

## SAVITRIBAI PHULE & URVASHI SAHNI

First female teacher of the first girl's school in India

Founding President and CEO, Study Hall Educational Foundation, Lucknow

### FEMINIST CRUSADERS



One started the first school for girls in pre-independent India. The other opened a school for girls from underprivileged backgrounds in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, 15 years ago. One set up a care centre for widows, the other established UP's first family counselling cell for women. Bound by the common cause of women empowerment, Urvashi Sahni, founding president and CEO of Study Hall Educational Foundation, which started Perna Girls' School in Lucknow, could well be today's Savitribai Phule, India's first female teacher. Both initiated movements to challenge the patriarchal order and dedicated their skills to pulling women

out of a life of violence and misery. Once very young brides themselves, Phule and Sahni made it their mission to fight child marriage. Phule introduced sports and vocational training in the school started in 1848 to make education more holistic. Sahni too uses the performing arts and critical dialogue in her classrooms. Sahni says, "Blackboard education is a one-sided idea of development. Raising questions that have not been raised is as important as learning fractions. Girls need to be taught that they are equal." For their efforts at breaking traditional shackles, they both faced stiff opposition, but as Sahni puts it: "Any freedom struggle requires unsettling the old."

TEXT: ANIKA MOHLA

## SMITA PATIL & RADHIKA APTE

Film and television actor, and theatre artiste

Film and television actor, and theatre artiste

### LEADING LADIES OF A KIND

Radhika Apte earns comparison with the legendary Smita Patil for effortlessly straddling the worlds of alternative films and commercial cinema. They've both also worked in theatre and television, had experience in regional cinema, and defy the cookie-cutter actor mould with their more earthy charms. Debuting with Shyam Benegal's *Charandas Chor*

in 1975, Patil became an icon with socially aware films like *Manthan*, *Bhumika*, *Arth* and *Chakra*, and Apte too became known for her role in intelligent movies like *Shor In The City*, *Badlapur*, *Huntern*, *Manjhi: The Mountain Man* and *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein*.



Apte often surprises with her choice of work, picking from a range that includes Rajinikanth's *Kabali*, Sujoy Ghosh's short film *Ahalya* and Anurag Basu's TV series *Chokher Bali*. "I like it like this," Apte has said. "I don't have any barrier of language or medium. I don't care for an image, so I don't have to think about what to do or not to do." The similarity between the two actors was most vivid when Apte played Lajjo in Leena Yadav's 2015 film *Parched* and the parallels were immediately drawn with Patil's fiery Sonbai of Ketan Mehta's 1987 classic, *Mirch Masala*.

TEXT: SANDIPAN DALAL