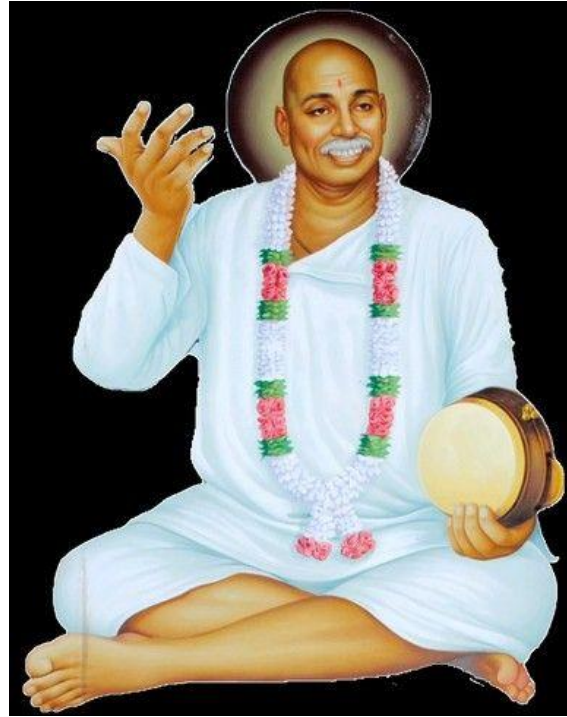




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Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj

On April 30, 1909, in the village of Yawali, situated on the Amravati-Morsi Road in the Varhad region of Maharashtra, a great personality was born. He was named "Madhav" by the visionary Gulabrao Maharaj at Akoz with Haribua. This gem, as it appeared on the world stage, began to reveal the flaws within Indian icons. Honored with the title of 'Mañik alias Tukadya' and 'Raṣṭrasant' at the age of 59, he became a light to a unique path of the country's development. We know him as 'Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj'.



Manik's mother's name was Manjiri (Manjula) and his father's name was Namdev Ganeshpant Ingle. Due to some reason, Manik's family had to leave Yawali and go to Chandur Bazar. When Tukdoji Maharaj was six years old, Bharatibua Maharaj used to reside in the Hanuman temple near their village. Bharatibua was quite impressed after listening to the devotional songs sung by Manik in his sweet voice. Manik's father enrolled him in the village school there to educate him, but Manik was more interested in singing devotional songs than in the education provided by the school. On February 21, 1925, Manik left Yawali started roaming around the different village while singing devotional songs. Upon reaching

the village of Varkhed, he attained samadhi. This experience led to a new strength awakening within him.

Just as an incarnate divine figure considers the protection of humanity and the destruction of evil deeds as their life's mission, similarly, Sant Tukdoji Maharaj made a resolve of a similar nature. He commenced his life's work in the regions of Gonduda, Ramdighi, Satbahini, and Tadoba. During the Chaturmas of 1930, through discussions on knowledge, he presented the true form of religion and the correct knowledge of religion to everyone. Through religious activities, an organization of the Bahujan society was formed. The rich and the poor started working together. There began to be free communication in the community kitchen. Process of ending the untouchability was started. The feeling of casteism started to diminish with communal dining.

On June 9, 1937, a program was organized in Varud by the Sanatan Hindu religion. Sant Tukdoji Maharaj, as the president of the program, strongly criticized the mentality of not studying one's own culture and instead becoming enslaved to other cultures. In the same year, in the month of October, during the Chaturmas program celebration, Tukdoji Maharaj presented thoughts on 'Rectification of Society's Mistakes and Untouchability', both of which were quite inspiring.

Once during the Ashadha month's Ekadashi, when Sant Tukdoji Maharaj went, he saw that some untouchable people were being prevented from having darshan of Vitthal. At that moment, he also decided not to have darshan of Vitthal. He was in Pandharpur for five days at that time. There, he raised the slogan of opening wells and temples for the untouchables. On August 7, 1946, the temple of the pilgrimage site Varkhed was opened for everyone to visit. Maharaj went to the temple with both untouchables and touchable and instructed that one untouchable person be sent with every well-known touchable person from the village to have darshan. Despite not being inspired by political power or politics, the work of a religiously dedicated saint, who practiced only the religion of humanity, brought about a change in people's minds and avoided hurting anyone. Such actions were heralded as 'Rashtradoot' (11-8-46) and 'Agrani' (23-8-46) by the newspapers of those times.

On September 1, 1946, Tukdoji Maharaj went to Pulgaon Mill for a bhajan program during the Ganeshotsav festival. He presented his role in untouchability eradication in front of all the people present there. Some orthodox people opposed him. To this, Sant Tukdoji Maharaj said, "After gaining self-rule, we all should accept the duty of service to achieve good governance and to keep it safe." Sane Guruji had undertaken a hunger strike at the Vitthal Temple in Pandharpur for the entry of untouchables, which Mahatma Gandhi did not support. In this context, Sant Tukdoji Maharaj played a crucial role in successfully ending this hunger strike. Sane Guruji had resolved to undertake a fast unto death to open the Vitthal Temple in Pandharpur for untouchable people. Sant Tukdoji Maharaj spearheaded a campaign to gather 500,000 signatures in support of this hunger strike. He initiated a movement of public awareness in Maharashtra, advocating for "Every village temple should be open for untouchables." Due to Maharaj's efforts and favourable governance, the Vitthal Temple in Pandharpur was opened for untouchables on October 10, 1947.

On August 15, 1947, India gained independence. Sant Tukdoji Maharaj, while explaining the meaning of freedom to the people, said, "If committing atrocities is a sin, then tolerating such

atrocities and sitting silently while injustice is being done to the weak is a great sin. Casteism and untouchability, without ending them, the future of India cannot be bright. Humanity should be our only caste."

Sant Tukdoji Maharaj had a great affection for Dr. Ambedkar. Regarding the mass conversion undertaken by Dr. Ambedkar, he had said that, "It is due to our lack of humanity that this session of conversion has increased. He transformed the untouchable society into Buddhism, which reflects great wisdom and foresight. We can see this sentiment in the articles written after Dr. Ambedkar's Mahaparinirvana on December 7 and in the 24-line tribute song."

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