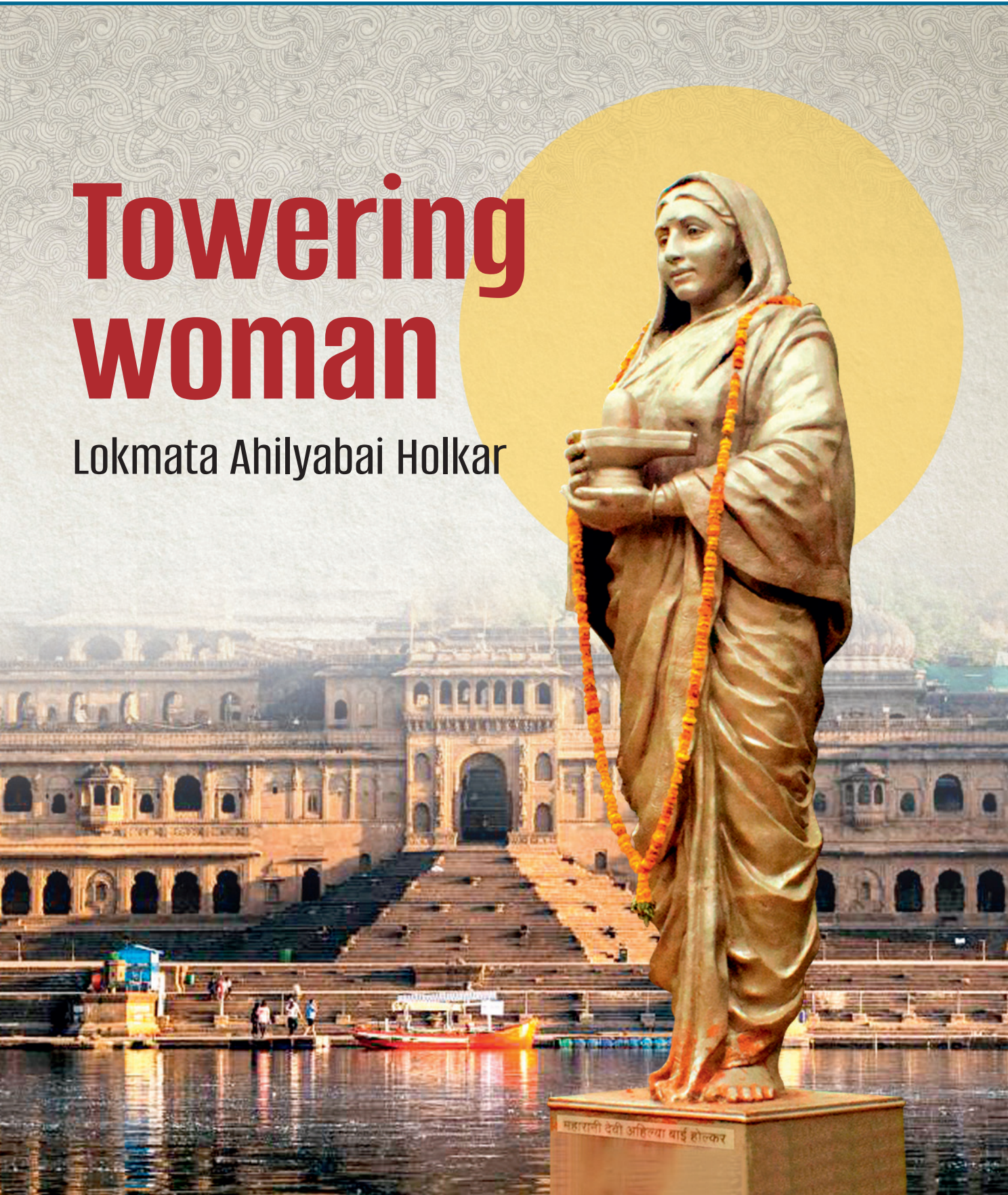


UNHEARD VOICES

14 MAY 2024 | Year 4 | Vol. 2

Towering woman

Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar



महाराणी देवी अहिल्या बाई होल्कर

Lokmata Devi Ahilyabai

Devi Ahilyabai is affectionately and respectfully called 'Punyashlok'. Everybody is familiar with the word 'Punya'. No need to explain what 'Punya' means. Devi Ahilyabai is the only ruler in India, whose name is prefixed with an adjective of 'Punyashlok'. Fact is that the entire life of Devi Ahilyabai was motivated by values and virtues, which was very exceptional considering contemporary political and social situations. She was not merely a ruler but a great social reformer by all accounts.

Unfortunately, very few people in India are aware about the contribution of Devi Ahilyabai's life, mission and work. Her contribution was intentionally neglected by historians, who were motivated by some intentions other than academics. They were least interested in bringing out reality before the public. Credentials of many historians in India and abroad are suspicious as they had certain design, narrative and brief while projecting history of India. Devi Ahilyabai's life and work do not fit in their agenda because of which she was neglected by the historians and rulers. UNHEARD VOICES has tried to correct this injustice. We have published a series on the life and work of Devi Ahilyabai. The current issue also has articles on Devi Ahilyabai to mark the beginning of 300th birth anniversary of Devi Ahilyabai.

Devi Ahilyabai was queen of Malwa region, which is now in Madhya Pradesh. But her vision covers the entire India. She is the symbol of Indian oneness, which was suppressed for generations. Take the case of places associated with Devi Ahilyabai. They are spread across India, which is strong evidence of Indian oneness. Historians ought to reply why a ruler of Malwa region thinks of places spread all over India. Devi Ahilyabai cemented an

emotional bond, which kept this nation alive despite several aggressions and invasions. This emotional bond is cultural or religious in nature but this is the reality and Devi Ahilyabai was well aware of it.

Historians tell us that Indian society has always been male dominated. Patriarchy is one of the features of Indians. We have been taught to believe that Indian rulers have to come from an upper caste. We have been taught to believe that Indian rulers were born to enjoy all kinds of materialistic luxuries. We have been taught to believe that Indian rulers had never nationalistic approach and were restricted to their kingdoms. We have been taught to believe that the 1857 freedom struggle was merely a confederation of disgruntled rulers. We have been taught to believe that Indian rulers never thought of social welfare. However, Devi Ahilyabai's life and work stands as the biggest challenge to this theory, which was imposed on us by the scholars and historians, who belong to the vested interests.

Take the case of places, which are associated with Devi Ahilyabai. They are spread across India. They are spread in all directions, covering all parts of Indian geography. Why does the ruler of Malwa region think of the rest of India? What was the motivation of Devi Ahilyabai to undertake welfare work in the regions, which were not parts of her kingdom? Historians must reply to these questions. Devi Ahilyabai's vision is not restricted to geographical integrity, which has strong ties of cultural, religious and emotional bonding. Her vision covers almost all aspects of social reforms. Be it woman empowerment or emancipation from social ills. Be it rehabilitation of tribals or be constructing roads. Be it restoring rich cultural heritage or be it providing facilities to devotees. Devi

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Ahilyabai hardly left a single aspect of human life, which needs state intervention for the larger wellbeing of the people. As a ruler, Devi Ahilyabai displayed her unmatched qualities in all areas. Records show that she was excellent in finance and revenue, she was equally concerned for military expertise, she was a great diplomat, who had cordial relations with other kingdoms, she used power to bring about social changes, she was an urban planner and the list goes on. Modern historians have great bias about Indian history. Germany's Otto Von Bismark is often described as the pioneer of the idea of a 'welfare state'. However, Devi Ahilyabai has to be credited for initiating all the steps, which are needed to be taken for the welfare state. Bismark took the steps for a welfare state in 1880 while Devi Ahilyabai moved in that direction almost 100 years prior to him. Unfortunately, neither western

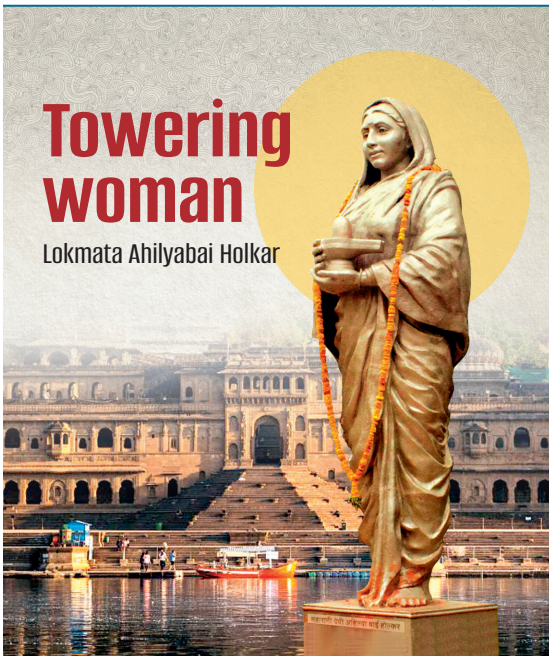
historians nor Indian historians paid adequate attention to her as it would dispute the beliefs, which they want to implant in India.

What makes Devi Ahilyabai different from other rulers is her spirituality. This spirituality came from religiosity. Religion was inseparable from Devi Ahilyabai. Her deep faith in spiritual values kept her moving in the direction of peoples' well-being. Her thoughts and deeds were born out of pure Indian soil as she was not inspired or influenced by western ideas. Considering her life and contribution to Indian society, Devi Ahilyabai can be aptly described as a true successor of Chhatrpati Shivaji Maharaj, who mainly fought for political freedom. Devi Ahilyabai tried to take Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's unfinished task to its logical end. Let's remember Devi Ahilyabai as a guiding spirit of India.

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Devi Ahilyabai : More than a ruler

Devi Ahilya is aptly called as Lokmata. Ahilyadevi's personality, vision and work is unmatched in the history. It is unparalleled and unbelievable. She needs to be remembered as role model by the rulers and people even today.

Dr. Devidas



Ahilyadevi Holkar's state was an ideal welfare State. People were happy under her rule. Her governance was people oriented. For the common people, ideal rule was synonymous with Ahilyadevi's rule. It was a time when the kings and emperors of India were busy battling with each other. That was the time when wars would be fought over a number of mundane matters.

Big, mighty empires would eat up smaller states in those days. Subsequently, small states would emerge again, fight against the aggressors and regain power. This vicious cycle was going on for centuries. In such turbulent period, Ahilyadevi considered her subjects as the base of governance and put all the might of her rule for the satisfaction and joy of the people.

Ahilyadevi's personality, character and tenure is a golden page in the history of India. Firstly, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj the Great and subsequently in the later years Ahilyadevi Holkar were the two towering personalities in the medieval history of India. Although monarchy prevailed in those days, both Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Ahilyadevi Holkar had actually implemented the concept of welfare state that is the base of the democracy and

especially the Constitution of India through their governance and administration. Both of them were well aware of public governance of the modern era. Both of them implemented rational and people-oriented methods of functioning at various levels of the administration and governance of their States. Thus, both of them proved effectively through their great vision and accomplishments that they were farsighted enough to think ahead of their times by putting their unmatched intellectual capabilities to their best.

Ahilyadevi effectively and efficiently carried forward the political and intellectual legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Shivaji Maharaj established his Hindavi Swarajya in Maharashtra. Ahilyadevi not only made her Malva State a strong, mighty and safe state, but also established a just, cultural regime across the entire country. Of course, priceless guidance offered by Malhar Rao Holkar played a vital role in Ahilyadevi's accomplishments.

Ahilyadevi was a contemporary of Madhavrao Peshava. She made her mark from her State of Indore in Malva region outside Maharashtra in the North India. She did her best to make the Holkar State, founded by Malhar Rao, a happy and prosperous state.



Ahilyadevi carried out a number of religious and welfare works not only in her state, but also in other states. Many historians have raised objection to the religiousness and charity of Ahilyadevi. Historians like Grant Duff, Riyasatkar G S Sardesai, Sir Jadunath Sarkar were not too impressed with the religious work done by Ahilyadevi. They have expressed their opinion that Ahilyadevi should have raised military and expanded her state instead of spending money on religious works. Sir John Malcolm, the then Governor of the erstwhile Central Province and first historian who wrote biography of Ahilyadevi too had same opinion. However, Malcolm changed his position completely after having discussion with contemporary intellectuals and subsequently he drew the conclusion that Ahilyadevi became revered only because of the religious and welfare works done by her.

Ahilyadevi's rule was a novel experiment in Indian history. The reins of state were in the hands of a devoted, religious woman. Ahilyadevi was judicious. A non-consummate woman ruling a state appeared like a figment of imagination. However, such an experiment was done in the history and the rule was handed over to a woman, Ahilyadevi.

However, several historians and authors of Ahilyadevi like Vishwanath Narayan Deo and W W Thakur come out in strong support of Ahilyadevi's religious and welfare policy. Indeed, one can firmly say the peace and joy that the people got in the 30-year long rule of Ahilyadevi would not have been achieved even if Ahilyadevi would have spent an amount double the amount she spent on charity and doing good deeds on raising strong military and expanding her State.

It can be proved with evidence that the objection raised by historians to Ahilyadevi's efforts to religious renovation and reconstruction is not proper. The objection that she ignored the military power too does not stand true to the test of the available historic evidences. Dispatches from the Court of Maheshwar made several mentions of Ahilyadevi making repeated suggestions to the Peshava about military affairs. Ahilyadevi had well understood the

deviousness, aggressiveness and ploy to grab the Maratha State in time. That is why she wrote to the Peshava, "Shrimantani shilewaricha ani hujuricha bharna karun jagogaji fauja pathavun tyas dashat padel ase karave. Shrimant faujechi upeksha karatat hi goshta karyachi nahi. Fauj changali vis-panchavis hajar javal asavi. Sarkari fauj va fransis (French) yaana ekatrit houn Mumbais lavave ani sarkari fauj va angrej yanni vasaichi pustapanhai karavi." (Your honour should recruit ranks and files and sent military at various places to put fear in them. Your honour neglecting the military will not help. The military strength should be around twenty to twenty-five thousand. Your honour's military and the French should come together at Mumbai and your honour's military and the British should rebuild Vasai.)

