

## Truth seeking Mahatma Phule

In the history of India's social reform movement, the name of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule holds immense significance. He dedicated his life to the ideals of education, equality, and social justice, and used literature, movements, and institutions as instruments to spread these values among the masses. Phule's work was not limited to attacking the evils of contemporary society; rather, it showed a constructive path toward building a new, just, and egalitarian social order. He considered farmers, laborers, women, and marginalized communities as the true architects of the nation and fought tirelessly for their rights. His philosophy was rooted in eternal moral truth, making it as relevant today as it was in his own time. By advocating universal education, establishing gender equality, and challenging the caste system, Phule gave Indian society a new direction. His life and writings remind us that genuine social transformation cannot be achieved through criticism alone, but through creative vision and moral commitment.



Mahatma Jyotirao Phule first wrote a play called *Tritiya Ratna* in 1855. Through this drama, he conveyed the message that education is the “third eye” of human beings. At that time, a large section of society was illiterate and unable to read or write, so Phule used this play as a medium to spread social enlightenment among the masses. Later, he composed songs of valor celebrating Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, whom he regarded as a symbol of self-respect, and spread them across villages.

From *Gulamgiri* to *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma*, Phule adopted a dramatic style of writing based on questions and answers. His aim was to awaken the humanity within human beings, and he believed that knowledge arises from the effort to untangle a web of questions. He

struck hard at the foundations of the caste system and devoted his life to promoting the vision of equality between men and women.

He emphasized the importance of knowledge and education in society. With the firm belief that “*women, Shudras, and Atishudras*”—all marginalized communities—are the true destiny-makers of the nation, and that farmers are the real nurturers of the country, he wrote the book *Shetkaryacha Asud (The Cultivator’s Whipcord)*. Over 125 years ago, Phule promoted cooperative programs and supported agricultural industrialization and modernization. He organized farmers’ movements against the injustices they faced and encouraged his friends to build unions for mill workers in Mumbai.

He also worked for the liberation of Devadasis, nomadic tribes, and backward communities, creating progressive literature to support their cause. Phule was likely the first Indian to advocate that primary education should be compulsory for all. His vision of restructuring education remains relevant even today. He foresaw issues such as population growth, fragmentation of land, and environmental destruction more than a century ago. In *Shetkaryacha Asud*, he even suggested providing water to farmers through specially designed taps to conserve resources.

To keep society free from addictions, he urged people to invest in good literature. For Phule, building prosperous and virtuous individuals required transformation at every level of society.

Mahatma Phule’s demand for restructuring education appears highly relevant even in today’s era. More than 125 years ago, he had already drawn attention to challenges such as the growing population, the increasing burden on agriculture, fragmentation of land, and the destructive impact of environmental degradation. His concern was how farming and farmers could truly benefit, how poverty among cultivators could be alleviated, and how a farmer could become the enlightened son of a well-cultivated land.

Today, when we discuss how to ensure water reaches everyone, Phule had already suggested in his book *Shetkaryacha Asud* that farmers should be provided water through specially designed taps to conserve resources. He also advised people to invest in good literature so that society could remain free from all forms of addiction. For Phule, the creation of prosperous and virtuous individuals required transformation at every level of society, and he gave great importance to such comprehensive change.

Mahatma Phule educated his wife Savitribai, making her the first Indian woman to be formally educated. He brought her into social life and demonstrated how women’s contributions should be encouraged in Indian society. From Phule’s *Satyashodhak* movement emerged Tarabai Shinde, who in 1882 wrote *Stri Purush Tulana (A Comparison Between Women and Men)*, presenting the case for gender equality in a powerful way.

Phule opened his household well to the so-called “untouchables” by allowing them access to his own well and established an institution to spread education among them. In this institution, two Dalit teachers—Dhuraji Apaji Chambhar and Ganu Shivaji Mang—worked actively. For widowed Brahmin women, he founded the *Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha* (Home for the Prevention of Infanticide). At this very place, he adopted the son of a widowed Brahmin woman, who later became a doctor.

Phule believed that without new ideals and without understanding new social objectives, the curiosity to dismantle harmful traditional practices could not arise. He rejected the destructive mentality of “annihilation for the sake of annihilation.” His vision was constructive, rooted in eternal moral truth, and directed toward higher social development. Mahatma Phule was a *Satyashodhak*—a seeker of truth—and for him, truth was the moral foundation of human life.

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Reference: महात्मा फुले समग्र वाङ्मय- महाराष्ट्र राज्य साहित्य आणि संस्कृती मंडळ, मुंबई