



# Savitribai Phule's Contribution in Education: Some Considerations in relation to Women Empowerment

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<p><b>Received</b> 20/06/2025</p> <p><b>Accepted</b> 23/06/2025</p> <p><b>Published</b> 09/07/2025</p>	<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p><i>Savitribai Jyotirao Phule was one of the greatest pioneer Indian social reformers, educators, and poets in the 19th century. She played a crucial role in the education and empowerment of women, especially through her efforts in founding the first girls' school in Pune at Bhide Wada, along with her husband Jyotirao Phule. Savitribai worked tirelessly to improve the lives of child widows, fought against harmful practices like sati and child marriage, and advocated for widow remarriage. In addition, she was a strong supporter, as well advocate for the removal of caste and gender discrimination and 024.459 campaigned against untouchability. The study is conducted to examine the role of Savitribai Phule as a social reformer and also to analyze Phule's contribution to the development of women's education &amp; empowerment. This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing the qualitative content analysis technique to examine the educational and social contributions of Savitribai Phule with the application of descriptive-cum-analytical research design. Study has explored various research studies, books and other research work, which are based on primary sources of data. It is found that Phule viewed education as a powerful tool of liberation, something that could help oppressed and marginalized communities, particularly women and Socio-economically weaker sections, to break free from the societal shackles that kept them ignorant and subjugated. Her vision of education went beyond the traditional curriculum. She aimed to create a system that would foster gender sensitivity, intellectual criticality, and a socially reforming mindset. For Phule, education was not considered just about acquiring knowledge, but about enabling individuals to challenge entrenched social norms, particularly those related to gender discrimination and caste-based exclusion. It is concluded that lesson from the Savitribai Phule's journey; can be undertaken by the social work to advocate and protect the rights of</i></p>
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*the marginalized communities and women, in advancing comprehensive social justice and equality.*

**Keywords:** Education, Savitribai Phule, Women Empowerment

## Introduction

Savitribai Phule stands as a pioneering figure in the history of Indian education and social reform, particularly in the context of women's empowerment. Born in 1831 in Maharashtra, she emerged at a time when Indian society was deeply entrenched in caste and gender-based inequalities. In collaboration with her husband, Jyotirao Phule, she initiated transformative educational reforms that directly challenged the oppressive norms of 19th-century Indian society. At the heart of her mission was the belief that education is the most powerful tool to achieve social justice and women's liberation.

Savitribai Phule's contribution to education was revolutionary for its time. She was the first female teacher in India and played a vital role in establishing the first girls' school in Pune in 1848. Her initiatives were met with stiff resistance from orthodox social structures, yet she remained steadfast in her commitment to providing education to girls, Dalits and other marginalized groups. Through her work, Savitribai redefined the role of women not only as recipients of knowledge but also as disseminators of progressive ideas.

Her contribution goes beyond the mere act of opening schools. Savitribai believed that education should be inclusive and emancipatory. She introduced a curriculum that was modern and rational, focusing not only on reading and writing but also on science and social awareness. She recognized the intersectionality of gender and caste discrimination, and through her educational endeavors, she attempted to dismantle both. Her writings- poems, essays and speeches- consistently advocated for self-respect, gender equality, and the need to uplift the oppressed through knowledge.

The significance of Savitribai Phule's educational mission in the context of women's empowerment lies in its lasting impact. She created a space for women to question their subjugation and inspired many to participate in the public sphere. Her work encouraged the emergence of a feminist consciousness in India much before the organized women's movements took shape. She understood that true empowerment for women could only come when they were educated, economically independent, and socially aware.

This research seeks to revisit and analyze the contributions of Savitribai Phule with a critical lens, especially focusing on how her educational initiatives laid the foundation for women's empowerment in India. In doing so, it aims to explore the socio-cultural challenges she encountered, her methods of resistance, and the legacy she left behind in the domain of feminist pedagogy. By situating her efforts in the broader context of 19th-century reform movements and contemporary discourses on gender equality, this study intends to highlight her relevance in present-day education and empowerment debates.

Ultimately, Savitribai Phule's life and work offer a powerful testimony to how education can be used as an instrument for social transformation. Her journey from being a young girl denied access to education to becoming a symbol of change and resistance continues to inspire generations. Her vision and courage make her not only a beacon of women's empowerment but

also a foundational figure in the history of Indian education.

### **Review of Literature**

Das & Das (2021) emphasized how her contributions to education, particularly for girls and the marginalized communities have laid a foundation for social equality, mobility and educational opportunity that continues to shape Indian Society today. In his article “Educational contribution of Savitribai Phule in 21<sup>st</sup> century in India” author portrays Savitribai Phule as a trailblazing social reformer whose work continues to resonate in contemporary India.

Garaian and Sen (2021) highlighted that Savitribai Phule an influential Indian modern reformer educationist, as well as a poetess made remarkable contributions to the education and empowerment of women. In this study, Savitribai fought against social injustices such as child widow herd, child marriage and advocated for widow remarriage.