Since Ahilyadevi was fully aware of the deceitful aggressiveness of the British, she described the tactics of the British saying, "Hinstra shwapade yuktiprayuktine martil pan aswalache marane mahakathin. Surat dharun marale tarach marel. Nahitar tyache chapetit kuni sapadala tar tyala gudgulya karun to thar karil. Tashi hi engrajanchi ladhai aah." (One might be able to kill brutal animals tactfully. However, killing a bear is very difficult. A bear dies only if one captures it and slays it. Otherwise, if it grabs one, it would maul and kill him, Similar is the war against the British.) Indeed, Ahilyadevi had mastered the policy of befriending the enemy of the foe.

Besides, Ahilyadevi had raised a British style drill force around the year 1792-93 by employing an American general named Boyd. Therefore, the charge that Ahilyadevi focused on only religious work and charity is devoid of substance. Righteousness was the base of Ahilyadevi's religiousness. Righteousness is associated with morality, humanness, crave for eternal human values and incessant urge to do good deeds. Because Ahilyadevi was righteous in such manner, her 30 yearlong rules can be evaluated perfectly on basis of the only criteria of welfare of people in all possible ways, happiness of the people. Happiness and satisfaction of subjects is the vitally important feature of a welfare state.

Ahilyadevi did not differentiate on basis of caste, varna, religion etc. She treated Brahmin, Maratha, Bahujan, Muslim equally. Her secularism was balanced and absolute. Even the Muslims from other states like the Nizam used to seek refuge at her state. Chronicles of Maheshwar Court mentions that Brahmin from the state of Tipu Sultan sought refuge at Maheshwar. The chronicle says, "Tipu, Haidarkhan ya lek,



Vijapurche thane gheun, padshaha apan mhanavun, gaj sava gajacha va mohar pandhara mashanchi and rupaya ekvis mashancha kela mhanun tya prantiche Brahmin yethe aale, tyane vartaman sangitale.” (Maheshwar Darbarchi Batmipatre, Bhag 2, Pg 47). (Tipu, the son of Haiderkhan, captured Bijapur, started calling himself emperor and changed the standard length of Gaj to one and a quarter Gaj, made a Mohar equivalent to fifteen Masa's and a Rupee of twenty-one Masa's. Therefore, the Brahmins of that province arrived here and told me this.) (Chronicles of Maheshwar Court, Part 1, Pg 47).

This shows how happy the subjects were under the rule of Ahilyadevi. Peace and security prevailed in the princely state of Indore during her rule. Contemporary rulers of princely states and subjects respected her for being character that was spotlessly clean and committed to the public welfare. Ahilyadevi had appointed her regents in 13 differently princely states and those states too had sent their regents to her court. Her relations with other states were cautious and precise. Therefore, there was no apprehension of foreign aggression. Knowledgeable persons and artists were respected in her state. Noted litterateur Prof Anil Sahastrabudde has done critical analysis of Ahilyadevi's work. He says, “Providing for basic requirements of subjects like food, clothing and shelter is responsibility of the ruler. It is the duty of the king or the ruler to serve to the subjects the way a mother tries her best to provide food to her child when the child feels hungry and considers it to be her apex duty. Ahilyadevi possessed a lot of motherliness. Therefore, she became the mother of the people and the mother of the nation. She spent a lot of money and her estate generously and showered affection on all while shouldering that responsibility.

Boundaries of state, limitations to power could not restrain her from doing her work. Ahilyadevi lived a life like the life of a Sant, who incessantly work for welfare of people. In fact, she intentionally chose that kind of life for herself. She tried her best to ensure that her subjects were not forced to suffer the pain and agony she had to suffer herself. However, this is no job of a single individual. It takes awakening of the feelings of nationality, religiousness and manliness among the masses. Ahilyadevi's rational mind realized this. She was not naïvely religious. She was righteous and diplomatic. She used charity to do good for the nation.”

Noted historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar passes an important and telling remark about Ahilyadevi. He says, “Now it can be proved with original

documentary evidence that Ahilyadevi was a top-class diplomat. Her charity was not naïve religiousness; they are permanent centres to inculcate values, national schools if we look at it from this point of view.”

What do the people really need? They need provision for basic needs like food, clothes and shelter, equality, peace, brotherhood, social justice, freedom to think and express and legal guarantee to protect self-respect of every element of the society. The state, which upholds these values automatically becomes entitled to the title of a welfare state. Ahilyadevi's 30 yearlong rule stands out as different and novel because she devoted herself and her wealth to make common people happy throughout her life.

The earnings of Indore state were divided



into two parts called “Daulat” (Treasury) and “Khajgi” (Privy). Indore was the only state to have such arrangement. Ahilyadevi's mother-in-law Gautamabai had been gifted with the sub-divisions of Maheshwar and Chandwad. Gautamabai managed their functioning independently. The earning from there would be considered Stree Dhan and transferred to privy estate. After Gautamabai's demise, financial powers of privy estate went to Ahilyadevi. Ahilyadevi financed the public welfare works like construction of temples, shelters, roads, wells, food distribution points etc. across India from her Stree Dhan in the privy estate. This is a never before and strikingly different phenomena. Moreover, her daily sustenance would also be financed from the privy estate.

Ahilyadevi firmly believed that she was born for public welfare and protecting interests of the subjects was her supreme duty. Justice department in her court was not subject to



earning. Justice would be delivered to the people free of cost. People were sure about the judiciousness of Ahilyadevi. Though she had her state, wealth, military, all glory and power, Ahilyadevi lived a non-consumptive life on basis of her inner strength. No worldly attraction could ever tempt her.

She never deviated from her ideals. Gandhiji's disciple Vinobha Bhave has stated, "Descriptions of Ahilyadevi made by poets like Moropant and Anantfandi are not exaggerated. Ahilyadevi's rule was a novel experiment in Indian history. The reins of state were in the hands of a devoted, religious woman. Ahilyadevi was judicious. A non-consummate woman ruling a state appeared like a figment of imagination. However, such an experiment was done in the history and the rule was handed over to a woman, Ahilyadevi. This experiment was unmatched in the history of not only India but the entire world. Ahilyadevi set a high example of welfare state on basis of affection, power of religion and wisdom. Wherever I have been in India, I have heard praise of Ahilyadevi from the people of other states. I believe Ahilyadevi remains unmatched in the entire history of India."

A review of history shows that several kings and emperors have done welfare works by governing with focus on people's welfare. They made people happy and satisfied. However, all that was restricted within the boundaries of their kingdom. Ahilyadevi is the only ruler who went outside the boundaries of her state, did welfare work outside her state through religion and bring people from various parts of India together. Thus, Ahilyadevi has made the most importance contribution to the national integrity. Religiousness dominated the lifestyle of people in those days. Therefore, Ahilyadevi thoughtfully chose the medium of religion. There was a selfless, vast humanitarian thought behind it. This work done by her integrated the nation besides highlighting the global thinking of our great tradition.

What may have inspired Ahilyadevi to do welfare works outside her state? Ayodhya, Banaras etc. places were under the Muslim rule in those days. How she may have obtained permissions of the rulers of the states concerned to construct or renovate temples? This needs detailed research. Musing over these aspect lead to following

Conclusions:

Ahilyadevi might have found her inspiration to do welfare works outside her state from her vast global point of view. Ahilyadevi was granted permissions to carry out construction

of temples of other structures in other states, especially Muslim ruled states, because of her strong foreign policy that laid thrust on coordination and cooperation. Be it the Nizam of Hyderabad or Tipu Sultan or anybody else, everyone felt respect and affection for Ahilyadevi. This was the beauty of Ahilyadevi's foreign policy.

Philosophy of the Sants is the core of the broad minded, cohesive policies of Indian tradition. Bore in Maharashtra, Ahilyadevi bore deep influence of not only Ramayan, Mahabharat and history but also the teachings of Marathi Sants. The legendary Sant Dnyaneshwar had prayed to the omnipresent God for well-being of the entire world in his Pasaydan in the land of Maharashtra. That was the most noble prayer ever made to the god. Sant Dnyaneshwar was a Sant and a yogi. He had no worldly possessions like wealth and power. Since he was ardent devotee of the God, he had prayed to the omnipresent od for well-being of all.

On the other hand, Ahilyadevi possessed financial and state power and also the uncontrollable craving and longing to work for public welfare. Therefore, one can conclude with certainty that Ahilyadevi brought into reality the prayer made by Sant Dnyaneshwar to the omnipresent god through her welfare works.

Peace and prosperity can be established in any state on basis of human values like mutual trust, affection and dedication. A state prospers with cooperation, wisdom and balanced thoughts rather than the force of law. Ahilyadevi selflessly spent every rupee of her earnings and every moment she lived for welfare of her state and our nation. It was an attempt to build an ideal and glorious nation. This thought can give inspiration for nation building even today.

Therefore, Ahilyadevi is the mother of the people, mother of the nation. She got the title Punyashlok because of her strong unblemished character and selfless work. The structures of various welfare projects carried out by Ahilyadevi across India from Rameshwar in South to Kedarnath in North and from Jagannath Puri in the East to Somnath in the West are standing even today, after 250 years have passed, serving as source of inspiration for the nationalist ideology. Waking up to the ideals set by Ahilyadevi and following them committedly is the only way to achieve welfare of mankind in today's era of global unrest and conflict.

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Ahilyadevi, motherly queen, who ensured comprehensive development

Besides providing fair, just and efficient governance, Ahilyadevi Holkar, the Queen of Malva, had adopted various measures to encourage and promote agriculture, industries, skill development and water conservation.

Rambhau



When Malhar Rao Holkar, the founder of the Holkar dynasty was appointed as the Satrap of Malva province, the first thing he did was to reach Depalpur in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh and plough a field with a tiller. Moreover, he also sowed seeds in the field. This an extraordinary move that reassured the farmers came at a time when the rulers were indulging in charging exorbitant taxes on people to finance their lavish lifestyles and waging wars with neighbour taxes further

burdening the citizens.

Malhar Rao's granddaughter-in-law, Ahilyadevi Holkar, who carried forward this legacy of Malhar Rao when she became the ruler of the Holkar dynasty later on, went a step ahead and adopted various measures to make the farmers self-confident and more productive. Ahilyadevi was the first one to convince the farmers that pursuing animal husbandry as a subsidiary business to Agriculture not only increases the earnings of the farmers but also increases the yield of



farming. She was also the first one to realize that cultivation of mixed crops doubled the gains of the farmers and encouraged mixed farming in her state.

Not stopping there, she realized the importance of cultivation of spices as cash crops and tried cultivation of spices along with food grain in the fertile lands on the banks of the river Narmada. When the experiment proved successful, she encouraged the farmers to cultivate spices. She also encouraged farmers to develop orchards to make cultivation more profitable.

As a consequence of this, production of fruits increased manifolds and the common people were able to include fruits in their diet. Moreover, Ahilyadevi took initiative to develop a market for the forest yield of fruits and honey. As a result of this initiative, the Adivasis in her state found new employment and earning opportunities. Besides, they


Weaving of Maheshwari sarees connoted not only the strength of Maheshwar, but also formed a legacy of the Holkar rule. Ahilyadevi's decision of setting up a strong fabric industry by manufacturing Maheshwari sarees helped the weaver enjoy a solidly stable financial and social life. Saree is a garment to which religious and cultural importance is attached. Several sarees including Paithani, Banarasi Shalu, Peshwai, Chanderi are famous and Maheshwari saree enjoys a special place among the much popular and renowned saree.

were inspired to conserve the trees in the forests from which forest yields were obtained and thus the green cover in her state increased. Realizing that the Adivasis had sound knowledge about edible fruits yielded from the forests and medicinal use of herbs, trees and creepers grown in forests passed for generations orally, she made cautious efforts to use their conventional wisdom to manufacture various medicines. Thus, she bridged the gap between the Adivasis and the people living in urban as well as rural areas.

Ahilyadevi made efforts to honour the skills of manufacturing various craft products and food items designed by the industrious and imaginative people and to develop a market for them. Deprived yet industrious and imaginative elements of societies such as landless labourers, Adivasis used to manufacture artistic items and paintings. She realized that their industrious labour to make these craft products and items were not only imaginative and productive but they also helped conserve the treasure of the indigenous culture. She encouraged this and promoted the handicraft, cottage industry etc. Maize, sesame, green gram, tobacco, opium, sweet potato, betel leaves, cotton, millet, sunflower, sugarcane, vegetables, cannabis, water nut, sorghum, wheat, linseed, lentil, onion, mustard, barley, cucumber etc. were the major Kharif and Rabbi crops in the era of Ahilyadevi. The Holkar dynasty would collect a whopping revenue of Rs 74 lakh in the form of various taxes charged in its state during Ahilyadevi's rule. It also made revenue in the form of tributes paid by the North, South and Central Divisions, Khandesh, Rajputana and other regions.

Subedar Malhar Rao Holkar had bestowed rights to the members of Bhil community to collect Bhilkawadi tax in the areas dominated by the population of Bhil. As a result, the Bhils refrained themselves from loot and plunder of travellers passing through their area. Introduction of Bhilkawadi tax made the paths winding through the forests and remote areas safer for journey. Therefore, the traffic of traders and pilgrims became less and people started traveling fearlessly. Realizing this benefit of Bhilkawadi tax, Ahilyadevi continued the tradition and thus rein in the nuisance that was caused by the Bhils in the past. The Holkar state had trade relations with Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Chanderi Sarees made at Sarangpur and Maheshwari Saree weaved at Maheshwar were famous all over. The Holkar's charged tax at the rate of ½ Anna per bullock load on transport of spices and similar items, 1 / 4th Anna per bullock load on transport of sugar, tobacco, weaved cloth and cotton, 1 Paisa per bullock load on transport of food grain, 3 / 4 Paisa for transport of buffalo, 1/4th Anna for transport of goat and sheep, ½ Anna for a head load of items and 1/4th Anna entry tax from the travellers and people arriving in the Holkar state from other states.

