



# Savitribai Phule Memorial

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**Abstract.** The Savitribai Phule Memorial, proposed at Bhide Wada in Pune, is a visionary project that aims to celebrate and preserve the legacy of one of India's most iconic reformers—Savitribai Phule, the country's first female teacher and a pioneer in women's education and social justice. This memorial is not just a physical structure but a symbolic and functional space that reflects the journey of a woman who fought against caste-based discrimination, patriarchy, and ignorance through the power of education. The concept behind the memorial—"From Darkness to Enlightenment"—captures the essence of her contribution in transforming society through knowledge. This research focuses on how architecture can be used as a medium of storytelling and empowerment. It examines how space, light, materials, form, and circulation can reflect historical struggles and inspire future generations. The site of the memorial, Bhide Wada, holds historical importance as it was the location where Savitribai Phule and her husband, Jyotirao Phule, opened the first school for girls in India in 1848. This makes the location itself a crucial element in the narrative of the design. The study involves a deep understanding of the historical, cultural, legal, and architectural context. The memorial project is supported by the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) and the Maharashtra state government. After resolving land acquisition issues that delayed the project for over a decade, demolition of the old structure was carried out in 2023 to prepare for new construction. The design includes a replica classroom, a timeline gallery, an educational center, a statue court, a library, and spaces for exhibitions and workshops, spread across a basement and three floors. The research draws upon case studies of similar memorials and explores how design strategies such as symbolic entrances, open learning plazas, passive ventilation, and use of local materials can create an inclusive and sustainable public space. The aim is to not only honor Savitribai's memory but to continue her mission by making the memorial a living, functional educational space for women and the underprivileged. In conclusion, the Savitribai Phule Memorial is envisioned as a dynamic public space that reflects historical truth, social activism, and architectural innovation. It stands as a beacon of education and equality, aiming to ignite minds and empower communities

**Index Terms-** Savitribai Phule Memorial, Bhide Wada, Women's education in India, Social reform architecture, Memorial design.

## I. Introduction

Architecture has always played a powerful role in shaping memory, telling stories, and influencing the social fabric of communities. A well-designed memorial is not just a static tribute to the past; it can serve as a living space that educates, provokes thought, and inspires social change. The Savitribai Phule Memorial, proposed at Bhide Wada in Pune, is one such project that aims to transform a historic site into a symbol of hope, empowerment, and progress. Savitribai Phule (1831–1897) was a reformer, poet, and the first female teacher in India. Along with her husband Jyotirao Phule, she fought tirelessly against caste oppression, gender discrimination, and social injustice. In 1848, she founded the country's first girls' school at Bhide Wada, a significant act that challenged the dominant norms of 19th-century India. Despite severe resistance—including verbal and physical abuse from conservative



society—she continued to educate and uplift women and marginalized groups. Her efforts led to the formation of schools, women's shelters, and social reform organizations, making her one of the earliest voices for feminism and social equity in India. The proposed memorial aims to celebrate her legacy not just through stone and structure, but by creating a narrative journey through architectural space. With the theme of "From Darkness to Enlightenment," the memorial reflects the transformation she brought to society—replacing ignorance with knowledge, and oppression with empowerment. Each architectural element of the memorial—such as the symbolic entrance tunnel, the open learning courtyard, and the statue plaza—has been designed to echo her values and achievements. This research paper explores the multifaceted process of developing the Savitribai Phule Memorial, including the architectural planning, historical background, legal challenges, government involvement, and community relevance. It also discusses how the memorial can become a functional educational campus, continuing Savitribai's mission by hosting workshops, exhibitions, and learning programs, particularly for women and girls from underprivileged communities. By placing a strong emphasis on historical authenticity, cultural sensitivity, and sustainable architecture, the project aspires to transform a historically significant site into a contemporary institution for learning and empowerment. The memorial is thus envisioned not just as a destination for remembrance, but as a space for ongoing education, awareness, and social dialogue.

