

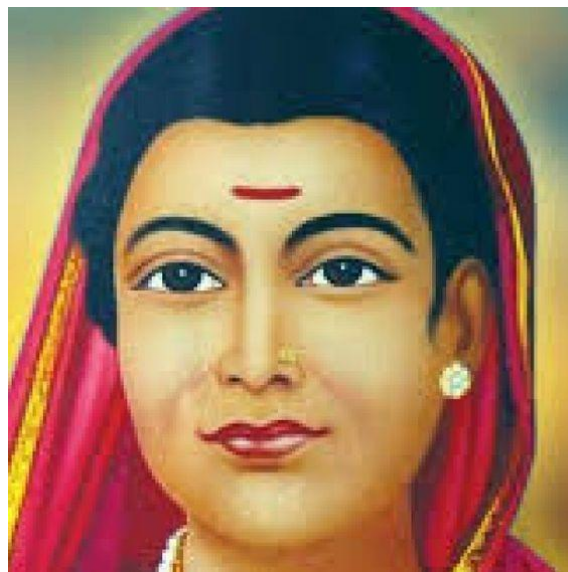


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Savitribai Phule

Savitribai was a woman ahead of her times, in thought and action, with the courage and sensitivity to lead a life defined by choices often ridiculed or aggressively opposed by society and its institutionalized ways. In 1868 when Savitribai was recuperating from an illness in Naigaon, she saw the villagers giving trouble to the couple. The boy was from a brahmin family, and he fell in love with a girl who belonged to the lower caste. Savitribai saved their life and advised them to leave the village and go to Pune and meet her husband, Jyotirao Phule, to help them with employment.

Savitribai Phule, Modern India's first women teacher, a woman who worked hard to liberate women by challenging the rigid caste system that existed in our society. Not only women she also constantly stressed the need for mass education to liberate the oppressed based on new social and moral values. She campaigned against untouchability and worked actively to abolish caste and gender-based discrimination. Savitribai Phule was born and raised in a small village called Naigaon in the Satara district on January 3, 1831, in the house of khanduji Newase. She was a curious child and eager to learn new things.



Savitribai Phule, when she was merely a nine-year-old, got married to Jyotirao Phule, who was 13 years old. Jyotirao Phule is extensively known for his works on social reform and education. Women's lack of educational opportunities struck him; he believed women were equally responsible for the nation's progress, so he wanted to start a school. For that, he began to teach Savitribai, and at the same time, she went to Mrs. Farar's Institution at Ahmednagar and Narman School in Pune to train as a teacher.

In 1848, Jyotirao Phule opened a school for girls in Bhidewada in Pune. Savitribai taught in the school and was its Headmistress. The school had children from different castes studying together. She believed that we all are human beings and we all are equal. Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule later started schools for children from the Mang and Mahar castes, who were regarded as untouchables. The couple opened a well in their house for the untouchables during an era when the shadow of an untouchable was considered impure. People were even reluctant to offer water to the thirsty untouchables.

Educating girls was radical then, and many opposed the couple's efforts. On her way to school daily, men would throw dung and stones at Savitribai. But this brave woman never stopped; she continued to fight against the stereotypes of society. She didn't let such regular threats and opposition stop her from doing what she believed.

She struggled and suffered with her revolutionary husband in equal measure. Jyotirao Phule, and his wife Savitribai, were the first in modern India to declare war on Brahmanic casteist culture and religion. Jyotirao set up the Satyashodak Samaj (The Truthseekers' Society) in 1873. The objective of the Samaj was 'to redeem the shudras and atishudras from the influence of the Brahmanical scriptures, teach them their human rights and liberate them from mental and religious slavery; Savitribai was an active member of the organization.

She started the practice of Satyashodak marriages – marriages conducted without any Brahmin priests. The Satyashodak marriage required the bridegroom to take an oath to give women education and equal rights. The mantras traditionally chanted by the Brahmin priest were to be sung by the bride and the bridegroom. She taught children from different castes and opened 18 schools with her husband. The couple also opened an Infanticide Prevention Centre (Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha) for pregnant rape victims and helped deliver and save their children.

Savitribai Phule was also a prolific author and poet. She published *Kavya Phule* in 1854 and *Bavankashi Subodh Ratnakar* in 1892, and a poem entitled "Go, Get Education," in which she encouraged those oppressed to free themselves by obtaining an education. As a result of her experience and work, she became an ardent feminist. She established the Mahila Seva Mandal to raise awareness for issues concerning women's rights. She also called for a gathering place for women that was free of caste discrimination or differentiation of any kind. Jyotirao Phule died on November 28, 1890. After Jyotirao's death, Savitribai led the Satyashodak Samaj.

Savitribai and her adopted son, Yashwant, opened a clinic to treat those affected by the third worldwide pandemic of bubonic Plague when it appeared around Nalasopara in 1897.

Savitribai was involved in relief work during these two years. She asked Yashwant to leave the army and come to Pune to help her with her relief work. The clinic was established on the stern outskirts of Pune, in an area free of infection. Savitribai died a heroic death trying to save the son of Pandurang Babaji Gaekwad. Upon learning that Gaekwad's son had contracted the Plague in the Mahar settlement outside of Mundhwa, Savitribai Phule rushed to his side and carried him on her back to the hospital. In the process, Savitribai Phule caught the Plague and died at 9:00 pm on the 10th of March, 1897.

Savitribai was a radical exponent of mass and female education, a champion of women's liberation, a pioneer of engaged poetry, and a courageous mass leader who took on the forces of caste and patriarchy and certainly had her independent identity and contribution.

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Reference : <https://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/savitri-phule-azim.pdf>