Government toll booths were set up on the banks of rivers marking boundaries of the



Holkar state to collect these taxes. Ahilyadevi made special efforts to develop agricultural lands cultivable with the water of Narmada, Kshipra and Kanh Rivers flowing through the Malwa region and to provide seeds, water and tools to farmers. She also provided patronage to agricultural experts at Maheshwar to test germination capacity of conventional seeds. Such tested seeds were distributed among farmers. She maintained record of percentage of live and fertile seeds, besides conducting studies on fertility of seeds, weather forecasting, treatment on diseases affecting the fruit orchards, soil testing in areas where cultivation was possible and crop watering methods. This made farmers aware about the proper ways to do agriculture. No wonder, the farmers, who worshipped land and water in addition to various deities and ancestors happily welcomed Ahilyadevi's decisions.

Provision of best quality seeds, tools and cattle for farming by the government promoted group farming. Agriculture prospered a lot, thanks to the constantly ongoing experiments at the government farms. Dr Jyotsna Holkar has elaborated in detail on the agriculture and tax system in Holkar rule in her book 'Holkar Rajyachya Prashasakiy Vyavastha' (Administrative Arrangements of Holkar State). She mentions that Ahilyadevi conducted a novel experiment of using lakes, tanks, ponds and wells for irrigation as a part of her water management initiative. She constructed bunds and tanks on the hill slopes to catch the rainwater flowing away from hilly areas. Stone gates were installed at these tanks to supply water through canals. Stone gates were installed at the great tank adjacent to the Matsyodari temple in Ambad town and Khokad tank was built by constructing a wall using lime to store water and supply it to Chandwad town. Ahilyadevi understood well that catching rainwater to let it percolate in the earth and to store it in various reservoirs proved extremely useful and she designed a policy to do that. She constructed tanks and dug wells at several places across India including Tryambakeshwar, Ambad, Jejuri, Chandwad, Wafgaon etc. to catch water and financed all these works using her privy estate. She took farsighted decisions aimed at public welfare while keeping focus on maximum catchment and utilization of rainwater. Thanks to the water sources built by her, water is available in the areas concerned round the year even today.

Maheshwar was a tiny village situated



Maheshwari Saree

on the banks of River Narmada. However, a large number of tourists, pilgrims and traders visited Maheshwar because of the religious importance it had. Exploiting this religious feeling, Ahilyadevi set up various marketplaces there. She provided patronage to expert weavers and started manufacturing Maheshwari sarees. Once manufacturing of handloom spun sarees and cloth began at Maheshwar, Ahilyadevi started training the local Adivasi women to weave cloth and sarees to provide them employment and to make them self-reliant. Generation of this employment for Adivasi women made Adivasi families self-reliant. The employment helped them get rid of the nomad life and settle down. Since Adivasis would live in forests and found their livelihood there, forest products and hunting were only sources of earning available to them. They were despised by the society since they committed thefts and dacoits due to the lack of stability. Ahilyadevi provided houses, employment, spinning wheels and cotton to Adivasi women at the cost of Government. As a result, life in Maheshwar became peaceful and happy.

Ahilyadevi used Maheshwari sarees herself



and also gift them to the womenfolk in the families of her courtiers. This led to the tradition of gifting Maheshwari sarees at various festivals and auspicious occasions. Cotton and silk needed to manufacture sarees was produced in Maheshwar at large scale. Ahilyadevi encouraged farmers to produce cotton and silk. She set up a local market of silk and cotton and a spinning-weaving industry developed in Maheshwar. The Maheshwari saree that had special features like pure fabric, natural colour and traditional designs became the business carrier of the Holkar state. Traditional pictures of Malva would be depicted on Maheshwari sarees. This carved out special space for them. The Holkar state developed business relations with far away states, thanks to the business of Maheshwari Saree and spun yard. In a thoughtful move, Ahilyadevi named the newly designed sarees after the capital of her state.

Weaving of Maheshwari sarees connoted not only the strength of Maheshwar, but also formed a legacy of the Holkar rule. Ahilyadevi's decision of setting up a strong fabric industry by manufacturing Maheshwari sarees helped the weaver enjoy a solidly stable financial and social life. Saree is a garment to which religious and cultural importance is attached. Several sarees including Paithani, Banarasi Shalu, Peshwai, Chanderi are famous and Maheshwari saree enjoys a special place among the much popular and renowned saree.

Ahilyadevi had a vast collection of religious books and books that were useful to people. She would invite experts of various fields to her court, hold discussions with them and honour them appropriately. Realizing that the experience of the experienced and knowledgeable people proves to be a guiding light for all, Ahilyadevi would always choose experts and provide them patronage at Maheshwar so that their expertise remains at hand for her. She started the tradition of respecting knowledge and knowledgeable people.

Ahilyadevi was an ardent believer and a religious woman. She organised discussions on many religious scriptures and conventional knowledge. However, Ahilyadevi also did not hesitate to challenge the people, who would exploit people in the name of religion. The books and volumes in Ahilyadevi 's personal collection included Shridhari (18 volumes), Muhurt Chintamani, Swarg Arohan, Wanparva, Panchatarani Geeta, Geeta Govind, Vyankatesh Stotra, Adhyatma Ramayana (seven volumes), Udyog Parv, Dnyaneshwari, Dnyaneshwari

Naman, Devichi Manasa Pooja, Chandika Pooja Vidhan, Vapi Kupotsarg Prayog, Kanyakubja Mahatmya, Janmashtami Pooja, Ashramwas Patri, Drona Parva, Rukmini Swayamvar, Malhari Kavach, Narayan Varma, Bhairav Tantrokt, Manu Sukta, Chaturthi Mimansa, Veerta Parva, Vrat Ka Patri, Narayan Sindhu Pothi, Anu Vedant, Bhagvat Geeta, Rudra Nyas, Shraavan Nirnay, Vishnu Sahastra Naam, Drushya Purnima Maas Patri, Naimisharanya Mahatmya Pancha Rushi, Vedokta Sukta, Savantsari Shraddha, Gayatri Paddhati, Navgraha Yantra, Yantra Vibhag, Vaidya Vibhag, Graha Makh, Malhari Satva Raja, Sthansta Sthan Vidhi, Daan Chandrika, Naimisharanya Mahatmya, PushkarMahatmya, Ved Pothi, Utsarjan Upakarma, Pooja Prakar, Sabha Parva, Vishhnu Pratishta Paddhati, Nirnay Sindhu, Jambu Marg Prastav, Maha



Prasthan Patri, Bheeshma Parva, Apamarjan, Tithi Nirnay Saar, Geeta Panch tarani, Vayu Stuti, Shiksha Upnishad, Malhari Sahastra Nam (From Padma Purana), Chaturmasa Prayog Patri, Anik Ka Vedokta, Narayan Upanishada, Raas Manjari, Raghuvansh, Prakruti Srot and Brahma Panchika.

Ahilyadevi realized the importance of preserving these books and volumes. She got many handwritten copies of these books and volumes made. She employed calligraphers and knowledgeable people to make handwritten copies of books. Thus, she conserved and preserved rare books. The books and volumes collected by her are preserved in the Government archive even today.

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stepwell, Known as Shivatirtha, Verul, Maharashtra

Devi Ahilyabai – A social visionary

Devi Ahilyabai will always be known for her extraordinary work. Her work covers all aspects of social life. Be it religion or be it economy. Her spirituality makes her far different from other social reformers and rulers.

Pramod

On 31st May 2024 begins the third birth centenary of the year of Devi Ahilyabai, the hereditary noble queen of the Holkar dynasty. Devi Ahilyabai was not a queen in the strictest sense. However, she still ruled the hearts of the people and hence considered as the uncrowned queen of Maheshwar, the seat of the Holkar dynasty. She is popularly revered as 'Lokmata' which means 'Mother of the people'.

Devi Ahilyabai was a capable ruler, an able administrator and a visionary, who always had the whole perspective of Bharat while in her role as a ruler. Her acts were always in the

interest of the nation and the people. While she was soft hearted to empathize with the people in understanding their problems and woes, she was tough and hard in deciding on matters of national interest and security.

Devi Ahilyabai's social work and reforms were focused on improving the lives of the people and promoting welfare in her kingdom. These works also extended beyond the boundaries of her kingdom. It did not only mean construction of structures for momentary benefits of the people but was made with a broader perspective of setting up lives of the people in different ways. Her



works covered the entire gamut of education, infrastructure development, healthcare and welfare, women empowerment and irrigation and agriculture.

While she had a wider perspective, the basic aim behind her works was to provide enough food, clothes and education to the people at large. A look at her works keeps one in a state of awe! It will be appropriate at this point to know about her works and the areas of public life she touched.

Education: With an aim to provide primary education to the people, Devi Ahilyabai created settlements of experts in various subjects at places like Maheshwar and other places of religious importance. 'Brahmapuri' of Varanasi is an example where all such experts, selflessly dedicated to imparting knowledge, were made to settle. This was a place where teachers, following the principle of simple living and high thinking, used to teach the next generations. Brahmapuri was then considered to be a university where students from all parts of the country used to come and study. It is from this place that Ramshastri Prabhune, renowned judge in the Maratha history, emerged. Devi Ahilyabai has also got a book titled 'ShriAhilya Kamdhenu' written and composed by experts. This book is like an encyclopedia on Rajdharma (principles and ethics of how to rule). Ahilyabai also had a collection of around 75 books (majorly of religious importance) and had also asked about 25 books to be ordered from Chandwad (a place in Maharashtra).

Infrastructure Development: In order to promote pilgrimage and encourage people to travel to other places in the country and people from other places to come to her kingdom, Devi Ahilyabai undertook numerous projects for construction and renovation of temples, ghats (steps leading to a river), wells, tanks and other public facilities. It is amazing to know that such works are spread all across Bharat – from Somnath temple in Gujarat to Bengal and from Himalayas to Hyderabad and down south. It covers all important places like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura, the Four Dhams, Jagannath – Puri and others. Records say that some such work was also done for the Pashupatinath temple in Nepal!

The variety of works include building / renovation of temples to building of wells, tanks and bridges. One striking example is the bridge built across river Karmanashini in Bengal. This river flows through Bengal and other provinces and meets the river Ganga. Ahilyabai built the bridge in order to stop the

water from flowing into the villages and cause damage thereon.

One also needs to understand that the main objective of all such works was to revive the Hindu Dharma, which seemed to have lost its sheen due to foreign invasions, mainly the Muslims.

Health & Welfare: Devi Ahilyabai had prime concern for her people. She, therefore, built many Dharamshala's (Dormitories) for the benefit of the sick and needy. She made it a point to invite and settle practitioners of medicine in her kingdom.

Women empowerment: Devi Ahilyabai took special efforts to rehabilitate the widows of soldiers who lost their lives in various battles. She invited weavers from various parts of the country and made them teach her subjects, mainly women, to weave sarees (ethnic women wear) which continue to be manufactured till today and are known



as Maheshwari sarees. In the process, not only were the women rehabilitated but an industry was founded. Ahilyabai also promoted women education and other welfare measures specially for them.

Social rehabilitation: The then Bhil community was infamous for robbery and other crimes. Devi Ahilyabai used a novel method to socially rehabilitate them. She first announced that she will marry her daughter to a man who shows his bravery and defeats the Bhils. This proved to be useful. One man by the name Phanse, successfully fought and defeated the Bhils. She got her daughter married to him immediately. Later, to take care of the Bhils, she allocated the task of guarding the borders to them due to which they started getting their livelihood. She also donated pieces of agricultural land **(On 27 page)**



Maheshwar: Model of urban planning

The name of Devi Ahilyabai Holkar is synonymous with Maheshwar. It is a picturesque sight of the fort that is an architectural wonder, the serene stone structure of the Palace (Wada) of Ahilyabai in it, the spacious series of steps (Ghat) leading down to the flow of River and the sacred River of Narmada Blessed by the enduring presence of the venerable Punyashlok Ahilyabai!

Chinmayee

How was the town of Maheshwar a few centuries ago? How did the extraordinary woman engineer its prosperity some 300 years ago and transform it totally although the sophisticated expertise of urban town planning was not available then? Let us have a glimpse at the town that is a lot more beautiful and well planned compared to the cities of today. Maheshwar is an ancient town with a long and glorious history. It was known as Mahishmati in the prehistoric era. Reva Khand of the Skanda Purana and Narmada Rahasya of the Vayu Purana describe the Mahishmati town of then. This town is mentioned repeatedly in Mahabharata too. The famous debate on metaphysics and religion (Shastrartha) between

Mandan Mitra (Mandan Mishra) and Adi Shankaryacharya, in which Adi Shankaracharya and his Advaita Vedanta prevailed, had taken place in this town. Bharati, the wife of Mandan Mitra (Mandan Mishra) was the referee at that debate.

The chronicles say Peshwa Bajirao (First) granted this town to Gautamabai through a charter (Sanad) in the year 1734. Malhar Rao Holkar renovated the Maheshwar Fort after that and strengthened it. The Maheshwar Fort was the private property of Gautamabai, Ahilyabai's mother-in-law. Ahilyabai would visit Maheshwar occasionally till the death of her father-in-law, Malhar Rao. However, after the cruel destiny delivered a brutal blow to her,



Ahilyabai decided to quit Indore, which was the capital of the Holkar dynasty and move her residence to Maheshwar.

Temples of Bhagwan Shiva, spacious course of Narmada River and the lush green surroundings at Maheshwar especially appealed to Ahilyabai's mind. The lady ruler with par excellence was basically drawn towards the religion. However, her life was destined to take a strange course and make her take over the reins of the powerful Holkar dynasty. Engrossed in diplomatic and political affairs as the ruler of the Holkar dynasty, Ahilyabai would find the peace of her mind at Maheshwar. After her son Male Rao became the chief of the dynasty and appointed as Subedar, Ahilyabai would spend most of her time at Indore where she would look after the governance and visit Maheshwar occasionally. However, Ahilyabai decided to move her residence to Maheshwar after Male Rao died in the year 1767.

Ahilyabai took reins of the dynasty in her firm hands after Male Rao's death and handed over the entire responsibility of the military to Tukoji Rao Holkar. After becoming chief of the dynasty, she moved the capital of the Holkar's from Indore to Maheshwar. There were some predominant reasons behind this decision. Firstly, since Maheshwar was situated along the banks of the Narmada River, there was scope for developing industry and agriculture there. Secondly, Maheshwar had Indore, the military camp of the Holkar's on one side of it and the region under control of the Marathas on the other. That made Maheshwar a safe resort.