## II. Background / History

Understanding the background and historical context of Savitribai Phule's life and legacy is essential to appreciate the importance of the memorial proposed at Bhide Wada, Pune. Savitribai was born on 3 January 1831 in Naigaon, Maharashtra, at a time when women's education was considered taboo and caste-based discrimination was deeply entrenched in Indian society. Despite being born into a marginalized Mali community and receiving no formal early education, Savitribai became the first woman in India to be formally educated and later trained as a teacher. Her journey into social reform began with the support of her husband, Jyotirao Phule, who was also a visionary reformer. Together, they started the first school for girls in India in 1848 at Bhide Wada, a traditional Peshwa-era building located in Budhwar Peth, Pune. This act of defiance against the rigid social norms of the time was revolutionary. It attracted severe backlash from orthodox Brahmins and conservative society, who hurled insults and even stones and dung at her as she walked to school. However, undeterred by this violence, Savitribai continued teaching, often carrying an extra sari in her bag to change if people attacked her. By 1851, the Phules were running three schools for girls, with an enrollment of over 150 students, which was higher than the attendance in government boys' schools at that time. They emphasized curriculum in science, mathematics, and practical subjects, challenging the gendered stereotypes that confined women to domestic roles. Savitribai also played a major role in starting Mahila Seva Mandal (Women's Help Society) in 1852, and later opened the Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, a shelter for widows and rape survivors—again, a radical move during a time when widows were treated as outcasts. Savitribai was also a poet and writer. Her book *Kavya Phule* (1854) contained inspirational and reformatory poetry that addressed caste injustice, women's rights, and the power of education. She also edited a magazine called *Bhashyam*, aimed at spreading awareness among the marginalized. She died in



1897 while caring for plague patients, proving her dedication to service until the very end. The site of Bhide Wada, where her revolutionary work began, remained neglected for years. Only in the 2000s did the idea of building a memorial at this site gain momentum. Due to legal battles and ownership issues, the redevelopment was delayed until 2023, when the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) finally received clearance from the High Court to take over the land. The upcoming memorial thus serves not just as a commemoration but as a return to roots, where the story of India's first feminist educator began.

### III. Details about the Study

The proposed Savitribai Phule Memorial is planned at Bhide Wada, a heritage site in Budhwar Peth, Pune, where India's first girls' school was founded in 1848. The study revolves around how this memorial can be conceptualized, designed, and executed to reflect not just the life of Savitribai Phule but the values she stood for—education, equality, and empowerment. The central design theme, “From Darkness to Enlightenment,” is not only symbolic but also forms the spatial and experiential foundation of the project. The study began with a site analysis of Bhide Wada, which revealed its potential as a place of historical and emotional significance. The location, though surrounded by dense urban fabric, is accessible and holds cultural memory. However, the site had been under legal dispute for over a decade. In 2023, the High Court and Supreme Court granted the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) the right to acquire and redevelop the site. Following this, the dilapidated structure was carefully demolished, and proposals for the memorial began moving forward. The architectural design, approved by PMC, includes a basement plus ground and three floors, covering an area of approximately 1,114 square meters. The ground floor features a replica classroom, similar to the one Savitribai taught in, along with a statue court, museum galleries, and a headmaster's office modeled after 19th-century educational spaces. The upper floors will house a library, timeline gallery, community auditorium, training rooms, and digital literacy labs for women and youth. The spatial flow has been designed to represent a journey from ignorance to knowledge. Visitors enter through a narrow, shaded corridor (symbolizing social darkness) and gradually move into brighter, open spaces filled with natural light, greenery, and educational exhibits. The structure is designed using locally available materials like brick and basalt stone, with features like solar panels, passive cooling systems, and rainwater harvesting, making it a sustainable public building. The memorial is not intended to be a museum alone but a living educational and cultural center. Workshops, training programs, lectures, and women's self-help initiatives are integral to the program. The PMC has allocated ₹7.26 crore for construction, with additional ₹40 crore for acquiring surrounding land to connect Bhide Wada with Phule Wada. The government of Maharashtra has further sanctioned ₹100 crore for memorial development under cultural heritage expansion. This study shows how architecture can be used to revive history, reflect ideology, and drive social change.

### IV. Examples Related to Topic

1. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Memorial, Delhi – This national-level memorial uses symbolism, such as a Buddhist Stupa form, to express ideas of liberation, equality, and social justice. It includes a museum, library, and meditation space, showing how architecture can represent reformist values



2. Gandhi Smriti, New Delhi – Known for its minimalism and emotional storytelling, visitors follow Gandhi's last footsteps. Its simplicity and spatial narrative can inspire a similar visitor experience for Savitribai's journey.



