked as a **member of the Poona Municipality** could visualise how lower castes would be able to **acquire power at local level during the period of British rule** and also enter the colonial bureaucracy.
- He **wanted lower castes to exploit the opportunity and get rid of the tyranny of Brahmins.**
- Phule assured the colonial rulers that if the Shudras were made happy and contented, they need not worry about

the loyalty of the subjects.

- 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 Brahmin bureaucracy to be replaced by **non-Brahmin bureaucracy**.
- But if the non-Brahmins were not available, he thought that the government should appoint the British men to these posts.
- The **masses had not yet become politically conscious**.
- The high caste elites were claiming that they were the true representatives of the people and therefore were demanding political rights.
- This process, Phule thought, would reestablish the political supremacy of the high castes.
- Phule advised his followers from the lower castes not to participate in the movement for political rights.
- He **argued that the Indian National Congress or other political associations were not national** in the true sense of the term because they represented only high castes.
- In his Satya Shodhak Samaj, he had made it a rule not to discuss politics.
- However, **his efforts to organise lower castes under the banner of Satya Shodhak Samaj should be seen as a political activity**.
- He **gave preference to social reform rather than political reform** in the 19th century.

Their social outlook:

- In 1848, Phule began his work as a social reformer when he **started a school for girls of low and untouchable castes**.
- 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.

- He, along with his wife **opened two more schools** for girls in 1851.
- Phule established a **school for untouchables and a night school** in 1852.
- He supported the **movement for widow remarriage** in 1860.
- In 1865, he **published a book on caste system** written by one of his friends Padval.
- **Satya Shodhak Samaj was established in 1873** by him and his colleagues to organise the lower castes against the Hindu social order based on varna and caste system.
- The government appointed him as a **member of the Poona Municipality in 1876** and continued as a member till 1882 and fought for the cause of downtrodden.
- The Phule couple along with Sagunabai **started their school at Bhide Wada, which included mathematics, science and social studies instead of Brahmanical texts like Vedas and Shastras.**
- Jyotiba and his colleagues saw the need for an organization that served the interests of non-Brahmins and **started Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873.**
- After **Jyotiba's death in 1890, Savitribai** carried forward the work of the organization and also **chaired the annual session held at Saswad in 1893.**
- **She initiated the first Satyashodhak marriage** – marriage without dowry, Brahmin priests or Brahminical rituals.
- Savitribai Phule died on 10 March 1897, while caring for a patient in the clinic which she had opened for the treatment of those affected by the bubonic plague.

His writings:

- 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 Jhetkaryaricha Asud (The cultivator's whipcord)** 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.

Influences on him:

British rule had brought to an end the tyranny of the last Peshwa in Maharashtra and had not only established law and order but also the **principle of equality before the law**. The new rulers opened the opportunities in education and mobility in occupation for the members of all castes.

New ideas of equality and liberty could reach the moderately educated sections of the lower caste. Phule who was concerned with the slavery of the lower castes favoured the British rule.

His writings reveal that **his thinking on social and political issues was influenced by Christianity and the ideas of Thomas Paine** (1737-1809). Phule was known for his religious radicalism in England.

His contribution to dalit empowerment:

- He was **worried about the condition of Shudras** who were deprived of their rights by the Brahmins who kept them ignorant.
- Phule thought that selfish Brahmins had prohibited women and dalits from taking to education in order to continue their domination.
- He **attacked the customs and practices** such as child marriage, polygamy, harassment of dalits and even varna system and Vedic culture.
- He **advised Shudra peasants not to have more than one**

wife and not to marry their young children.

- He started **schools for untouchables** and promoted their social development.
- His writings reflected his **zeal to work for the emancipation of dalits.**
- As a recognition of his **great work for the lower castes**, he was felicitated and a **title of 'Mahatma'** was **conferred** on him **by the people in Bombay in 1888.**