Though simple, the Palace (Wada) of Ahilyabai at Maheshwar had its own special features. Standing on its terrace, one could watch the pinnacles of temples all around defining the skyline. This view would provide peace and joy to Ahilyabai. She would hold her court at this palace every day. The court would assemble at a spacious yet simple hall that was a part of Ahilyabai's residence. It had no pompous glam and glitter like carpets, throne or luxurious seats. All it had in the name of sitting arrangement was a clean mattress spread.

Consider this, the Holkar dynasty was one of the wealthiest dynasties of that time and Ahilyabai was the owner of the entire wealth. It was the time when all kings, dynasts and chieftains made it a point to get stone studded gold thrones for themselves. However, Ahilyabai had no interest in such lavishness. Completely devoted to her work, she would instead find comfort in the use of a clean, coarse, loosely-woven woollen white mattress (Ghongadi). The palace at Maheshwar became witness

to a novel, never before seen ceremony soon after Ahilyabai went to live there. Soon after taking over the reins of the dynasty, Ahilyabai relinquished all property as per the Vedic rituals performed by Brahmin priests. She vouched at the ceremony, "My purpose of life is to keep my subjects happy. I am personally responsible for every act I do. I shall be answerable to God for every act I do in exercise of the power vested in me. I have to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to me by the god. This wealth and property are not mine. I offer it to Lord Shiva."

Since the fort was situated on the banks of River Narmada, Ahilyabai first built a Ghat on the banks of Narmada. She constructed paved roads leading to the Ghat from the town. Besides the stone structure of the Ghat, she also built beautiful temples of Bhagwan Shri Ram, Bhagwan Krishna and Bhagwan Shiva and a spacious auditorium where subjects could gather and listen to performance of Kirtan.

River Narmada, referred to adoringly as Narmada Maiya (Mother Narmada) by Ahilyabai and others, witnessed all this transformation of Maheshwar, reassuring and encouraging Ahilyabai. Ahilyabai had a special emotional attachment with Narmada Maiyya. Entire Central India called Narmada Maiyya and Ahilyabai became the mother of the people of Central India.

With Ahilyabai moving to Maheshwar, a number of expert artisans like stone carvers, mesons, carpenters made a beeline to the town to find employment and accommodation there. Ahilyabai then renovated the Rajarajeshwara Temple. She constructed a grand temple of Kashi Vishwanath and made arrangements to ensure pooja was performed there. She also constructed a temple of Bhagwan Ram and appointed Nathu Bhat Bhikam Bhat as priest there. She constructed new temples, renovated old ones and made arrangements for their upkeep and poojas there by appointing Brahmin families for the purpose. She renovated Shri Kaleshwar temple and constructed a Dharamshala to provide accommodation for the devotees performing the auspicious circuit journey around River Narmada (Parikrama).

Sakharam Dhongade of Indore possessed sound knowledge of the business of silk.



Ahilyabai called him to Maheshwar, offered him the seed capital for business and thus the business of weaving silk cloth started at Maheshwar. Within four years after that, more than 100 weavers were weaving Maheshwari Sarees and Dhotis. Maheshwar became a handloom hub. Sarees manufactured at Maheshwar are world-famous to this date. In those days, even the Peshava used to place orders for his Dhoti at Maheshwar.

The weavers settled at the Juna Bazar just outside the Maheshwar Fort. Likewise, several new settlements were designed. Several new business districts (Peths and Puras) were designed. Phansepura was designed in memory of Ahilyabai's son-in-law Yashvantrao Phanse, Govindpura was named after the Manager of Privy (Khasgi Divan) Govindpant Ganu, Malharganj was named after father-in-law Malhar Rao. Besides, Aditwar Peth, Mangalwar Peth were also established.

A business district of goldsmiths was set up and crafting of the crowns and jewellery for idols began. Maheshwar style silverware became famous. Every item was crafted differently and artistically, thanks to the patronage by Ahilyabai. Ahilyabai gave apex importance to agriculture. She understood well that the farmers were the backbone of the state. Taking into consideration the contribution of farmers in the development of the state, she adopted pro-farmer policies. Her policy had its focus on the environment, water reservoirs, forests, seeds, wells, tanks and ponds, bunds etc.

Mentions of drought at several places across contemporary India are found in chronicles. However, there was never a drought in the region ruled by Ahilyabai. Ahilyabai constructed canals fed by river to provide water for agriculture and general purposes such as bathing, cleaning utensils and clothes, drinking water for cattle. This ensured that the river water remains non-polluted while ensuring adequate water supply for agriculture. This helped good quality and quantity of yield. She reserved some land to provide interference free habitat for birds and animals. The farmers were permitted to sell their produce at any place of their convenience. She set up markets for agricultural produce in Maheshwar too. She provided seed capital to enable farmers to do complementary business. She imposed prohibition on alcohol.

A number of debates, discourses and talks are held on the environment all over today, in the 21st century. Ahilyabai did her best to preserve the environment 300 years ago. She got trees like Neem, Mango, Tamarind, Peepal, Bunyan, Indian Fig (Audumbar) along the roads and at barren, uncultivated lands. These trees not only keep the temperature low, but their roots go deep under the earth and thus they maintain water table levels. She made a rule that every farmer shall plant 20 trees, of which 11 shall be owned by the State and nine shall be owned by the farmer. This rule was called "Nau Gyarah Kanon".

Thanks to these policies and initiatives, the



revenue of Ahilyabai's state was a whopping Rs 1,05,37,211. The revenue collection from the region was Rs 75,00,000 during Malharrao's era. Ahilyabai had made a rule, prohibiting begging, alms across her state. Instead, she provided employment to every person belonging to every class at Maheshwar. Koti Lingarchan Pooja was an example of this.

Ahilyabai was a devotee of Bhagwan Shiva. She would perform Koti Lingarchan Pooja on the banks of Narmada River in the pious month of Shravan. One thousand Brahmins would come together and make one crore Shiv Lingas for the pooja. This ritual generated employment for many. The soil needed would be extracted from the bed of River Narmada. That provided employment to many. Besides, those selling items required for Pooja, flowers, milk for Abhishekam, dairy products would also make their earnings due to the ritual. After the ritual was over, conservancy staff would be required to clean the venue. Thus, the ritual supported many trades and businesses. Later, she went ahead and started the Koti Lingarchan Pooja daily. The tradition of making 1,25,000 Shiv Lingas and worshipping them praying for public welfare is ongoing at the palace at Maheshwar as of today. She employed the visually impaired and physically challenged to simple jobs like cleaning spaces.

Appreciably, Ahilyabai paid a lot of attention towards social integration and inclusiveness. Some 300 persons would have food together at the palace at Maheshwar every day in the afternoon. There would be no difference concerning food. The food that Ahilyabai herself ate would be served to everyone. The diners would be servants, dependents, informants, family members, clerical staff, water fetchers, washer men, tailors, conservancy staff etc. Not only would they be able to enjoy the meal together, but the tradition also promoted cohesiveness, mass reach out, feeling of equality, mutual affection and cooperation and a feeling of integrity among the common people.

Increasing the social and educational standard of a city is as important as making economic, social and industrial developments for a ruler. Ahilyabai attached a lot of importance to education. Her mentor, Malhar Rao the Great, had laid full thrust in educating her in her formative years. Ahilyabai felt it necessary that the Maheshwar should be renowned as a centre of art, just as the Holkar dynasty was famous for its bravery. She resolved to promote excellence in various fields so that Maheshwar becomes a centre of excellence. To make this happen,

she corresponded with the qualified people from across the state and invited them to move to Maheshwar using her official seal and signature as a symbol of her earnestness. Best of medicos (Vaidya), astrologers (Jyotishi), experts of grammar (Vyakaran Vetta), Kirtankars, sculptures (Murtikar), poets (Kavi), writers (Lekhakar) were invited to live in Maheshwar.

Sanskrit is considered the language of Gods. She set up a Sanskrit school to study Vedas (Sanskrit Vedpathshala) at Maheshwar soon after reaching there. Nearly 115 students would enroll there every year. She made a collection of the best books at Maheshwar through carefully selected scholars. With the patronage of the intellectuals, Maheshwar rapidly progressed culturally. Ahilyabai herself would tour the town every day in a palanquin and overlook how the conditions in which the people lived. Thanks to this, the residents started treating the Maheshwar town like their mother.

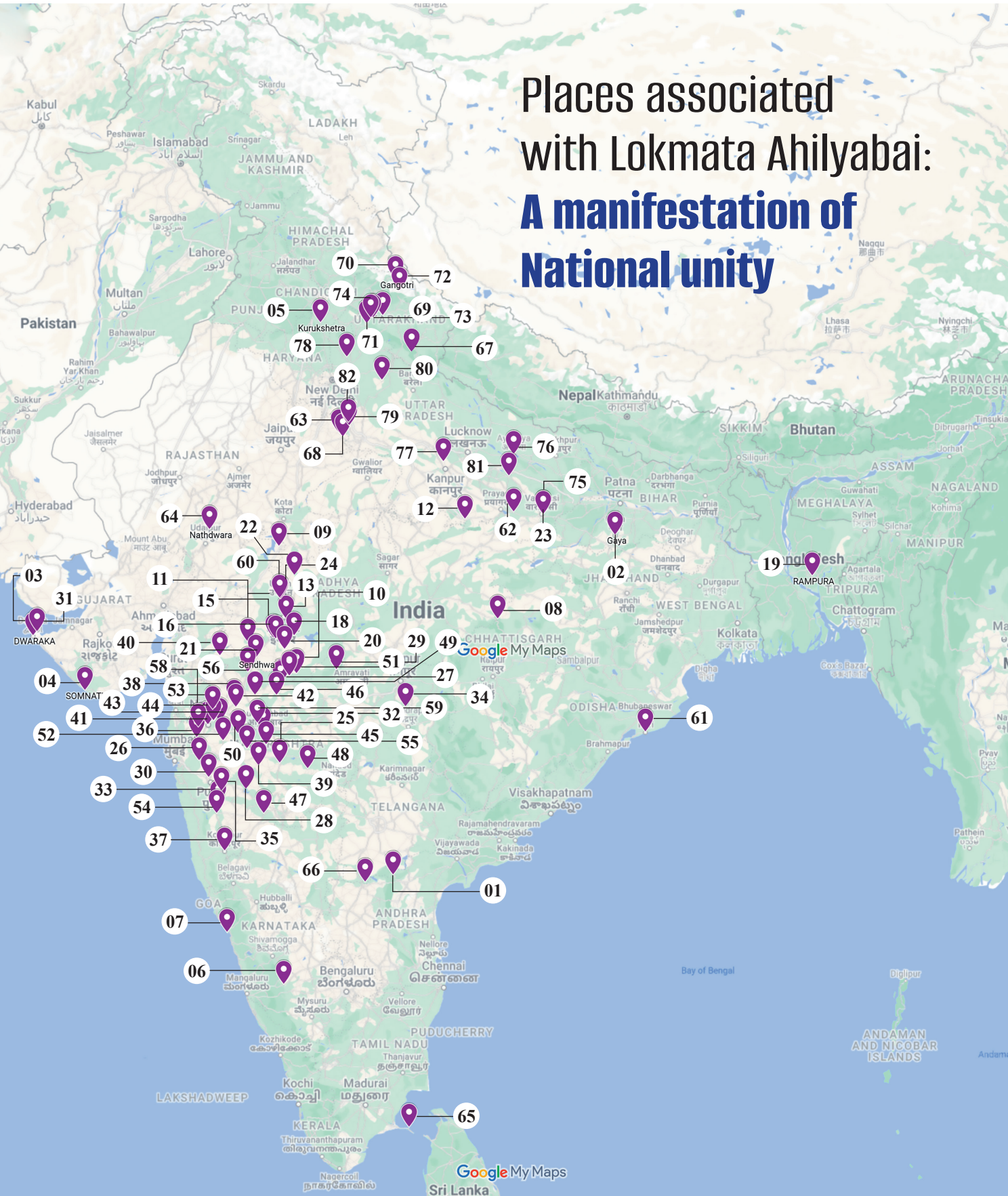
River Narmada, referred to adoringly as Narmada Maiya (Mother Narmada) by Ahilyabai and others, witnessed all this transformation of Maheshwar, reassuring and encouraging Ahilyabai. Ahilyabai had a special emotional attachment with Narmada Maiyya. Entire Central India called Narmada Maiyya and Ahilyabai became the mother of the people of Central India. While River Narmada prospered lives of people with her water, Ahilyabai incessantly worked on welfare of people. Both Ahilyabai and River Narmada were thus bonded with each other.

Ahilyabai's palace at Maheshwar was constructed along the river Narmada. She would be able to have darshan of Narmada Maiyya from her chamber. She never had her meal without bathing in the river Narmada. Ahilya Ghat of River Narmada is an architectural wonder. Many pilgrim centres are located along River Narmada. However, Maheshwar is the most beautiful one. Residence of Ahilyabai had made it more pious. Though she was one of the wealthiest persons, Ahilyabai lived a simple life 300 years ago. Indeed, she was a Raj Yogini, Karma Yogini and Shiva Yogini.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj would often say, "Creation of this state (Swarajya) is God's own will". Ahilyabai dedicated her state to Bhagwan Shiva and ruled in the name of Bhagwan Shiva. No wonder, Maheshwar, the town developed by such a godly woman, is the capital of Gods.

