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Q5

(a) What are the main factors responsible for gender inequality in India? Discuss the contribution of Savitribai Phule in this regard.
(b) "The current internet expansion has instilled a different set of cultural values which are often in conflict with traditional values." Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS IV · 10 marks · Ethics and Human Interface

Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in-human actions; dimensions of ethics; ethics - in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators; role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.

Core demand of the question

- (a) What are the main factors responsible for gender inequality in India? Discuss the contribution of **Savitribai Phule** in this regard
- (b) "The current internet expansion has instilled a different set of cultural values which are often in conflict with traditional values." Discuss

Revision summary

Main factors of gender inequality are patriarchy, economic unpaid labour, education and health gaps, violence, political under-representation and caste.

Savitribai Phule opened girls' schooling in 1848 and fought child marriage, widow stigma and caste exclusion.

The internet installs speed, self-display and stranger-speech that clash with hierarchy and honour.

Some clashes liberate the trapped; some spread hate, stalking and lies.

Ethics keeps protective traditional duties, drops oppressive ones, and applies law to online harm.

Introduction

Half the republic still walks uphill. Part (a) asks why, and what **Savitribai Phule** already did about it. Part (b) asks how the internet's new habits collide with older ones - without romanticising either.

Body**(a) Factors of gender inequality, and **Savitribai Phule****

- **Patriarchy as a social structure:** the male line as default owner of land, name, ritual and the street after dark.
- **Economic factors:** unpaid care work, a gendered labour market, the gender pay gap, and property that still often flows around daughters despite the **Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act**,

2005.

- **Education and health:** dropout of girls after puberty, poor toilets, anaemia, and maternal risk that treats a woman's body as a fertility instrument rather than as a citizen.
- **Violence and fear:** domestic violence, dowry, sexual harassment, trafficking, and the "safety" argument that then locks the girl at home instead of policing the harasser.
- **Political under-representation:** reserved panchayat seats exist; cabinets, party tickets and police leadership still lag, so the file is written about women more than with them.
- **Caste and minority intersection:** a Dalit or Adivasi woman, or a woman in a ghetto, meets two or three inequalities at once. Gender policy that sees only the urban middle class will miss her.
- **Technology and work:** digital public services that assume a husband's phone; platform work without maternity or safety.
- Son preference, sex ratio and unpaid girl-child labour in sibling care are demographic and ethical facts, not only "culture."
- Law is not absent - PCPNDT, POSH, the Protection of Women from **Domestic Violence Act, 2005**, criminal law on sexual offences - but implementation, stigma and delay keep inequality alive.
- **Savitribai Phule (1831-1897):** with Jyotirao **Phule** she opened a school for girls in Pune in 1848, when teaching a girl, especially a lower-caste girl, was treated as pollution.
- She taught, wrote, and faced abuse on the walk to school; the story of the sari thrown with dung is the cost of that public ethic.
- She worked for widow dignity, against child marriage, and for the education of those the varna order had declared unteachable - a gender and caste intervention together.
- The Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha and her poetry treated infanticide and women's pain as public wrongs, not as family secrets.
- **Contribution in this regard:** she proved that gender inequality is not fate; it is a taught exclusion that a school and a stubborn teacher can begin to reverse. Today's **Article 15 and 21A** sit on that stubbornness.
- **The unfinished work she named is still the syllabus:** get the girl to school, keep her there, and refuse the purity rule that polices her body.

(b) Internet cultural values versus traditional values

- The statement is largely true as a description of conflict, and incomplete if it treats "tradition" as only virtue and "internet" as only vice.
- **Internet-instilled values:** speed, display of the self, weak gatekeepers, global peer groups, a market for attention, and a habit of speaking to strangers.
- **Traditional values (in the Indian working sense):** family hierarchy, face-saving, local reputation, ritual time, and duties that bind a person to kin and community before the self.
- **Conflicts that are real:** elder authority versus a young person who finds facts and allies online; arranged-match secrecy versus dating apps; sexual shame versus information (and also versus pornography); khap-like honour versus a woman who can call a helpline.
- **Conflicts that injure:** rumour and communal deepfakes travel faster than a priest's or a teacher's correction; suicide contagion; cyberstalking; and a child who is never off the stage of classmates.
- **Conflicts that can be healthy:** a Dalit student finding **Ambedkar** without a hostile classroom; a queer person finding that they are not alone; a farmer finding a price; a patient finding a second medical opinion.

- **Traditional values that deserve defence:** care for the old, truth-telling in the panchayat sense of not destroying a neighbour with a lie, hospitality, and restraint in speech - all of which trolling violates.
- **Traditional values that deserve challenge:** untouchability, the silence around domestic violence, and the idea that a girl's phone is a family's honour to confiscate.
- **Ethical navigation:** digital literacy, the **Information Technology Act, 2000** and intermediary rules as law not as panic, POSH-like workplace norms for online work, and family conversation that is not a raid.
- **The civil servant's task:** use the net for service delivery and warning, punish the crime (hate, child sexual content, stalking), and do not confuse a viral clip with a riot that must be answered by an illegal blow.
- **Close:** expansion has instilled a different value-set. The adult response is to keep the traditional duties that protect persons, drop those that cage them, and regulate the net's harms without a nostalgic ban on knowledge.

Flow diagram

Gender inequality -> Patriarchy property violence
 Savitribai Phule -> SCH Girls' school 1848
 SCH -> Education as equality
 Internet values -> Conflict with tradition
 Conflict with tradition -> Keep care and truth
 Conflict with tradition -> Drop honour-policing
 Conflict with tradition -> Regulate rumour and crime

Conclusion

Gender inequality in India is patriarchy plus property, unpaid care, violence, weak political voice and caste. **Savitribai Phule's** girls' school and her fight on widowhood and caste remain the model: education as public defiance. The internet does conflict with many traditional habits; keep care and truth, drop honour-policing, and civilise the feed with law and literacy.

Facts & figures

Savitribai Phule, 1848 Pune school

Among the first modern schools for girls in western India, run with Jyotirao **Phule**, including children from castes excluded by orthodox practice.

Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005

Coparcenary rights for daughters; a legal dent in property patriarchy, still uneven in village practice.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

The POSH statute; a workplace ethic the internet-era office still owes, including to remote workers.

PC-PNDT Act, 1994

Bans sex selection; a legal answer to son preference that technology made more lethal.

Information Technology Act, 2000

The principal Union statute on cyber offences and intermediaries; the legal frame for internet harms, not a substitute for culture.

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