Banerjee et al. (2021) the contribution of the Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule on women’s education, women empowerment and backward class people.

Pandey and Murmu (2024) Educational legacy of Savitribai Phule in modern day India. His qualitative research paper explores the transformative journey of Savitribai Phule, a pioneering figure in Indian history. This study is known for challenging and dismantling gender barriers through education. Her legacy includes ground breaking initiatives like establishing school for girls, advocating for women’s rights and fighting social evils such as caste discrimination and child marriage.

Patel (2017) highlighted the contribution of Savitribai Phule for women’s rights movement during British rule. It deals with Savitribai Phule’s struggle to establish social harmony by establishing schools for Dalit, Muslim girls’ students. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several social reforms played key roles in transforming India into a progressive nation. One prominent figure among them was Savitribai Phule. She is celebrated for laying the milestone foundation for women’s socio-legal rights, liberty and education in India.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To know Savitribai Phule’s views on women education
- To know Savitribai Phule’s contribution on women empowerment
- To analyse the relevance of Savitribai Phule’s contribution on education and women empowerment to accelerate the women empowerment in India

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing the qualitative content analysis technique to examine the contribution of Savitribai Phule in education for women empowerment. This study has explored various research studies, books and other research work, which are based on sources of data.

The research draws its findings from both primary and secondary sources. Books and official government reports are the main resources. Information from secondary sources, such as scholarly publications, popular for relevant, which was them complied here.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **For Objective 1**

Educators contribute significantly to society by fostering learning, nurturing students' potential and shaping future citizens. Savitribai Phule significantly contributed to women's education in India by co-founding the first girls' school in the country in 1848. She fought against gender discrimination and championed equal access to education for girls, arresting that empowerment through knowledge is essential for social progress. Savitribai promoted the idea that education is a continuous journey. She believed individuals should seek knowledge throughout their lives, adopting to change and fostering personal and intellectual growth every day.

### **For Objective 2**

There is a distinct feature of Savitribai Phule's life, life purpose, life struggle and her contribution to the women empowerment. When Savitribai started teaching, there was strong opposition in the society. When she went to school to teach, people used to throw stones and even mud at her on the way. All these challenges did not break Savitribai's morale towards her passion, rather she started devoting her time to finding a solution to an even bigger challenge. At that time, it was most important for her that people should send their daughters to school to study. Savitribai used to go door to door talking to the people, explaining them the importance of education and while doing their work, don't know how many times she used to get disrespected by the people. Savitribai still didn't back down from her mission. She became the Messiah for women, widows and orphans and the medicine for their pain. Living life as a mission for the society is a great difficult task. Savitribai Phule did this difficult and great work in her life.

### **For Objective 3**

Savitribai's career was marked by her relentless efforts in advancing education for girls and marginalized communities by 1851, she and her husband managed three girls' schools in Pune with around 150 students. They opened a total of 18 schools, alongside initiatives such as "Mahila seva Mandal in 1851 to promote women rights and Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha", an infanticide prevention center for widows in 1853. In summary, while Savitribai Phule's contributions were monumental in early stages of women's empowerment in India, particularly through her pioneering work in education and social reform. Her focus was on challenging societal norms that hindered women's access to education and their overall well-being.

## **Significance of this Study**

- Savitribai Phule's pioneering work in women's education and social reform continues to inspire future generations, serving as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of education for women's empowerment and equality.
- Savitribai's life and work serve as a testament to the strength and potential of women to overcome societal barriers and achieve their full potential. Her legacy inspires women to pursue education, fight for their rights and challenge oppressive social norms, contributing to a more just and equitable society. Education, as championed by Savitribai, is a key to women's economic independence, enabling them to participate fully in the work force and contribute to their families and communities.
- Her story serves as a powerful reminder that education is not just a right but a tool for social

change and justice, motivating individuals to challenge oppressive norms and fight for equality.

### Conclusion

Savitribai Phule was indeed a revolutionary figure in Indian history, and her contributions to education and women's empowerment were nothing sort of a transformative. Her relentless efforts to promote education, particularly for girls and women, played a crucial role in reshaping society's views and advancing social justice in a time when these issues were deeply neglected.

Her journey wasn't just one of education but also one of empowerment for not only for women but also for marginalized groups of society. By providing them dignity of equality, free from violence, giving education and helping them to find their voice, she created a foundation for future societal progress, ensuring that scheduled caste people and women should remain the creators of the new society. It is concluded that Savitribai Phule lived her life for the education of women and for women empowerment. Her journey can be adopted and undertaken by the professionally trained social workers to advocate and protect the rights of the women, in advocating towards progress, comprehensive social justice and equality. By offering care and services, social workers can create a favorable environment, which would bring tangible changes in the lives of women and these vulnerable and poor sections.

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