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Places associated with Lokmata Ahilyabai: A manifestation of National unity






No	Name	Info
1	Srisailam	Preservation of Mallikarjuna temple
2	Gaya	Vishnupad temple was rebuilt in 1787
3	Dwaraka	Restoration and renovation of the Dwarkadhish temple
4	Somnath	Ordered Somnath mandir to be rebuilt with a consecrated idol in 1783
5	Kurukshetra	Building of Shiv Shantanu Mahadev temple, panchkund ghat, laxmi kund ghat
6	Belur	The development of Ganpati mandir , pandurang mandir , khandoba mandir .
7	Gokarna	Garib khana- a resthouse
8	Amarkantak	Contributed to the development of temples, ghats, and facilities for pilgrims in the area.
9	Bhanpura	Built 9 temples and dharmashala
10	Burhanpur	Initiatives to improve infrastructure, including the construction of ghats along the tapti river and the restoration of temples and monuments
11	Chikhaldra	Built Neelkantheswar temple
12	Chitrakoot	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
13	Devguradia shiva mandir	The Gutkeshwar mandir of present day is built on top of the original sunken temple
14	Jamghat-bhumidwar	Built a gate to the town. Near them is a pond which is known as Ahilyabai pond
15	Maheshwar	Encouraged local artisans and weavers, leading to the growth of the weaving industry in maheshwar. Several construction and renovation projects, including temples, ghats, and forts. The most notable of these was the Ahilya fort.
16	Mandaleshwar	A ghat was built on the banks of river Narmada
17	Nimar	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
18	Omkar Mandhata	Kevalagiri ghat:1778-1785 the ghat was extended and was completely re-built. Built several temples in the city, among which included are the Vishvanatha temple and the Manikarnika ghat
19	Rampura	Construction of several shiva temple in rampura
20	Sakargoan	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
21	Sendhwa	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
22	Tarana	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
23	Tilbhandeshwar	Tilbhandeshware temple's restoration
24	Ujjain	Reconstruction of the Mahakaleshwar temple, dedicated to lord shiva, which had been damaged by invaders



25	Beed	Jirnodhar ghat-significant patronage from Ahilyabai Holkar, who added the enhancements with intricate carvings, sculptures, and ornamental pillars, further adding to its splendor. Khandeshwari temple in beed underwent extensive renovations and improvements
26	Bhimashankar	Funding for the repair of the bhimashankar temple's infrastructure, including the temple structure itself, courtyards etc.
27	Bhusawal	Changdev mandir restoration
28	Chaundi	Birth place of Ahilyabai Holkar, mahadev temple and a ghat on the sina river.
29	Chikhaldara	Constructed of virat mata mandir and gopal krushn mandir
30	Chinchwad	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
31	Darukavane	Reconstructing and renovating the Aundha Nagnath temple
32	Hamalwada	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
33	Jagtapwadi	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
34	Jamb	Samrtha temple is built in memory of Sant Ramdas Swami
35	Jejuri	Malhar Gautameshwar temple was enhanced and rebuilt
36	Kasara ghat	Built a well
37	Kolhapur	Renovation and maintenance of the famous mahalakshmi temple
38	Malegaon	Built and repaired roads, bridges, and water supply systems, which facilitated better connectivity and transportation
39	Miri	Built Lord Shiva temple at miri known as " bhairav temple
40	Nandurbar	Built 15 to 16 wells under her supervision. Also building and restoring temples - Mamnath Mahadev temple, Shree Shaneshwar temple, Umapati Mahadev temple
41	Nashik	Ghat on the ramkund in panchavati, built a temple dedicated to lord rama
42	Nimgaon	Well, was dug for agriculture purpose
43	Niphad	Build the kunda in dindori, niphad
44	Ozar	Restoration and preservation of the vigneshwara temple.
45	Paithan	Restoration of temples and construction of ghats along the Godavari river in paithan
46	Paldhi (jamner)	Paldhi temple - preservation and development of the temple and the surrounding area
47	Pandharpur	Peshwa barav was constructed to provide water for the warkaris
48	Parli vaijnath	Vaidyanath temple renovated
49	Parola	Preserved and renovate the fort of parola
50	Puntamba	Reconstructing temples and building new ghats.
51	Raver	Built a kund at mahadev temple in raver
52	Sangamner	Ram temple of sangmner was renovated by Rani Ahilya Holkar
53	Saptashringi	Built dharmashala in saptashringi



54	Satara	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
55	Shingnapur	Facilitated and supported pilgrimage to various sacred sites of Shingnapur
56	Shirpur	Khanderao (malhar) temple or Pataleshwar mandir founded by Rani Ahilyabai Holkar
57	Sulpeshwar	Renovation and restoration of the Sulpeshwar Shiva temple.
58	Trimbakeshwar	Built a bridge from kushavart tirth to Trimbakeshwar temple and built a temple named as Tribhuvaneshwar Mahadev temple behind the Trimbakeshwar temple. Renovated kushavrt kund.
59	Verul	Rebuilt the Ghrishneshwar temple in the year 1791 ce
60	Pashupateshwar	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
61	Jaggannath Puri	Generously funded the construction and renovation of the Shri Ramchandra temple in Jaggannath Puri
62	Handia	Contributed to the development of Siddhanath temple.
63	Kumher	In loving memory of her husband, oversaw the creation of a memorial dedicated to khanderao holkar in the vicinity of kumher
64	Nathdwara	Construction of the Ahilya kund, a holy water reservoir located within the shrinathji temple complex
65	Rameswaram	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
66	Alampur	Restoration and renovation of several temples in alampur.
67	Badrinarayan	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
68	Bharatpur tehri	Maintained and enhanced the Bharatpur ganga mandir
69	Devprayag	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
70	Gangotri	Renovation and maintenance of the gangotri temple and the surrounding pilgrimage sites
71	Haridwar	Renovate and maintain the ghats (steps leading to the river) along the ganges river
72	Kedarnath	Sponsored the reconstruction of the Kedarnath temple
73	Neelkanth Mahadev	Played a pivotal role in renovating and restoring the Neelkanth Mahadev temple in Rishikesh
74	Rishikesh	Renovation of the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Rishikesh.
75	Anand kanan	Rebuilding of Kashi Vishwanath temple
76	Ayodhya	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
77	Bithoor	Brahmavart ghat is renovated by Rani Ahilyabai Holkar
78	Sardhana	Chandi devi temple was built by Devi Ahilyabai Holkar
79	Mathura	Temples and ghats along the Yamuna river in mathura were renovated and restored
80	Sambhal gram	Constructed Laxmi Narayan temple and two wells.
81	Sultanpur	Known for her good governance and patronage to religion
82	Vrindavan	Commissioned the chain bihari temple behind kaliya ghat



Devi Ahilyabai saw big dreams.
She could convert some
of her dreams into reality
partially in her lifetime.
Turning the remaining of her
dreams into reality is now our
responsibility.



Devi Ahilyabai Holkar : A queen dedicated to public welfare

Vinita



If one is to describe Devi Ahilyabai, the phenomenal queen of Holkar Dynasty, the apt words would be found in the Marathi poem 'Raj yogini Sati Ahilya Holkaranchi Rani, Ajun Narmada Jali Laharati Tichya Yashachi Gani!' (The waves of River Narmada still sing the songs of success of Sati Ahilya, the queen of the Holkar Dynasty, who, in spite of being a queen, remained a hermit and a pious woman to the core.)

Over two centuries after her decades, a number of public works built by her brick by brick stand tall even today as testimony of her great achievements. Most of the public works done by her are associated with places of worship. However, the common people have been using them in many ways until this date.

She built several roads, forts and buildings not only in Malva region where she ruled, but across the country outside her state from Badrikedar to Rameshwar and from Dwarika-Somnath to Jagannath Puri. The public works constructed by her are situated at a total of 40 places across India. She reconstructed several important temples including the temples of Kashi Vishweshwar, Somnath and Verul. She made permanent arrangements of financial assistance to over 50 temples. She constructed shelters for devotees at 11 major pilgrim centres. Moreover, she constructed beautiful, spacious and strong ghats along several Rivers at various pilgrim centres such as Kashi, Ayodhya, Haridwar, Maheshwar and Nashik which are still standing. She set up food distribution centres at a number of places including Maheshwar. Besides, she also built several wells, tanks, ponds, reservoirs and water cists.

All these works appear to be charity arising out of her religious tendency. But the fact is that the society in her era was deeply influenced by religion. Religion was the basis for public welfare, public awakening and organizing the masses. The Maratha rule that had gained its standing by fighting back the Mughal Empire was deteriorating and getting disintegrated fast during her period. People were harassed due to the incessant atrocities of the aggressors and constantly ongoing battles of the local chieftains and local rulers. Tormented, people sought solace, a ray of hope in pilgrims. However, watching temples that remained dilapidated for several years was disturbing and demoralizing experience. Therefore, the works of reconstruction and renovating temples undertaken by Devi Ahilyabai meant rebuilding the feeling of self-honour and self-confidence among the masses.

By reconstructing temples, Devi Ahilyabai not only awakened and nurtured the religious feelings, but also promoted a culture based on morality and good conduct by using the religious feelings of people. Besides, the works undertaken by her served public welfare in many ways. Food security, safety, peace, stability, patronage to the weaker sections, justice, social development and happiness provide a sound base to human life. Devi Ahilyabai's public welfare works helped achieve all this. Devi Ahilyabai would rule her state with utmost honesty and in a just manner. She was also extremely cautious about the safety of her state. Consequently, her state remained stable and peaceful. As a result, the subjects were happy and satisfied. Public works would go on incessantly in her state and at various pilgrim centres. The adage 'Chalu Dya Holkari Taki' (Let the works of Holkar continue) became popular



because of it.

These works undertaken by Devi Ahilyabai provided continuous employment to artisans like stone cutters, masons, carpenters etc. other craftsmen and also labourers. Once a temple was built, gardens would also be developed there providing employment for several people such as gardeners, priests, decorators, Kirtan performers etc. Besides, more people would start visiting pilgrim centres because of good facilities there. This promoted axillary industries.

Thus, these constructions proved to be centres of Indian culture and values. Besides, she provided several facilities like free food distribution, shelters for needy for the distressed, physically challenged persons. She provided free medical treatment to people in her state. She used various occasions like Katha, Kirtan and festivals that were available then to the best of their capacity for public awakening. She preserved, conserved and spread conventional knowledge and wisdom by getting a number of Pothis, religious books copied and donating them. Her personal collection of books at Maheshwar was as good as a library. She would arrange for reading of important books and hear it herself. Several scholars frequented Maheshwar, thanks to the availability of the books in her collection, and that gave a cultural aura to Maheshwar. Besides, she funded setting up of a Sanskrit university at Kashi and suggested the name 'Brahmapuri' for it.

She expected the university to be a centre to study Vedic literature and creation of new literature. She would send a team of experts to assess the progress of the work of setting up the university after every three months. Means of travel were not available in those days. People faced difficulties during journey while crossing the rivers and forests and dealing with thieves and dacoits. Devi Ahilyabai provided all possible facilities to travellers. She built reservoirs, grew orchards along the roads and provided facilities like water points, shelters, ghats along the rivers, ferry boats to the travellers. She set up water points, constructed reservoirs and dug wells to deal with water scarcity. The wells constructed by her are still in use.

Notably, she was using her privy estate to finance all these works. She herself had adopted extremely simple lifestyle, minimizing her needs. Therefore, she could offer charities more than anybody else. None of her contemporaries, be them men or women rulers, have done as many public welfares works as Devi Ahilyabai. Moreover, she maintained a sound fund reserve for her state. Tax was collected, but not exorbitantly. In case any officer was found

collecting extra revenue, she would make him repay it.

Another important initiative undertaken by Devi Ahilyabai was to rehabilitate the communities that traditionally robbed people by providing them employment, lands to cultivate and the assistance they needed. She employed many such people as road tax collectors. She provided employment to the bootleggers. She encouraged villages to remain alcohol-free by giving prizes. As a result, the people who were causing nuisance were assimilated with the mainstream society. This curbed crimes and reduced nuisance. Thus, the people under Devi Ahilyabai's rule enjoyed peace and prosperity although instability prevailed in the other surrounding states.

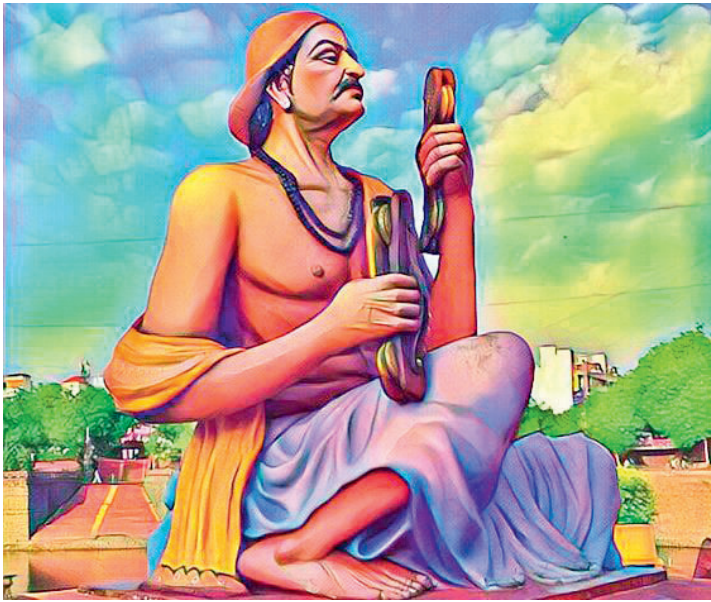
She invited expert weavers to Maheshwar, trained them and expanded the weaving industry. As a consequence, weavers found employment. Beautifully women artistic sarees gave a new identity to Maheshwar. Such works done by her strengthened the social fabric in India and promoted a culture of integrity, inclusion and assimilation.

There was a time when the journey from Indore to Maheshwar was considered risky. Some men helped travellers do the journey safely but collected self-styled 'Hat Dhulai Tax' from them in return. Once, they felt they had collected excessive amount and gave the money to their Queen, Devi Ahilyabai. She refused to accept the money. Instead, she used it to construct a gate at the middle of the ghat between Maheshwar and Indore. A pandal was set up next to it. People were able to rest there and enjoy the natural beauty of the serene Vindhya-Satpuda ridges. A tank was also built there. This can be viewed as a tourism promotion scheme of those days. The works done by Devi Ahilyabai are guiding light in the fields of tourism, employment generation, industry, handicrafts, architecture and many other.

Devi Ahilyabai saw big dreams. She envisioned highway from Kashi to Kolkata, she facilitated taking the Holi water of River Ganga from Kashi to Rameshwar, she wanted to set up a huge food distribution point at Rameshwar, she longed to see the idol installed at the Somnath temple. She could convert some of her dreams into reality partially in her lifetime.

