

# Sadbhavana

## DIGEST

TITLE: SWARAJ by MF Hussain



# Sadbhavana Digest

## Issue # 5, September 2021

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# Editorial

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This fifth issue of the Sadbhavana Digest is focused on the thought, literature, music and movements of Maharashtra. Of course, as always, we have explored the three questions: How Should We Deal with the Self? How Should We Deal With Other Human Beings? And How Should We Humans Deal with Nature? We do so from the Maharashtrian viewpoint. The issue has been put together by Shri Vijay Nadkarni, who lives in Pune and Mumbai and who took early retirement from the State Bank of India to work with development organisations. Vijay Nadkarni has written an overview article – “Maharashtra – A Society Coming to Terms with Itself” and translated Dinkar Gangal’s article - “The Ongoing Transformation in Maharashtra – Renaissance at the Grassroots”. These articles give an overview of the thoughts and movements of Maharashtra from the 13th century to the 21st century.

**Under Theme One:** How Should We Deal with the Self, there are three pieces, two spiritual and one spirited. The first is the famous bhajan Pasaydan by Sant Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. The Youtube link to the bhajan rendition by Lata Mageshkar is also included. This is followed by excerpts from the Gita Pravachan delivered by Vinoba Bhave while in the Dhule jail in 1932. One of the inmates, Sane Guruji took notes and got these printed later. Vijay Nadkarni selected a few excerpts to give the reader a flavour of Vinoba’s talks on the Gita. The next piece is a poem on forbearance, courage and perseverance, Phakt Ladh Mhana by Vi. Wa. Shirodkar. It has been translated in English by Vijay Nadkarni and Vijay Mahajan.

**Under Theme Two:** How Should We Deal With Other Human Beings, the first piece is the bhajan Je ka Ranjale Ganjale by Sant Tukaram. Its translation into English by Mahatma Gandhi during his stay at the Yervada jail is also given. The Youtube link to the bhajan rendition by Pandit Bhimsen Joshi is also included. The next piece is again a bhajan – an Abhang in the Varkari tradition - Awagha Rang ek Zala - by Sant Sohirabai (Soyarabai), the wife of Sant Chokhamela, who was a Mahar and was not allowed to enter the temple at Pandharpur, but because of his devotion to Vitthal, became widely accepted as a Sant. A Youtube link to the rendition of Sohirabai’s abhang by Kishori Amonkar is given. The third piece is a prayer song "Khara to Ekachi Dharma, Jagaala Prem Arpaave" by Sane Guruji, the social reformer of 20th century Maharashtra who had a large following among the youth. Finally there is a piece by Tarun Deol in The Print, titled “Celebrating Pu. La. Deshpande — the ‘RK Laxman of Prose’” which describes this literary giant and a very warm human being.

**Under Theme Three:** How should we humans deal with Nature, we carry a piece by by Madhav Gadgil Today's Environmentalism: Time for Constructive Cooperative Action, published in the Economic and Political Weekly. In it, the well-known environmentalist argues for focus of environmental activism on people's rights over natural resources, coupled with nature-friendly cooperative enterprises in sectors like quarrying, and mineral and sand mining. This is followed by a report by Soumya Sarkar on "Women lead climate-smart farming in Marathwada". Then an Abhang by Sant Tukaram - "वृक्ष वल्ली आम्हा सोयरी वनचरे"- the trees and plants are our kin. Finally just a mouth-watering weblink to a Youtube talk on the "Cuisine of Maharashtra" by Kaumudi Marathe. We hope our readers enjoy this Maharashtra flavoured Sadbhavana Digest as much!

