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Savitribai Phule

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Why is in news? This Quote Means: ‘A woman without education is like a banyan tree without roots or leaves’, by Savitribai Phule

March 10 is the **death anniversary of Savitribai Phule**, who passed away in 1897 at the age of 66 years.

Savitribai was **one of the first women teachers of India**, and spent her life trying to empower women through education, in the face of virulent opposition.

About the quote:

Savitribai said, “A woman without education is like a banyan tree without roots or leaves; she cannot provide for her children and stay alive herself.”

Savitribai wrote on the subject of women’s education consistently and compellingly.

Two books of her poems, ‘**Kavya Phule**’ and ‘**Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar**’, were published in 1934 and 1982.

The quote says that a **woman without education is incomplete**.

Just like a Banyan tree cannot draw nutrition for itself without roots, and cannot provide shade to anyone else without leaves, a woman without education is weak and can’t contribute to her family and society adequately.

A tree without roots can easily fall and die — a woman without education is similarly vulnerable, with nothing to anchor and sustain her in a hostile society.

Savitribai was writing at a time **when women were deprived of education and their taking up paid employment of choice was unthinkable**.

This meant that a woman whose husband had died or who had no one to provide for was literally caught between life and death; her fate and that of her children was exceedingly uncertain, leaving them open to exploitation.

Savitribai, thus, wanted women to have assets and abilities of their own — roots and leaves — which could help them survive. Her use of the imagery of a Banyan tree makes her message easy to grasp for everyone.

Early age:

Savitribai was born on **January 3, 1831**, in Maharashtra’s Naigaon, in the **lower caste community of malis** (gardeners).

In keeping with the customs of the time, she was not educated, and married off at the age of 10 to **Jyotirao Phule**, who was then 13.

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Jyotirao Phule, better known as Jyotiba, was also a **social reformer** who worked in the field of women education. Jyotirao educated Savitribai at home after their marriage.

Savitribai Phule's contribution for women's education:

It was her **husband who introduced her to academic education**, and Savitribai never looked back. Later, she attended a **teachers' training institute** in Pune.

The couple went on to **found India's first school for girls in Pune's Bhidewada** in 1848 - it was the country's **first school for women started by Indians**.

By the end of 1851, the Phules were running three schools in Pune with **around 150 girl students**. The teaching methods at their schools were believed to be better than government schools and soon the number of girls enrolled in Phule's schools outnumbered that of the boys in government schools.

For their work, they had to face severe social backlash, from a conservative society as well as from nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who thought diluting the caste system would mean dilution of the Indian Hindu identity itself.

The chorus against them was so strong that Jyotirao's father Govindrao was **forced to evict them from his house**.

Savitribai and Jyotirao then moved to their associate and friend Usman Shaikh's neighbourhood.

Savitribai, alongside Usman's sister Fatima Sheikh, began teaching girls here. Within two years, more schools were started for **girls, shudras and anti-shudras in Pune**.

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 etc**—which came to have many schools under them.

In her poem, "**Go, Get Education**", she urges the oppressed communities to get an education and break free from the chains of oppression.

Other social reforms:

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 mattress.

She simultaneously **campaigned against child marriage, while supporting widow remarriage**.

Along with Jyotirao, Savitribai started the **Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha** ('Home for the Prevention of Infanticide') for pregnant widows and their children. The couple adopted one such child, Yashwantrao, who went on to become a doctor.

In 1873, the Phules set up the **Satyashodhak Samaj** (Truth-seekers' society), a platform open to all irrespective of caste and religion, with the aim of working to ease the sufferings of Dalits and women.

When her husband died in 1890, **Savitribai carried out his last rites**, a role still primarily performed by men.

After Jyotiba's death in 1890, Savitribai carried forward the work of the organization Satya Shodhak Samaj and also chaired the annual session held at Saswad in 1893.

She initiated the **first Satyashodhak marriage**—a marriage **without a dowry, Brahmin priests or Brahminical rituals** in 1873.

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Her achievements were diverse and numerous, but they had a singular effect—posing a brave and pioneering challenge to the caste system and patriarchy.

Even her death came while **working for the society** — when the **Bubonic plague broke out in Maharashtra** in 1897, she contracted the disease while taking a sick child to the hospital, and breathed her last on March 10, 1897.

Legacy of Savitri Bai Phule:

The Savitribai Phule's ideology had a **significant impact on India's intellectual and feminist movement**, particularly in terms of Non-Brahman, Dalit and women politics.

Phule's teachings of **universal rights and equality**, as well as her arguments **against brahmin dominance** of social, religious, and political life, **influenced the Non-Brahman Movement greatly**.

Her teachings **influenced the Dalit and women's educational movement** into the early twentieth century, which was distinct from the Non-Brahman Movement.

Along with B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule have become a symbol for the backward people.

On the Jayanti of Savitribai, women in local branches organize the **Human Rights Campaign**.

In 1983, the **Pune City Corporation erected a memorial for Savitribai Phule** and India Post also issued a stamp in honour of Phule in 1998.

The 3rd of January, **Savitribai's birthday**, is observed as **Balika Din** which means 'Girl Child Day' throughout **Maharashtra**.

In her honour, the **University of Pune was renamed** to 'Savitribai Phule University' in 2015.

Conclusion:

Savitribai was a woman who not only fought against the hegemonic practices of the society but also against imperialistic forces.

For her, education was the tool to bring about social reform. She firmly held the opinion that education had the power to alter and shape the social role and position of women