Turning the remaining of her dreams into reality is now our responsibility. Therefore, we must strive to live up to the ideals laid down by her and usher in a true welfare state.

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Narsi Mehta spent his entire life serving God and reciting His praise through Bhajan and Kirtan. Moreover, the Sant who penned the world-famous Bhajan 'Vaishnav Jan to Tene Kahiye' also possessed social, cultural and religious points of view.

Narsi Mehta - A Sant & an inspiring social reformer

Lalit

The Bhajan 'Vaishnav Jan to Tene Kahiye' puts forth a million-dollar fact. If one halts just after reciting 'Par Dukhe Upkar Kare', the qualification criteria would result in a skyrocketing number of Vaishnav Jans. However, the full line of the Bhajan is 'Par Dukhe Upkar Kare to Ye Man Abhimaan Na Ae Re'. This latter part of the line is a caution sounded to alienate ourselves from our subconscious ego. If we wish to experience the joy of beneficence, we must forget our deed; and should never forget the beneficence of others for you.

Shri Narsi Mehta, the legendary Sant-poet of the 15th Century, penned this world-famous Bhajan, which teaches the greatest lesson of life. This Bhajan was also the favorite of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by not only this Bhajan but the entire collection of expressions and musings of Bhakta Narsi Mehta.

Mahatma Gandhi is often credited to be the first person to use the term 'Harijan' to connote those who were at the receiving end of untouchability. However, the fact is that Narsi Mehta was the first person to use this term. Narsi Mehta was a courageous social reformer

too. Narsi Mehta launched revolutionary initiatives for the eradication of untouchability. He would consider not only from the social, cultural and religious point of view but also from the view of humanness. He had a broad approach.

Narsi Mehta opposed division among human beings based on caste, religion and class. He professed, "Those who overcome castes too are the creation of the god. Which human being is not created out of bones and flesh? Which mother has not turned herself into a 'Harijan' to keep her child clean? A man is never untouchable. Instead, evil tendencies are untouchable. Narsi Mehta found the abomination and division in the name of religion, which is meant to overcome evil, unacceptable. He went to various villages and settlements to spread the message of eradication of untouchability and spread public awareness through his Bhajans. He coined the term 'Harijan', which means 'Children of the god' to refer to all those devoted to Bhagwan Shri Krishna, notwithstanding caste, class or gender.

The term 'Harijan' was used in his religious songs for the first time. Coincidentally, later on,



one of his greatest admirers, Mahatma Gandhi, adopted it in 1933 to connote the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Gandhiji founded his 'Asprushyata Virodhi League' in September 1932, which was renamed 'Harijan Sevak Sangh' later on. Gandhiji renamed his weekly, Young India to Harijan in 1933 because he believed that the campaign for eradication of untouchability was as important as the campaign for political independence and we all must commit ourselves to the pious cause for the present and future India, Indian youths and Indian adults. Narsi Mehta was the origin of this campaign for the eradication of untouchability launched by Gandhiji. Gandhiji became immensely famous because of this campaign.

All people recited this Bhajan in the era of struggle for independence. Not only this Bhajan, but every creation of Narsi Mehta is so powerful and meaningful that it provides spiritual as well as mental peace. His Bhajans provide strength and vigor besides enlightenment of reality. They provide to us the resolve, firmness and courage required to overcome the obstacles. He held the key to one's communication with the god. Although he was no God, he was no less than God. He eradicated worldly attractions from the minds of people and steered their minds to the devotion of God.

In the long and glorious tradition of the devotees immersed in the worship of Bhagwan Shri Krishna, Narsi Mehta connotes unwavering and consummate devotedness. Full of devotion, his Bhajans give courage to people even today. They preach the real meaning of religion and inspire us to live a pious life. His Bhajans highlight the ultimate truth. Describing the highest- standing Sant-poet of Gujarat and the most devoted worshipper of Bhagwan Shri Krishna is as difficult as describing the fragrance of a flower using words. Narsi Mehta's devotion was so powerful, simple and pious that Bhagwan Shri Krishna himself had to appear in person to help this beloved devotee on numerous occasions.

Such a great Sant-poet, Narsi Mahta was born in a Nagar Brahmin family in the Saurashtra region in the 15th century. His father was Krishnadas and his mother was Dayakunvar. Both his parents passed away when he was still a child. In his early childhood, Narsi Mehta was speechless. His grandmother took him to consult a great saintly man. The moment the great saintly man saw Narsi Mehta, he professed, "This child will grow into a legendary devotee."


When the grandmother told him about Narsi Mehta being speech impaired, the saintly man

uttered in the ears of Narsi Mehta, "Son! Say Radha Krishna.' And behold, Narsi Mehta started uttering the words, Radha Krishna!

His grandmother and elder brother brought up Narsi Mehta since he had lost both his parents in his early childhood. Narsi Mehta would serve Sadhus and Sants ever since he was a child and made it a point to reach wherever Bhajans and Kirtan would be recited. He would lose his sense of time while hearing Bhajans and Kirtans at night. His sister-in-law would scold him when he would return home at late night hour. Narsi Mehta was married to a young Manikbai at an early age. Manikbai too had to suffer a lot. A few days after their marriage, their son Shyamal died. After their daughter married, Manikbai was left alone. Narsi Mahta would be immersed in his recital of Bhajans and Manikbai would be made to manage the house. She would spend most of her time in serving the Sadhus and Sants visiting their house. Finally, she departed for her heavenly abode while worshipping her husband. This gave freedom to Narsi Mehta. He said, "Good! This involvement too has ended. Now I would happily focus on reciting Bhajans in the praise of Bhagwan Shri Krishna.

Narsi Mehta was devoted. He was a simple man. He wished well for all. All he wanted to do was to serve Sadhus and Sants. However, people would not allow him to recite Bhajans and Kirtan peacefully. People would harass Narsi Mehta, pass taunts against him, find ways to disturb him and speak all sorts of things against him. However, Narsi Mehta did not allow all this to affect him.

On an occasion, frustrated with domestic problems and botheration, Narsi Mehta deserted home. Such was his frustration due to the vexation that he wanted to end his life. Therefore, he left Junagarh and walked to the forest. Junagarh is situated at the foothills of Raivatak Mountain. The Girnar forest surrounding it is infamous for ravenous beasts like tigers and jaguars, which have habitat in it. He wandered about in the dense forest. Probably, he wanted a beast like a tiger or a jaguar to attack and kill him. While wandering, he spotted a temple. Although the temple was dilapidated, the Shiva Linga installed in it was intact though no worship had been performed there for years. Watching the Shiva Ling, Narsi Mehta overcame the feeling of devotion. He found a new ray of hope. He embraced the Shiva Ling and resolved that he would not eat food or drink water till Bhagwan Shiva was pleased and appeared to give him Darshan. Narsi Mahta's unwavering devotion and resolve appeased



Bhagwan Shiva, who appeared and asked Narsi Mehta to seek his wish. Narsi Mehta told Bhagwan Shiva, "Oh lord, grant me what you love the most!" Bhagwan Shiva granted his wish saying "Tathastu" and took Narsi to Vaikunth where Raas Leela was on with him because the Bhagwan wanted to intensify his devotion to Bhagwan Shri Krishna. Bhagwan Krishna was frolicking with the Gopika's there. Bhagwan Shiva was holding a torch to light up. He handed over the torch to Narsi Mehta. Holding the torch in his hand, so immersed was Narsi Mehta in the experience that he did not notice his hand burning due to the flames of the torch. Bhagwan Shri Krishna was astonished noticing the astute devotion towards him. Bhagwan Shri Krishna instructed Narsi Mehta to describe the Raas Leela that he had witnessed to the men and women of the mortal world through poems and thus spread devotion. In abiding by the directive given by the Bhagwan Himself, Narsi Mehta spread the message of devotion and the masses caught on it. Not only the

people would be enthralled with Narsi Mehta's Bhajans, but they would also recite them themselves at various places.

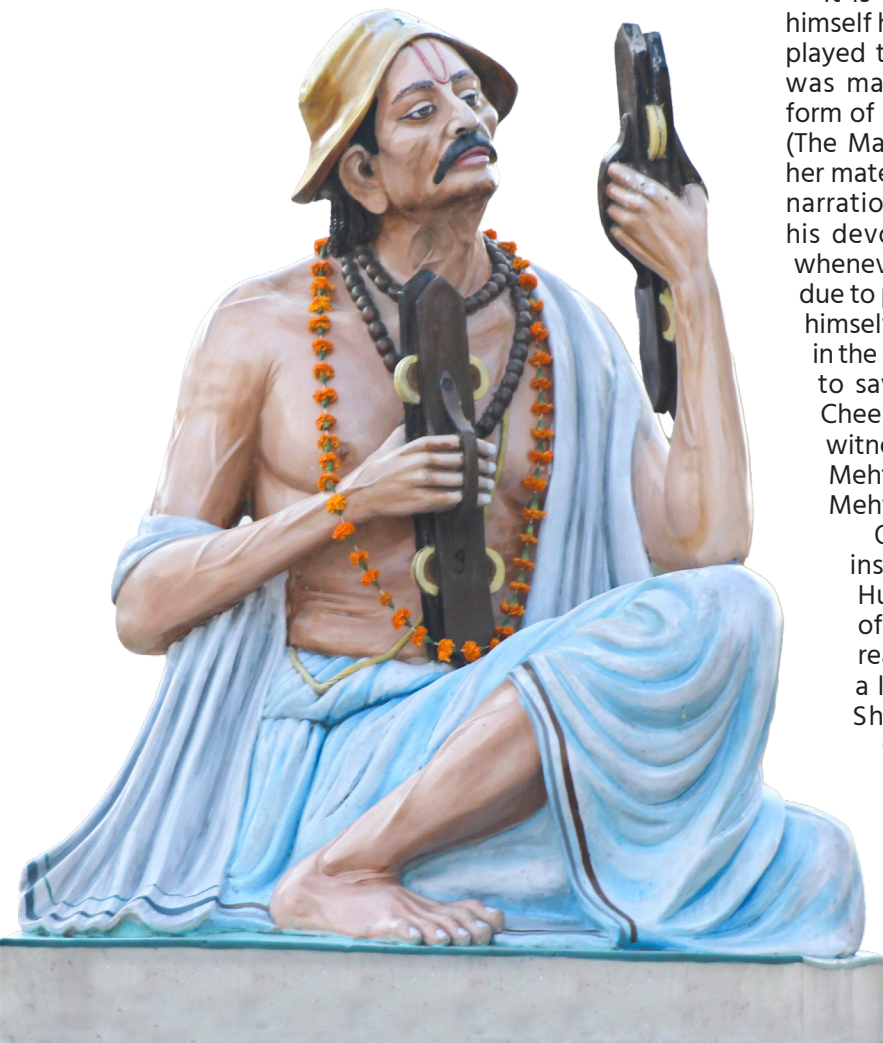
Such was the simplicity, guilelessness and softness of nature in Narsi Mehta that he treated his sister-in-law, whose taunts had forced him to desert home, as his Guru. Narsi Mehta returned to Junagarh and started serving Sadhus and Sants and reciting Bhajans and Kirtans. Folklore goes that once, while he had gone shopping for ghee in the market to perform the annual Shradha ritual for his father, he got immersed in Kirtan and failed to recall everything about the home, Shradha ritual and people invited for meal at him. This forced Bhagwan Shri Krishna, known for solving all problems faced by his devotees, to appear himself in the form of Narsi Mehta, visit his home and perform the rituals of Shradha. The Brahman invitees had had lunch and gone away by the time Narsi Mehta returned home. Bhagwan Shri Krishna appeared in person to Narsi Mehta's rescue on many other occasions too. Narsi Mehta's life is full of miracles.

It is believed that Bhagwan Shri Krishna himself had given the cymbal that Narsi Mehta played to him. When Narsi Mehta's daughter was married, God himself appeared in the form of her maternal uncle. Nani Bai Ka Mayra (The Mayra of Nani Bai – Gift to Nani Bai by her maternal uncle) is a famous and emotional narration of the incident. So immense was his devotion to Bhagwan Shri Krishna that whenever Narsi Mehta's reputation was at stake due to paucity of funds, Bhagwan Shri Krishna himself would appear in person to his rescue in the same manner in which he had appeared to save Draupadi's honour at the time of Cheerharan (disrobing). Many people stood witness to the miracles occurring in Narsi Mehta's life on so many occasions that Narsi Mehta came to be known for the miracles.

On an occasion, influenced by some insisting pilgrims, Narsi Mehta wrote a Hundi (promissory note) in the name of Shyamala Girdhari from Dwaraka. On reaching Dwaraka, the pilgrims searched a lot for a wealthy businessman named Shyamala Girdhari but found none. Consequently, they were dejected.

However, suddenly they came across a wealthy businessman named Shyamala Girdhari. Believably, Bhagwan Shri Krishna of Dwarka himself had appeared in the form of Shyama Girdhari to keep Narsi Mehta's promise.

In those days, people would





test Narsi Mehta, complain against him and harass him. The king of Junagarh would receive several such complaints. However, he would ignore them. On one occasion, he felt it necessary to put Narsi Mehta to the test. A temple of Bhagwan Vishnu was situated inside the palace. The king ordered Narsi Mehta to sit in the auditorium at the temple and recite Bhajans and Kirtan. The sacred sanctorum of the temple where the idol was installed remained locked and guarded. The king said he would consider Narsi Mehta a true devotee if appeased by his Bhajan and Kirtan, the god himself transfers the garland worn by Him to Narsi Mehta's neck by morning. Narsi Mehta would not be permitted to step outside the palace till the test was over. Raga Kedara was Narsi Mehta's favourite composition of musical notes and its recital by him would appease the Bhagwan himself. Narsi Mehta's recital of Bhajan in Raga Kedara appeased the god who transferred the garland worn by Him to Narsi Mehta's neck in the wee hours.

