



Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule

For Prelims: Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Satyashodhak Samaj (The Truth-Seeker's Society).

For Mains: Legacy of Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule, caste- and gender-based discrimination.

Why in News?

Recently, Maharashtra Governor was criticised for allegedly mocking **19th century social reformers Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule** for “**getting married at a young age**”.

- Mahatma Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule stand out as an extraordinary couple in the social and educational history of India.
- They spearheaded path-breaking work towards **female education and empowerment, and towards ending caste- and gender-based discrimination.**



Who were Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule?

- In 1840, at a time when **child marriages were common**, Savitri at the age of ten was married to Jyotirao, who was thirteen years old at the time.
- The couple later in life strove to oppose child marriage and also organised widow remarriages.
- **Jyotirao Phule:**
 - He was an Indian **social activist, thinker, anti-caste social reformer and writer from Maharashtra.**
 - He is also known as **Jyotiba Phule.**
 - **Education:** In 1841, Phule was enrolled at the **Scottish Missionary High School** (Pune),

where he completed education.

- **Ideology:** His Ideology was based on: **Liberty, Egalitarianism, Socialism.**
 - Phule was influenced by **Thomas Paine's book titled The Rights of Man** and believed that the only solution to combat the social evils was the enlightenment of women and members of the lower castes.
- **Major Publications:** Tritiya Ratna (1855), Powada: Chatrapati Shivajiraje Bhosle Yancha (1869), Gulamgiri (1873), Shetkarayacha Aasud (1881).
- **Title of Mahatma:** He was bestowed with the **title of Mahatma on 11th May, 1888** by a Maharashtrian social activist **Vithalrao Krishnaji Vandekar.**
- **Social Reforms:** Jyotirao, the revolutionary that he was, **observed the lack of opportunities for education for young girls and women.**
 - He started to **educate his wife at home** and trained her to become a teacher.
 - He realised the **pathetic conditions of widows and established an ashram for young widows** and eventually became an advocate of the idea of Widow Remarriage.
 - He attacked the **orthodox Brahmins and other upper castes** and termed them as "**hypocrites**".
 - In 1868, Jyotirao constructed a **common bathing tank** outside his house to exhibit his embracing attitude towards all human beings and wished to dine with everyone, regardless of their caste.
 - He started **awareness campaigns** that ultimately inspired the likes of **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** and **Mahatma Gandhi**, stalwarts who undertook major initiatives against caste discrimination later.
 - It is believed by many that it was Phule who first used the **term 'Dalit'** for the depiction of oppressed masses often placed outside the 'varna system'.
- **Savitribai Phule:**
 - 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 published **Kavya Phule in 1854** and **Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar in 1892.**
 - In her poem, **Go, Get Education**, she urges the oppressed communities to get an education and break free from the chains of oppression.
 - She simultaneously **campaigned against child marriage, while supporting widow remarriage.**
 - She initiated the **first Satyashodhak marriage**—a marriage without a dowry, Brahmin priests or Brahminical rituals in 1873.

What is their Legacy?

- Together, by 1848, the Phules started a **school for girls, Shudras and Ati-Shudras in Poona.**
- 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 Etceteras**—which came to have many schools under them.
- In 1853, they opened a **care centre for pregnant widows** to have safe deliveries and to end the practice of infanticide owing to social norms.
 - The **Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha (Home for the Prevention of Infanticide)** started in their own house.
- The **Satyashodhak Samaj (The Truth-Seeker's Society)** was established on 24th September, 1873 by Jyotirao-Savitribai and other like-minded people.
 - The Samaj **advocated for social changes that went against prevalent traditions**, including economical weddings, inter-caste marriages, eradication of child marriages, and widow remarriage.
 - Also, Satya shodhak samaj was founded with a purpose to give education to the lower castes, scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and made them aware of the exploiting tradition of society.

Satya Shodhak Samaj organized (2016)

- (a) a movement for upliftment of tribals in Bihar
- (b) a temple-entry movement in Gujarat
- (c) an anti-caste movement in Maharashtra
- (d) a peasant movement in Punjab

Ans: (c)

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