



## SAVITRIBAI PHULE – LEADERS IN NEWS

**NEWS:** On the occasion of the 194th birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule, let's look at her contributions to women's education and social reform.

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

#### Early Life and Marriage

- Savitribai Phule, born on January 3, 1831, was the eldest daughter of Khandoji Neveshe Patil of the Mali community.
- Married at the age of 10 to Jyotirao Phule, who was 13 at the time, in 1840 when child marriages were common.

#### Education and Early Contributions

- Savitribai's education began after her marriage, with her husband teaching her at home.
- She later attended a teachers' training institution in Pune, marking the beginning of her journey as an educationist.
- In 1848, the Phules established the country's first school for girls in Bhidewada, Pune, defying societal norms that denied education to women.

#### Advocacy for Marginalized Communities

- The Phules opened multiple schools for girls, Shudras, and Ati-Shudras, facing significant opposition from Indian nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak.
- Savitribai and Jyotirao were expelled from their family home due to their efforts to educate marginalized communities.

#### Establishment of Social Institutions

- Together, they founded 18 schools and created the Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, a shelter for pregnant widows and survivors of sexual assault, providing a safe space for childbirth.
- By 1884, they had cared for 35 Brahmin widows, reflecting their commitment to social reform.



## Revolutionary Educational Philosophy

- Savitribai's pedagogy emphasized questioning and liberation through education.
- Her poems advocated for breaking societal chains of caste and patriarchy, promoting the value of education, especially for women.
- Example from her poem *Samuh Samvad*: "To live with dignity, go to school/Education is the true ornament of human beings."

## Overcoming Societal Challenges

- Savitribai faced harassment from conservative men who opposed her teaching efforts, yet remained undeterred.
- She carried an extra sari daily to change into after being pelted with stones or cow dung on her way to school.

## Broader Social Reforms

- Advocated for inter-caste marriages, widow remarriage, and the abolition of child marriage, sati, and dowry systems.
- The Phules adopted Yashwantrao, the child of a widow, whom they educated to become a doctor.

## Establishment of the Satyashodhak Samaj



- In 1873, the Phules co-founded the *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Truth-Seeker's Society) to challenge social evils and promote reforms such as less expensive weddings and widow remarriage.

## Humanitarian Work During the Famine

- During the 1877 famine, Savitribai set up 52 food camps to provide relief, especially to children.
- She managed a camp in Dhankawadi, preparing over 2,000 bhakris daily for those in need.

## Final Years and Legacy

- Jyotirao Phule passed away in 1890, and Savitribai defied societal norms by performing his last rites.
- During the 1897 Bubonic plague, Savitribai served in relief efforts, contracted the disease, and passed away on March 10, 1897.
- Honored posthumously: In 1998, India issued a stamp in her name, and Pune University was renamed Savitribai Phule Pune University in 2015.

## Fatima Sheikh: A Pioneering Ally

- Fatima Sheikh, a teacher, and reformer, collaborated with the Phules in opening the first girls' school in her home in Pune in 1848.
- Alongside Savitribai, she went door-to-door persuading families to enroll their children in school despite widespread opposition.
- Though her life is poorly documented, her contributions to education and social reform remain significant.

## Modern Recognition

- Google Doodle commemorated Fatima Sheikh's birth anniversary in 2022, highlighting her role as a pioneering educator and reformer.
- The Phules and Fatima Sheikh remain symbols of resilience and progress in the fight for education, caste equality, and gender rights.

**Source:** <https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/knowledge-nugget-savitribai-phule-birth-anniversary-jyotirao-dalit-9756695/>