Narsi Mehta was a straightforward and humble man. He was least interested in the good or bad deeds of anybody. He was insouciant with worldly matters. However, he

was soft-hearted. He never considered upper or lower strata. He always sang enthralling songs of Akhand Raas Leela of Brahma and Maya and spread messages of devotion to Bhagwan Shri Krishna. He did not see Brahma and Maya differently. He would say 'Brahma Latakan Kare Brahmapase' (Maya too is a form of Brahma). Indeed, there is oneness between Radha and Krishna. They are no different entities. This entire world is the outcome of the constantly ongoing Brahma Leela or Raas Leela of Radha-Krishna. The ignorant ones entangled in the web of Maya may not experience this oneness. However, the devotees who have guileless, pure hearts have such experience. Narsi Mehta was such a devotee. He was knowledgeable. He was the supreme devotee who ever existed in the field of Indian spirituality and religion. Devotion like this is a rare phenomenon in history. That is why, he spent his entire life serving the god and reciting His praise through Bhajan and Kirtan and finally conjoined him. Praise be to such a great and true devotee!

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Devi Ahilyabai – A social visionary

(From 13 page) to such Bhils so that they could farm and grow the crops to support their day-to-day livelihood.

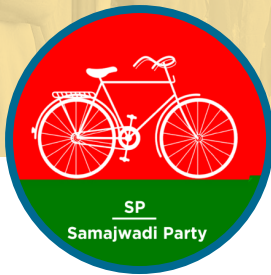
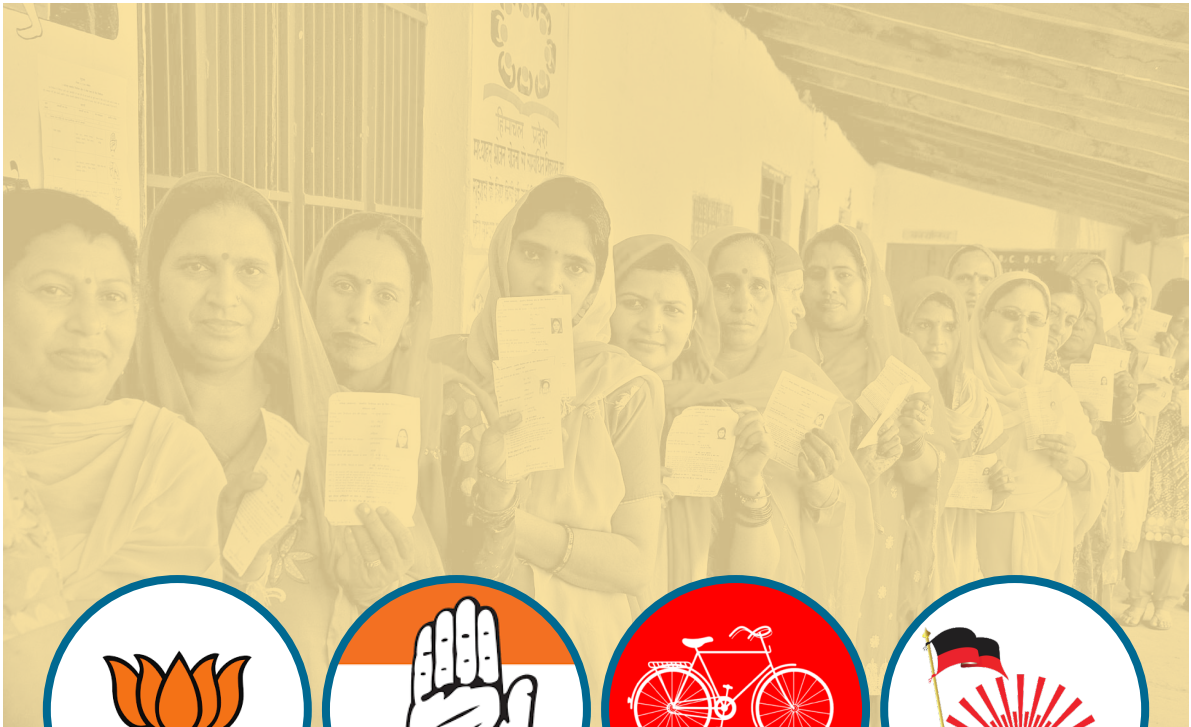
Other works: Devi Ahilyabai had a holistic view of social welfare. In times of drought and also at the times when crops were damaged due to passing of the army cavalcade, she provided various concessions to the farmers. With a view to revive, reconstruct and maintain forts she encouraged people to stay on forts. Similarly, she also set up settlements known as 'peth' and 'pura' (local terms to describe a cluster of people built around or near the marketplace, normally the central place of the village / town). In a rarest of rare gesture, she encouraged people to cultivate crops in certain areas which were later intended to be left open for birds, insects and animals to be fed. In today's terms, she was not only environmentally friendly but was conscious of the importance of the existence of birds and animals.

Was the Devi a philanthropist? Definitely yes. However, her philanthropy was not only limited to the nobility of the act per se. She had a wide canvas of the Nation and the Dharma

in her mind. Public welfare was not only to support the needy but to groom their minds to build up the Nation. Setting up trade and industry was not only to support livelihood but to develop the kingdom. Rehabilitation of various groups of people was not only to provide them with their day-to-day livelihood but also to promote a feeling of compassion, brotherhood and empathy. Being patron to subject matter experts, specialists and artists was not only to bestow livelihood to them but also to build up art and culture.

Welfare measures in various parts of the country were not only to facilitate pilgrimage and other activities but also to promote a feeling of harmony and sense of belonging, encourage exchange of art and culture and promote points of travel and communication. It is therefore not surprising that people considered her to be their 'Mother'. Her 30-year rule has proved to be a guiding light even after a period of 300 years! Our heads therefore bow in respect to the Lokmata!

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What political parties promise about deprived in election manifestos ?

In Lok Sabha election 2024 political parties come out with fascinating promises. Here we present what political parties have promised to deprived communities.

Rushikesh



India, the World's largest democracy, is in the process of electing representatives from different political parties, which will address their issues. Being a socially diverse nation proper representation of every stratum of society should be ensured. Scheduled caste, Scheduled tribes in India are considered as the backward sections of society. That's why their proper representation in the political domain is important.

Different political parties have released their manifestos for this general election. Let's look at

what major political parties in India have to say about Scheduled Caste and Scheduled tribes.

The ruling BJP's manifesto says that they have 60% of current ministers in the Union Council of Ministers from OBC, SC, and ST communities and they have provided constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes. Also, the benefits of all Garib Kalyan programs have reached the OBC, SC, and ST families. They have promised to expand livelihood opportunities for all families, including OBC, SC & ST, by measures like doubling



the MUDRA loan limit to ₹20 lakh. They will continue schemes such as PM Svanidhi and PM Vishwakarma Yojana. They have promised to ensure that no students of the OBC, SC, and ST families are deprived of higher education due to affordability by expanding existing scholarships for meritorious students.

Nationalist Congress Party led by Sharad Pawar released its manifesto on April 24, 2024. As a part of the INDIA alliance, they have also promised that the nationwide socio-economic and caste census will be conducted. Reservation will be extended to SC, ST and OBC in private educational education. They will also work towards eradicating manual scavenging. Rigorous implementation of atrocity acts regarding SC and STs will be ensured. If elected, they will bring constitutional amendments exceeding 50 percent reservation quotas for SC, ST and OBC.

A particular law will be created which will make it compulsory to allocate resources to SC and ST in the annual budget. Their agenda includes providing institutional credit for SC and ST communities, doubling scholarship funds for higher education, establishing residential schools and district-level study centres, promoting workplace and educational inclusion, eliminating manual scavenging with technology, and creating a dedicated helpline for enforcing the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) released its election manifesto on April 2, 2024. DMK thinks that the Vishwakarma Scheme launched by the central government is based on caste-based occupation. That's why they have announced that the scheme will be restructured on the basis of social justice. DMK believes that the proper reservation policy is not followed in faculty appointments in reputed institutions like IITs and IIMs.

Taking into consideration this scenario they

have announced that the reservation based on the Mandal commission report will be followed in the faculty appointment. They have promised to establish a Commission for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the national and state levels to ensure the proper functioning of reservations for Scheduled Castes, and Other Backward Classes in higher education institutions and employment opportunities. DMK party is also a part of the INDIA alliance.

Just like other parties in this alliance, they have promised to conduct a caste census. A study conducted by Azim Premji University in 2019 says that people belonging to scheduled caste and backward communities are underrepresented in the higher-paying jobs in the private sector.

Considering this survey as the base, they have announced to extend reservations in the private sector too. DMK promises to ensure a 50% reservation for the Backward and Most Backward communities, abolishing the Creamy Layer. Indian National Congress is also a part of INDIA alliance. So just like every other party in this alliance, they have also promised to conduct the socio-economic survey of castes in India. They have promised to take affirmative action based on the results of this survey.

If voted to power they will bring a constitutional amendment to increase the 50 percent reservation cap for SC, ST and OBC. Government posts belonging to SC, ST, and OBC will be filled within a year. They have promised to enhance institutional credit to SC and ST for home-building, starting businesses, and purchasing assets. More public works contracts will be given to people belonging to SC, ST and OBC. Funds will be provided to SC, ST and OBC students, who are pursuing higher education. Apart from that aid will be given to students, who want to study abroad and the number of scholarships will be doubled to make them pursue Ph.D. If elected they have promised



Political parties often include policies aimed at addressing the needs of deprived communities in their manifestos. These policies can vary significantly depending on the party's ideology, priorities, and the specific needs of the communities in question. Parties may propose expanding social welfare programs such as unemployment benefits, housing assistance, and food aid to alleviate poverty in deprived areas. Policies to improve education in deprived communities might include increased funding for schools in low-income areas, initiatives to reduce class sizes, and programs to improve the quality of teaching. Parties might propose measures to stimulate economic growth and create jobs in deprived areas, such as tax incentives for businesses to invest in these communities or job training programs to equip residents with skills for employment. Some parties may advocate for community-led initiatives and empowerment programs that give residents a voice in decision-making processes and help them take control of their own destinies.

to build a network of residential schools for students for SC and ST.

If voted to power they will provide reservations to SC, ST and OBC in private educational institutions and will also pass a law that will ensure resource allocation for a scheduled class sub-plan. They have promised to eradicate manual scavenging. And the person employing the other person for manual scavenging will be punished. Also, compensation of 30 lakh will be given to the family of that sanitation worker if he/she falls prey to any disease. To end the discrimination based on caste the strict implementation of the Atrocities Act of 1989 will be ensured. Along with that, the Rohit Vemula Act will be made to end caste discrimination in educational institutions.

The Communist Party (Marxist) of India which is mainly dominant in Kerala also released its election manifesto with some attractive promises to backward sections. CPI (M) promises to end all sorts of caste oppression. Just like Congress, they have also announced the formation of special component plans for scheduled castes. The party promises to provide five acres of arable and cultivable land to all people belonging to SC and ST. Just like other

parties that are part of the INDIA alliance, it has promised to conduct a caste census and also promised to extend reservations to SC and ST in the private sector.

Strict Enforcement and implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and the POA Amendment Act 2015. Special courts will be set up for SC and ST in each district and the special Act will be made for the prevention of caste, religious, and gender-based discrimination in educational institutions and work environments. They have promised to end manual scavenging. Reservations in all the excluded sectors, universal access to hostels, and scholarships for all SC and ST students. Along with all this, they have announced to give reservations to Dalit Christians too.

Samajwadi Party has promised that they will conduct a nationwide caste census if elected. They will work toward eradicating casteist slurs. Along with that, they have promised they will fill all the government posts reserved for SC ST and OBC. A promise of reservation in private has been given by them.

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Upholding Women's Rights: A Reflection on India and the World

In the quest for gender equality, the discourse surrounding women's rights remains a pivotal and evolving conversation globally. India, with its diverse cultural tapestry and historical nuances, presents a fascinating case study in this regard. Rooted in the principles of justice, equality, and inclusivity, the Indian Constitution stands as a beacon for women's rights, reflecting a commitment to empowering women across all spheres of society.

India's journey towards gender equality has been marked by significant milestones and challenges. The Hindu Code Bill, introduced in the 1950s, was a landmark legislation aimed at reforming and codifying Hindu personal laws, particularly concerning marriage, inheritance, and property rights. Championed by luminaries such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, this legislation sought to dismantle age-old customs and practices that perpetuated gender discrimination, laying the groundwork for a more egalitarian society.



At the heart of India's commitment to women's rights lies its Constitution, a visionary document that enshrines the principles of equality and justice for all. The Constitution not only guarantees fundamental rights to women but also provides a robust framework for their protection and empowerment. Articles 14, 15, and 16, which ensure equality before the law and prohibit discrimination on grounds of sex, serve as cornerstones for gender justice.

Moreover, the Directive Principles of State Policy mandate the state to promote gender equality and strive towards securing equal pay for equal work, ensuring the economic empowerment of women. The constitutional provisions thus serve as a potent tool for advancing women's rights and fostering an inclusive society.

Over the years, India has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the status and participation of women in various spheres. Driven by progressive policies and grassroots activism, Indian women have broken barriers and

shattered stereotypes, asserting their presence in domains traditionally dominated by men.

The empowerment of women in India is multifaceted, encompassing economic, social, and political dimensions. Initiatives such as the NREGA and the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana have provided women with opportunities for economic self-reliance, enabling them to contribute to the nation's development actively.

Socially, campaigns and movements advocating for gender equality, such as the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao initiative, have sought to challenge regressive attitudes towards women and promote their education and well-being. Additionally, the rise of women-led startups and enterprises reflects a growing trend of female entrepreneurship, signaling a shift in societal norms and perceptions.

One of the most significant indicators of women's empowerment is their participation in the political process. The right to vote, a fundamental democratic principle, has provided women with a platform to voice their concerns and shape public policy. In India, women have played a crucial role in elections, with their voting turnout steadily increasing over the years.

Furthermore, efforts to enhance women's representation in elected bodies have yielded positive results. Measures such as reservations for women in local governance institutions, as enshrined in the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, have paved the way for greater female participation in decision-making at the grassroots level.

When comparing the timeline of women's suffrage in India and the United Kingdom, notable differences emerge. While women in the UK gained the right to vote in stages, starting with the Representation of the People Act in 1918, which granted voting rights to women over 30 who met certain property qualifications, full equality was not achieved until the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act in 1928. This act extended voting rights to all women over 21, aligning them with men's voting rights.