# Maharashtra – A Society Coming to Terms with Itself

## by Vijay Nadkarni<sup>1</sup>

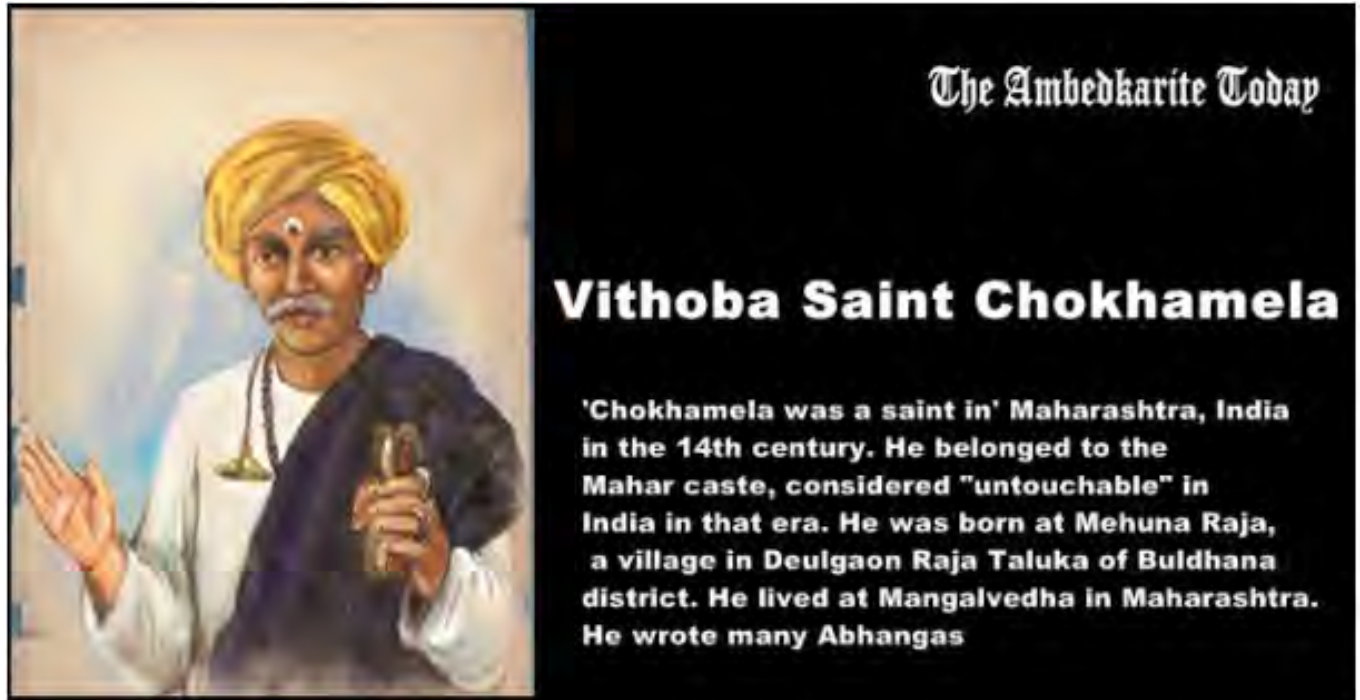
Maharashtra has been in the forefront in the process of nation-building for many centuries. The book “Makers of Modern India”, edited and introduced by Ramachandra Guha (2010), features nineteen individuals. Of these, as many as seven are from Maharashtra. Of course, the choice of the individuals by the editor could be debated but the contribution of these individuals to the shaping of the political and social discourse in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries cannot be questioned. In a way, these leaders are only symbols of the ideologies and movements they represent. It would thus be more appropriate to say that the land of Maharashtra has served as the nursery of diverse ideologies and schools of thought, reformist movements, social experiments and cultural explorations.

While these thinker-activists, as Guha prefers to refer to them, were from the nineteenth or the twentieth century, the tradition of combining valour, devotion, philosophy and cultural pursuits in the process of social mobilisation has its roots in developments evolving centuries earlier. Chhatrapati Shivaji is considered to be the tallest leader from Maharashtra and is revered for his valour, military prowess, strategic acumen as also for his statesmanship, administrative abilities, spirit of tolerance and concern for the people. Chhatrapati Shivaji was not just a king who fought against Mughals and other invaders by mobilising his people: he was an able administrator who laid down a system of governance and taxation; he was keen on ensuring that his officials did not harass the common people; he did not persecute or discriminate against people following a different faith; he laid down clear rules to be followed by his army during campaigns.

What made Chhatrapati Shivaji a king who stands out amongst his peers for his governance and concern for the people? What was the key to the unstinted support he received from his people? Perhaps the soil was prepared during the earlier centuries by the Bhakti movement. The thirteenth century saint and philosopher-poet Sant Dnyaneshwar, who along with his three siblings was ostracised from his Brahmin caste due to the return to family life by their father after taking sanyas, took the revolutionary step of writing a commentary on the Bhagwad Gita (Dnyaneshwari) in Marathi, in contrast to the then existing practice of writing such texts only in Sanskrit, thus opening up the treasure of Bhakti for common people.

Sant Namdev, a tailor by occupation /caste and a contemporary of Dnyaneshwar, travelled far and wide right up to the northern parts of India. His verses have been included in the Guru Granth Sahib of the Sikhs. A galaxy of saints illuminated the skies of Maharashtra over the next three or four centuries. A striking feature was that these saints expressed their devotion, mostly to Lord Vitthal, in verse forms - mostly abhangs - in simple language but displaying profound spiritual insight. They came from all castes; to give a few examples – Sant Tukaram – one of the most revered saints who wrote abhangs which continue to

attract the attentions of both scholars and devotees even today - was from a family of kunbi farmers, Eknath was a brahmin who defied social prejudices based on caste, Namdev was a tailor, Gora Kumbhar was a potter, Sawata Mali was a gardener who grew vegetables and Narahari Sonar was a goldsmith.



