



"THE SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF SAVITRIBAI FULE "

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ABSTRACT :

The task of bringing Maharashtra state as the first modern state in India for providing education to woman was carried out solely by the efforts of Hori'ble Jyotirao Fule and Her "Ladyship Savitribai Fule in the early Fifties of Eighte6nth Century. The most powerful woman worker who is popularly known as Savitribai in Maharashtra herself was born on 3rd January }831 in Naigaon that comes under Satara district. The woman was married to Mr. , Jyotiba Fule who himself rebelled against religious slavery and the rottened H,indu traditions who gave absolute freedom to Savitribai to work for the upliftment of the poor.

KEYWORDS :ancient landlordism , providing education to woman.

INTRODUCTION

Those were the days when the - ancient landlordism was setting down and the new British Rule emerged. The new rule brought sweeping changes in Indian society and the age old conventions of Aristocracy were falling down I like autumnal leaves.

Poverty, unemployment, caste prejudice were rampant in 'those days. The suppressed classes were' suffering in a kind of eternal darkness without any ray of hope. At such a time Savitribai diagnosed the ' ignorance ' of people as the root cause of all their miseries. She strongly believed in the emancipation of women from the clutches .of old conventions that pavesway to the real progress of our society. In those days many of our Indian leaders were influenced by Marxism and Savitribai too anticipated a socialistic society which will be free from all kinds of human suffering. She also published the Communist Party Manifesto in 1847 and actively participated in the movement of social change, and improvement. She gave a clarion call to all the suppressed classes to come. together and become a force to drive away the anti- social conventions and purge the society. She has undertaken manyprojects that .. were: intended to bring radical changes in the mentality of people. For the first time in the history of India she established school for girls on 1st January 1848 and became the first. Headmistress of the school and also the first Headmistress in our country.

Savitribai also started a model Hostel for street children who were destitute' and .provided shelter to those children who were labelled as 'thieves' and were boycotted by the upper class society. She recruited the scheduled castes and children of nomadic tribes in order to provide them recognition and social security in their lives. This maiden attempt by the lady indeed was amazing and astounding to many other contemporaries of at that time.

As it is mentioned earlier, gender discrimination was rampant in the contemporary world of Savitribai. The cultural backwardness became a great impediment for the social progress. Social injustice to the lower castes was a common trend of the society, and the women community of all castes were subjected to abject suffering and soul stifling struggle. There was no protection to the defenseless woman in the society. Especially, when a young woman became the victim to the sexual atrocity, the whole society used to boycott the woman. There was no law or convention to provide protection to such women. In view of this . precarious existence of

women. Savitribai started a " Nursing Home" for all those women who became victims to the animalism and brutal activities of evil forces. Female infanticide was also very much active and any female child was considered as bane for families. These inhuman trends haunted Savitribai day and night that actually motivated her to provide special rehabilitation centres not only to the infants but also to the mothers.

Another major social evil predominant in society was " child marriages ". People used to conduct mass child marriage programmes which proved it self as a fatal curse to many a young child. If the husband - boy died for any reason of illness or an accident the female. child was condemned as a widow instantly, much before she could reach even her puberty. This sadistic trend of society gave a spines chilling experience to Savitribai who declared war against such blind social sentiment. Of course, today it isa law and offence to commit any infanticide but the present social security provided to female infants owes its existence to the valiant efforts of the social worker made in Mid Nineteenth Century. Savitribai was not only a revolutinary and idealist but she was a committed social worker. She adopted male child of a female Brahmin widow who subsequently became Dr. Yashwant who remains a role model and a glaring example of Savitribai's devotion to social cause.

Young widows in our society become a source of great and serious concern. The Social convention and the religious'fatwa' insisted on the 'tonsure' of the head, that is to say people blatantly used to shave off complete hair on the head of widows. This practice was not only depressing but was also disgusting. Savitribai assembled all the barber communities that was attended by more than 500 barbers. She successfully convinced them to take a mass 'oath" not to shave any widow's hair ('kesavpan ') in future. She gallantly entrusted the responsibility to Shri. Narayan Lokhande inPune,the leader of the Barber's Union.

Another social curse prevalent in those days W,\S untouchability. The lower castes were condemned to lead their lives outside the villages and towns. They were not allowed to lay their hands on public well, due to the religious fear of defilation. Savitribai became the first ever Indian woman to resist this convention of 'untouchability' and taught the lower castes how to fetch water for themselves. Indeed this was the first experiment made in Maharashtra that conveyed the message across the nation against the untouchability castes how to fetch for themselves. Indeed this was first experiment made in Maharashtra that conveyed the message across the nation against the untouchability.

Today, we witness the State and Central governments spending crores of rupees on the education of rural masses. But Savitribai realized the necessity of education of every citizen of this country and made it compulsory in her contemporary society for the progress and development of India. As Rajaram Mohan Roy launched a movement against 'Sati' in his mother state, so also Savitribai rebelled against the tradition of child marriages and made a consistent struggle for the implementation and Legislation of Widow Marriage Act in 1856.

The year 1897 brought doom for the city ofPune. The epidemic hit a great majority of people by which patients started falling down like autumnal leaves. The adopted son of . Savitribai Dr. Yashwant and herself flexed their muscles to help the victims. Once more the commitment of Savitribai revealed itself in the afflicted. city in her rescue work. Special camps Were arranged all over the city to admit the patients for treatment. But the dreaded contagious disease also attacked Savitribai as well as Dr. Yashwant. But that could in no way prevent the lady and the doctor from making the rescue operations. The lady was not shaken by the symptoms of plague. Subsequently both Savitribai and Dr. Yashwant had to sacrifice their lives at the altar of the service of the mankind. Savitribai breathed her last on io" March• 1897.

Savirtibai's physique disappeared. But her spirit of social commitment continued to work. Her own death gave birth to a new beginning in the state. Thousands of social workers got inspiration from her devotion to social cause. The messages of the lady spread like a wildfire all over the state and the country. The seeds of her ideals have been scattered all over the country. Untouchability began to erode by the dedicated efforts of her followers. Women community started receiving equal treatment on par with men in! education and jobs .. Especially rural women came forward to join their hands with their men in work to fight out poverty. Women participation in Education and work started bringing prosperity at homes as well as in the country. Soon after getting freedom from British rule the self government of the country gave priority to giving shelter to street children and helpless women in the country,• Government organization as well as Non - Government

Organizations struggled hard for the Education of rural and urban women. A special provision has been made to protect widows and encouraging schemes are brought in to force for the re-marriages of widows. The final breathe of Savitribai, indeed, breathed fresh air into the soul of Indian nation. Today the central and state government are reaching food and water even to the remote tribal areas. The government through Human Resource Development, new Delhi and Social Justice and empowerment made it a mission to realize the dreams of Savitribai whose ideals were sown on the Indian soil almost a century before. This is how the life of Savitribai left an indelible mark on the history of the nation.

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