

**THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE THREE ERAS – WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO JYOTIRAO & SAVITRIBAI PHULE**

**Swadha Dinesh Nathalkar,*

**Research Scholar, D.T.S.S. College, Malad (East)*

Abstract:

A picture of women in the society today is strong, free, full of opportunities and highly potential but is it only enough to know the status of women today? It becomes very essential to closely see the women's progress from centuries till date in order to understand its worth. The life of women in the past centuries has become just a matter of discussion but we do not attempt to see the dark parts of the society through which the change has arisen. There is a need to emphasize on the factors which has uplifted a woman so that it can be authentically followed even today. We cannot deny the fact that even today some women are in need of upliftment, thus knowing the change and the key factors that brought the change is important.

Jyotirao Phule, a revolutionary had done an immense work for emancipation of the women in 19th century India. He was a first to consider an issue of gender, supported women going beyond the orthodox society and a rescuer helpless woman. Phule's main pillar to eradicate inequality was Education, by which he pulled women out of tyranny and made them realize their rights. Thus, it becomes essential to see the status of women before and after the work of Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule

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Introduction:

What is the status of the women in the society?

We see that people are discriminated on the basis of their caste, sub caste, religion, creed, language, etc. Resulting in inequality and oppression. But there was never a need of a reason to discriminate women as she was never considered as worth valuing. Then, to which society, religion, caste, sub-caste, creed does the women belong to? Because her position be it in any caste, sub-caste or religion was the same, be it a brahmin women or shudra women their value in the society or at their home was zero even as an individual.

Let's take a look towards three different eras. Taking into consideration the women's position in the period before 19th Century, the women's position at the time of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule existed and the women's position in today's society.

The Women's Status before 19th Century/ before Jyotirao Phule:

One of the main reasons for a woman to face so much from the centuries is ignorance, resulted due to lack of education which kept every woman away from knowing her basic human rights. Therefore, no education has led to lack of awareness about the rights of individual. Before 19th century the life of women was equal to the life of an animal, just to obey and work for the male dominating society. The gender discrimination was the highly followed discrimination irrespective of the caste or religion.

But the society was dominated and ruled not by all but only by the literate men. Did we notice the word ‘literate’, the only weapon to eliminate discrimination or to know one’s own rights.

This was the reason why women were kept away from education because only if she is educated, she can be aware of her own rights. That would have proved harmful to the so-called male dominating society, who always treated women as slaves and wished to be the slaves always. All the rituals and practices were only insensitive and harmful for women for example; breast tax, dowry, sati pratha, keshavapan, child marriage, woman infanticide, fasting, sitting aside during her periods, no widow remarriage, no to women education, etc. Thousands of women have lost their life because of these inhuman practices but no one concerned to act on it. The women’s life was only subject to getting married, serving family, satisfying husband’s sexual needs and delivering a ‘boy’ child. Everyone in the society was busy in discussion on caste, religion, language-based discrimination but gender discrimination was never considered as a big issue till Phule came in picture in 19th century.

The Drastic Change in the Status of Women at the Time of Phule:

Do we know the answer for the question that why women accepted and use to follow all these cruel practices at that time and not now?

The great revolutionist of 19th century India Jyotirao Phule rectified the reason, which was lack of awareness of our own rights resulted due to lack of education. He was the man of action for women. Jyotirao at that time educated his wife Savitribai Phule so that she can provide education to every girl or women irrespective of caste and religion and also started a school for women. Therefore, they both are the pioneers of women education. Not literate but we can say some wise men in the society like Phule supported women education. Because of which the women along with the society was made aware about the difference between superstitions and rationality, as superstitions were the grounds on which women were made to follow everything and also to consider men as superior to them which was only because of lack of education. Most of the cruel and irrational practices which were practiced with full trust and closed eyes before 18th Century, women started and learned to say ‘No’ to them and some of them also was stopped. Phule campaigned against keshavapan, dowry, started widow remarriage, women education, emancipated women who were underprivileged etc. A huge revolution was brought in the society especially for women and the visible results were seen at that time and also till now, as women started to gain education, she started to know her rights and learned to deny things that weren’t rational. Women was able to say ‘No’ to irrational things because of awareness spread by Phule. Therefore, education made women to know her own potential that made her stand in the society. Awareness proved to be very essential to differentiate between right and wrong actions, which was a need of women to uplift. This is how women progressed in 19th century from having no identity to gaining social self-identity through awareness. This was a turn and a drastic change of women’s position in society before and after 19th century which was clearly visible.

Status of Women in Today’s Society and a Need of Education:

Is there a difference between ‘Education’ and ‘Qualification’?

An authentic motive and aim of Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule were to start women education to bring awareness, so that woman can know and claim her own right which was not disclosed earlier. Thus, the aim was education and not mere qualification. Education acts as the weapon to upliftment of the society, whereas today’s qualification is upliftment of one’s own self only. Therefore, there is a very thin line between education and qualification, which seems to be crossed by women in the society today. In the search and attempt of getting qualified, women in today’s society have

started losing the authenticity, values and ethics of the word education. Education without values and ethics becomes only qualification and today women are following the same at a large scale. We say that, educating one woman from every house will educate the whole family. But women in the search of proving themselves and to show that their status is equal or beyond the men is where education is eliminated, which is the pillar of upliftment of the society according to Phule.

There is no doubt that status of women is very good as compared to 18th century and today women are reaching the heights of the success than men but development of the society is equally essential than of one's self. Today, the malpractices and irrational beliefs has almost vanished away, women have rights in all the sectors, education is made free, no one practices sati, widow women can marry without any difficulties, women infanticide and child marriage is a crime, in fact anything that causes harm to women's integrity is a crime. Today, in 21st century we can proudly say that women have her own position and respect in all fields, religion, caste and society and disrespecting women is a crime and serious actions can be taken. This is a satisfying but still a very difficult journey of women's progress.

Conclusion:

This change is satisfying, isn't it? But what about the places where there is still a need of awareness and education for women? For that purpose, if every woman decides to take qualification with ethics and value then it would be worth calling as education. This will aim to uplift every woman in the society. Therefore, if the authentic aim of education is followed it will benefit each one of us in the society as it did in 19th century India. Today, women have opportunity to gain free education. Every woman must bring good out of it by taking into consideration the dark conditions of the women in the past and should strive for success and should not strive to prove one's self over the men. Thus, it is essential to emphasize and study the status of women from the three eras as it works as an eyeopener.

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