3. Rani Lakshmi Bai Smarak, Jhansi – Features murals, sculptures, and storytelling through visual arts. It demonstrates how historic struggles can be communicated through public art in a landscaped setting.



4. Phule Wada, Pune – The residence of Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule serves as a contextual reference, showcasing 19th-century architectural style and material use.



## V. Proposals

The proposed Savitribai Phule Memorial at Bhide Wada, Pune, is envisioned not just as a monument but as a “Campus of Thought”—a space that honors her legacy while continuing her mission through education, empowerment, and public engagement. The central design concept, “From Darkness to Enlightenment,” shapes both the physical structure and visitor experience. The memorial is structured to guide people through a symbolic and emotional journey that reflects Savitribai’s own life—from social suppression to revolutionary reform. The design proposal includes a four-level structure (basement + ground + 3 floors) with integrated indoor and outdoor spaces. The basement is reserved for parking and services. The ground



floor houses the main statue plaza of Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule, a replica classroom representing the original 1848 girls' school, and a timeline corridor narrating her journey through digital installations, poetry, and murals. These spaces introduce visitors to her struggle and achievements. The first floor is designed as a library and archive, offering access to her writings, Dalit literature, feminist texts, and research materials. A section of this floor will also serve as a gallery space for rotating exhibitions focused on women's education, social reform, and marginalized voices. The second floor includes a multipurpose auditorium (seating 150–200 people), which will host lectures, cultural events, school programs, and film screenings. Adjacent to this are training rooms for vocational workshops, digital literacy, and leadership programs—especially for girls and underprivileged communities. The third floor is a space for interactive learning, with small seminar halls, collaborative classrooms, and a rooftop contemplation garden. Natural light is introduced through skylights, while shaded verandas and courtyards encourage outdoor learning and reflection. The entire building uses local materials, passive cooling, solar energy, and rainwater harvesting, making it a sustainable public space. Open spaces surrounding the memorial include landscaped gardens, a Tulsi Vrindavan symbolizing cultural roots, and seating spaces under native trees. These green zones act as calm, reflective areas for visitors. The proposal ensures that the memorial remains functional, inclusive, and educational, honoring Savitribai's spirit not just in memory, but through action. It will serve as a dynamic space for learning, inspiration, and community development—a continuation of the revolution she started over 175 years ago.

## VI. Conclusion

The Savitribai Phule Memorial represents more than a tribute to an individual—it is a living reminder of the transformative power of education and courage in the face of injustice. As India's first female teacher, Savitribai Phule not only challenged deeply rooted patriarchal and caste-based systems but also laid the foundation for inclusive education. This memorial, proposed at the very site where she began her historic journey—Bhide Wada in Pune—serves as a spatial and cultural revival of her legacy. Through this research, it becomes clear that memorial architecture must evolve from being a passive space of remembrance to a dynamic platform for awareness and action. The proposal integrates narrative elements, spatial symbolism, sustainable features, and community-oriented programs that echo the values Savitribai lived and fought for. The central concept of “From Darkness to Enlightenment” ensures that every visitor experiences her journey—from being oppressed by society to becoming an educator, poet, and reformer who lit the way for others. The project is grounded in the belief that architecture can educate. The memorial's replica classroom, timeline gallery, library, auditorium, and vocational training rooms create opportunities for visitors—especially girls and marginalized youth—to learn, reflect, and participate. In this way, the building itself becomes a tool for social change, just as Savitribai's schools were in the 19th century. The importance of the project also lies in its context. After decades of legal and social delays, the



Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), with support from the Maharashtra government, is finally moving ahead with land acquisition, architectural design, and phased development. With a financial backing of over ₹100 crore and a broader vision to connect Bhide Wada with Phule Wada, the memorial stands to become a part of a larger heritage corridor for social reformers. In conclusion, the Savitribai Phule Memorial is not just a monument of stone and memory—it is a living, breathing campus of empowerment. It honors one of India's greatest changemakers by carrying forward her unfinished work—creating a more equal, educated, and just society. The memorial will serve generations to come, reminding them that the greatest revolutions often begin in the smallest classrooms.

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