

## Savitribai Phule

Beginning public life through the field of education, feeding thousands of hungry people during famines who had no access to food, becoming a poet and writer by using literature as a tool for agrarian and social reform, striving so that every village and every community receives education and becomes cultured, inspiring women and Shudras—who lived lives akin to animals—to claim equal rights, not sinking into grief after her husband's death but tirelessly spreading the ideas of the Satyashodhak Samaj, working for children whom society had abandoned as “untouchables” during the plague in Maharashtra, serving them, taking them to her son Dr. Yashwant for treatment, and continuing to serve the sick even while knowing she herself could be harmed by the plague—and ultimately sacrificing her own life in that service. Such is the extraordinary personality of Savitribai Phule, whom we can rightly call sublime.



Ordinary people were living like animals, and Savitribai Phule pondered how humanity could be instilled in them. In her poetry collection *Kavyaphule*, she writes:

**शूद्रांना सांगण्याजोगा शिक्षण मार्ग है। शिक्षणाने मनुष्यत्व, पशुत्व हाटते पहा।।**

*"Shudras must be shown the path of education. Through education, humanity arises, animality disappears—see for yourself."*

Thus, Savitribai presented the fundamental idea of education as the path to humanity more than 150 years ago. She believed that people should meet each other with warmth, that education should awaken self-respect, that individuals should recognize their own identity, and beyond that, treat everyone in society with love and dignity.

After Mahatma Phule's death in 1890, Savitribai Phule shouldered the responsibility of the Satyashodhak Samaj with remarkable dedication. At a time when society confined women to the kitchen and children, she stepped forward for social work. She was perhaps the first woman in Maharashtra—and possibly in all of India—to do so. It is not that educated upper-caste women did not exist then, but their social activities were bound by rigid traditions. Beyond organizing public *haldi-kumkum* ceremonies, they could not cross the threshold of their homes.

The importance of Savitribai's work is evidenced in *Chakshurvaitatyam*, through the testimony of Mama Paramanand, known as the "Political Sage of Maharashtra." In the later years of his life, he wrote a letter on July 31, 1890, to Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad, requesting financial assistance for the Phule couple. In that letter, he wrote:

*"For their selfless service to the people, Jyotiba and his wife deserve lifelong support. No praise is enough for his wife. What can one say about her abilities? She fully supported her husband and faced every difficulty alongside him. Even among the so-called upper-caste women, it is rare to find such a self-sacrificing woman. This couple devoted their entire lives to public service. The British government ruling over our country should help such people, though it seems unlikely."*

In 1851, Savitribai was only about 20 years old. At that age, running a school for girls, enduring the anger and insults of a conservative society, and still training those girls was an extraordinary achievement. This work reflects Savitribai's patience, courage, and unwavering faith in her mission.

To such a great personality, we offer our respectful salutations.

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Reference: सावित्रीबाई फुले समग्र वाङ्मय - महाराष्ट्र राज्य साहित्य आणि संस्कृति मंडळ