However, it is worth noting that India's journey towards universal adult suffrage was more immediate and inclusive. When India gained independence in 1947, the newly adopted Constitution granted voting rights to all adult citizens without any discrimination

based on gender, religion, or caste. This bold move reflected India's commitment to inclusive democracy from its inception, setting a precedent for other nations around the world.

In contrast, while the United Kingdom eventually granted voting rights to women of all social spectrums, it did so much later than India. The exact timeline for when voting rights were extended to all women in the UK was around 1950, whereas Indian women had been exercising their voting rights since the country's independence in 1947. This discrepancy underscores India's proactive stance towards gender equality in the realm of political participation.

India's early recognition and enfranchisement of women across all social strata not only reaffirmed the principles of equality and inclusivity but also positioned women as integral contributors to the democratic process. It serves as a testament to India's progressive vision and commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of all its citizens, irrespective of gender or background.

While India has made significant strides in advancing women's rights, the struggle for gender equality remains a global challenge. Across the world, women continue to face systemic barriers and entrenched patriarchal norms that limit their opportunities and

freedoms. Issues such as gender-based violence, unequal access to education and healthcare, and wage disparities persist, highlighting the need for concerted action on a global scale.

In this context, international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and holding governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality.

The journey towards gender equality is an ongoing endeavor that requires collective action and unwavering commitment. In India, the constitutional principles of inclusivity and justice serve as guiding lights in the pursuit of women's rights. Through progressive legislation, grassroots movements, and socio-economic empowerment initiatives, Indian women have made significant strides towards realizing their full potential.

However, challenges persist, both within India and globally, necessitating continued advocacy, awareness, and policy interventions. By upholding the principles of equality, dignity, and justice, we can create a world where women are not only equal participants but also agents of positive change in society.

*Author is Pune based journalist.
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US Celebrates Ambedkar Jayanti with Cultural Extravaganza

Cities across the US recently celebrated Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's 133rd birth anniversary with fervent festivities. In Jersey City, City Hall stood as a symbol of equality, with a blue flag flying alongside the American national flag, representing solidarity with Dr. Ambedkar's ideals. Canton Township, Michigan, hosted a series of events that included scholarly discussions and vibrant cultural performances, reflecting the social justice principles championed by Dr. Ambedkar.

From insightful dialogues on transnational Buddhism to dynamic presentations by youth, the celebrations highlighted Dr. Ambedkar's enduring legacy of promoting inclusivity and empowerment worldwide.

Caste Clash Erupts at Salem Temple Festival, 31 Arrested

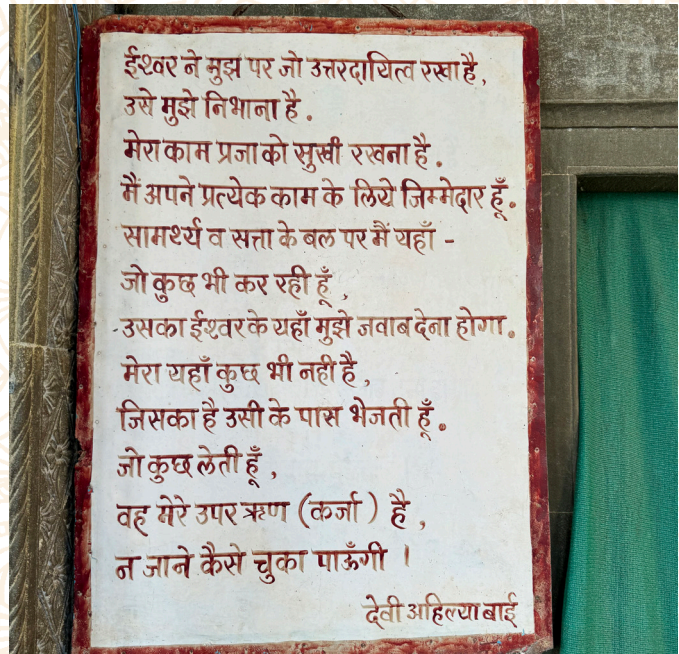
Tensions flared at the Mariamman temple in Theevattipattu village, Salem district, as clashes erupted between scheduled caste Arunthathiyars and members of dominant castes, including Vanniyars, Udayars, and Chozhiya Vellalars. The violence began when Arunthathiyars were barred from entering the temple, leading to a heated argument that escalated into stone-pelting between the groups. The chaos forced the cancellation of the temple festival and resulted in the arrest of 31 individuals by police. Amidst the turmoil, fires broke out in a couple of shops, further exacerbating the situation.

*Compiled by Prajvalant.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

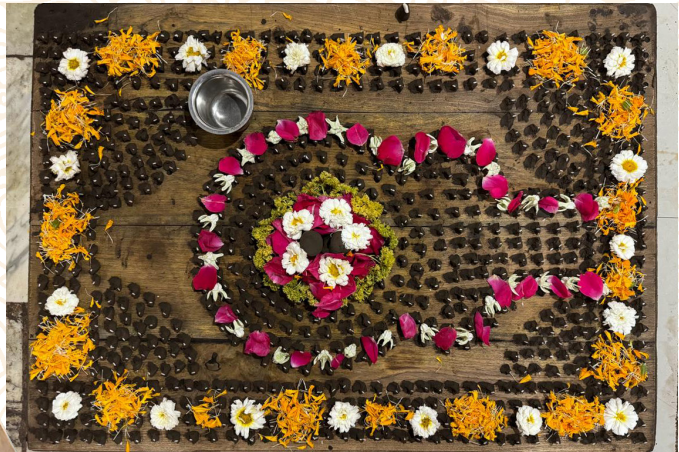


Photo Gallery

Some of the works, carried out by Lokmata Ahilyabai, still stand as a testimony of her vision.



Devi Ahilya said

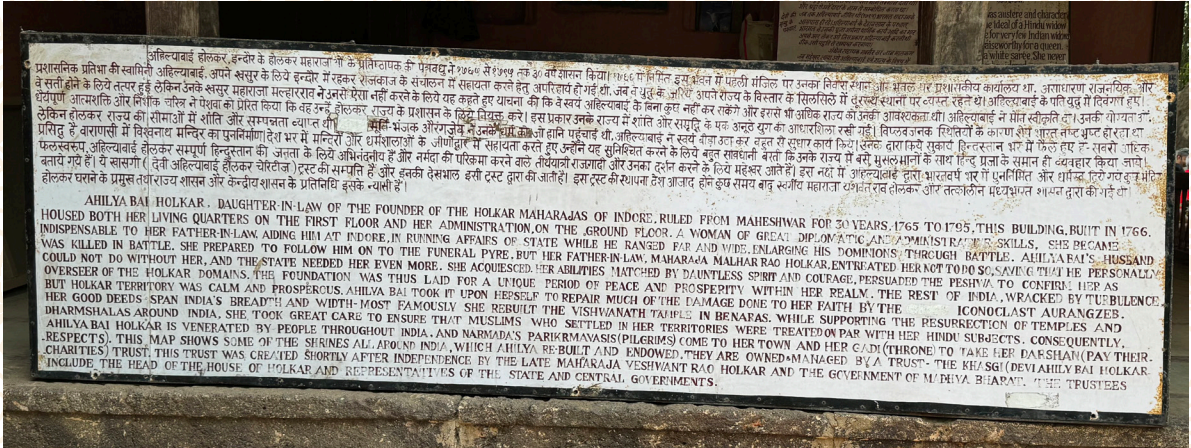


Sahastralingarchana

SCULPTOR
UTTAM PACHARNE MUMBAI

महेश्वर संस्कृति सहयोग
महारानी देवी अहिल्या बाई होल्कर
जन्म - ३१ मई १७२५ * तिथि - १३ अगस्त १७९५
शासन - १७६७ से १७९५
MAHESHWAR SANSKRUTI SAHYOG
MAHARANI DEVI AHILYA BAI HOLKAR
Born - 31 May 1725 * Died - 13 Aug 1795

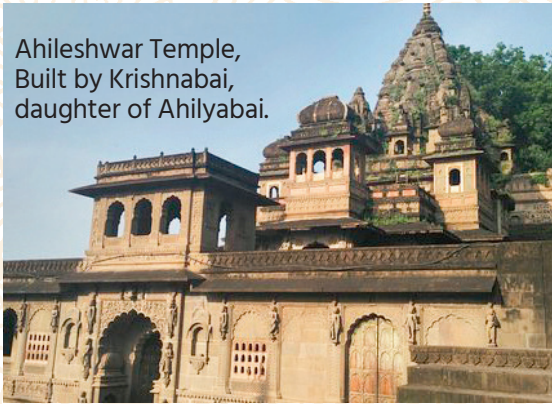
Information about Ahilyabai



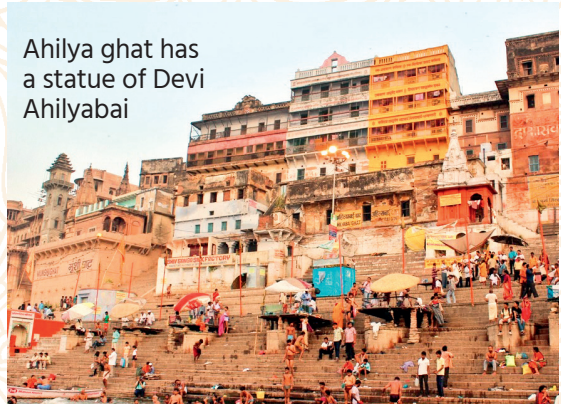
Sitting arrangement of Ahilyabai darbar



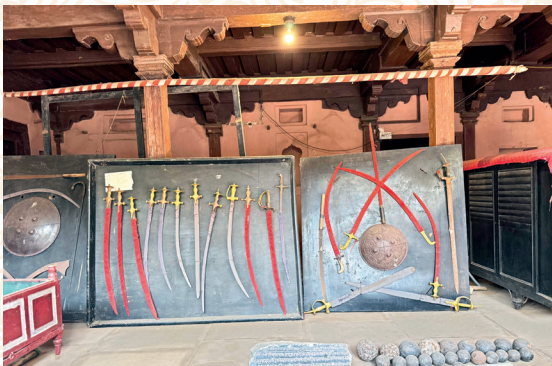
Maheshwar ghat



Ahilleshwar Temple, Built by Krishnabai, daughter of Ahilyabai.



Ahilya ghat has a statue of Devi Ahilyabai



Armour of Ahilyabai



देवी अहिल्याबाई होलकर का परिवार (मायका)



पतिदेव श्री खंडेराव होलकर एवं
सौभाग्यवती अहिल्याबाई होलकर



देवी अहिल्याबाई होलकर के पिताश्री
माणकोजी शिन्दे एवं माताश्री सुशीलाबाई शिन्दे



प्रातः स्मरणीय लोकमाता
देवी अहिल्याबाई होलकर



श्री यशवंतराव फणसे
देवी अहिल्याबाई होलकर के दामाद



देवी अहिल्याबाई की कन्या
सौ. मुक्ताबाई यशवंतराव फणसे



देवी अहिल्याबाई के एकमात्र पुत्र
श्री मालेराव खंडेराव होलकर

(श्री मालेराव की दो पत्नियाँ थीं. बाघ घराने की प्रीलाबाई एवं बहाड़ घराने की भैरवाबाई)

देवी अहिल्याबाई होलकर ने अपने एकमात्र पुत्र
श्री मालेराव होलकर को हाथी के पैर जले नहीं कुशलवादा
उपर ऐतिहासिक गजद है।
मालेराव की मृत्यु सहीर दीवानी ने हुई।
अपने पुत्र के दुस्वप्न के विना
अहिल्याबाई ने कभी प्रयास किया न।

मध्य में
अहिल्याबाई का चित्र
जोड़कर देव
5 चित्र की अण्णा सा. दावे
झार संधार अहिल्या विश्वावती से साभार



Kashi Vishwanath Temple



Srisailem

Family-tree



Vishnupad Temple



Well in Kasara Ghat

DIN VISHESH

Remembering Mata Ramai



27th May
Mata Ramai Death Anniversary

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's wife, Mata Ramai, although not a direct witness to Dr. Ambedkar's struggles, was nevertheless his supportive companion. Ramabai Ambedkar was not actively involved in political or social movements, nor did she hold any prominent positions, but her motherly support and understanding were invaluable. Despite not actively participating in public life, her firm resolve, resilience, and supportive nature contributed to Dr. Ambedkar's ability to navigate through numerous challenges and injustices.

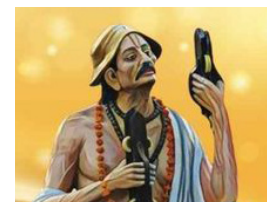
Many significant events in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's life, especially those that led to important decisions and actions, often had Ramabai as a witness. Her presence not only bore witness to these events but also served as a source of inspiration for Dr. Ambedkar. Ramabai's busy schedule reflected her immense wisdom, thoughtful consideration, and deep commitment to her family's well-being. Her observance of traditional rituals, fasting for her husband's well-being, and unwavering devotion were remarkable. Her dedication and love towards her husband were evident in her observance of marital vows and her unwavering support. Dr. Babasaheb's profound and revolutionary contributions to Indian politics and social reform were greatly understood and appreciated by Ramabai.



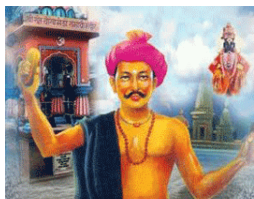
22nd May
Raja Ram Mohan Roy
Birth Anniversary



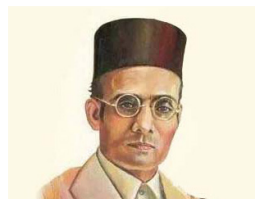
23rd May
Buddha Pournima



23rd May
Bhagat Narsi Mehta
Birth Anniversary



28th May
Sant Chokhamela
Birth Anniversary



28th May
V.D. Savarkar
Birth Anniversary



31st May
Rani Ahilyadevi Holkar
Birth Anniversary

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