Source: [Ambedkaritetoday.com](http://Ambedkaritetoday.com)

Sant Chokhamela belonged to the community of Mahars who were considered untouchables then. 1 His wife, Soyarabai, also wrote abhangs conveying intense spiritual experiences. Janabai, who was said to be a domestic servant at the house of Sant Namdev, was another woman saint as also Sant Muktabai, the sister of Dnyaneshwar. There were also some saints from the Muslim community. A single example of Bahinabai, a brahmin woman, becoming a disciple of Sant Tukaram who was from a farming caste, would suffice to show the extent to which shackles of caste discrimination were thrown away, at least in the spiritual sphere.

The Bhakti movement in Maharashtra was characterised by the Varkari tradition in which the devotees of Lord Vitthal walk for days from all over Maharashtra congregating at his temple at Pandharpur on the eleventh day of Ashadh every year. They walk in groups, singing abhangs of various saints on their way. This tradition of performing a "vari" (act of walking up to Pandharpur) continues till date. The Varkari tradition, which simplified the practice of religion and taught equality, is believed to have brought about a transformation in the society which, as Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and scholars such as Eleanor Zelliot have pointed out, had an impact on the Maharashtrian ethos and also made the society ready for the social reforms which were witnessed a few centuries later. It is believed that the mobilisation of the masses by Chhatrapati Shivaji was also facilitated by the Bhakti movement.

The rise of the Maratha power in the subsequent period is also characterised by the disregard of the taboos on taking up vocations beyond those ordained for one's castes. It is normally not realised that the very act of the Peshawas, who were Brahmins, taking to the sword was in itself a revolt against the shackles of caste. (Bajirao Peshawa the first, when he married Mastani, went a step further and defied religious taboos, even if for love). Among the powerful families of the Maratha confederacy, not all belonged to the traditional warrior castes. For example, the Holkars of Ujjain were from the Dhangar community whose traditional occupations are related to animal husbandry. It may be the case that the very nature and extent of the military expeditions required mobilisation of vast armies on a scale that it would not have been feasible to sustain them without breaking caste barriers. The bhakti movement and the political ascendancy of the Marathas led to an awareness amongst people and weakened social taboos, preparing the ground for the reformist movements which became the hallmark of Maharashtra's social life in the succeeding centuries.

While the military expeditions of the Marathas offered to the people an exposure to lands beyond the Marathi regions in the country, the advent of the British opened up an altogether new world of western thought and systems of governance. The reaction to the British Raj was not uniform. While the middle class took to the new system of education quite rapidly and also accepted the new legal and administrative structures thus benefiting from them, there was also resistance to foreign rule which was expressed in diverse ways. There were instances of armed rebellions such as those by Umaji Naik who belonged to the Ramoshi community and by Vasudev Balvant Phadke as well as many individual acts of assassination etc. such as those by Anant Kanhere in Nasik and by the Chaphekar brothers in Pune. At the same time, there were leaders who chose the path of constitutional means of petitions and representations as also mass mobilisation through forming of associations and holding meetings etc.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of intense debate on social and political issues amongst people of high calibre. There were debates on the means to be adopted for opposition to the various actions of the British Government with Justice M.G. Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale opting for moderate means while Lokmanya Tilak opting for greater mass mobilisation. He launched movements such as swadeshi and passive resistance. (A little known venture of Tilak was his launching of the Paisa Fund -collecting a paisa from a person for raising a fund- for the development of Indian industry and promoting industrial training. Ishwar Das Varshnei, originally from Aligarh, helped in starting a glass plant and a training centre for manufacture of glass at Talegaon near Pune). There were differences also as regards the primacy to be accorded to social reform movements or political activity against the British for swaraj.

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<sup>1</sup> For a video program on Sant Chokhamela, see  
<https://www.facebook.com/Sadbhavana.net/videos/407460630797332/>

Ranade, Gokhale, Bhandarkar and Justice Telang were in favour of social and religious reform along with political activity (some of them came together with Dadoba Pandurang and Atmaram Pandurang to found the Prarthana Samaj or prayer society on the lines of the Brahmo Samaj) while Tilak advocated focusing the efforts first on getting swaraj after which we as a nation could address our social issues. Tilak and his close friend and ally Agarkar (who along with Tilak was a co-founder of the Deccan Education Society and Fergusson College as also the newspaper Kesri) parted ways on this issue with Agarkar opting to work on issues such as women's education, widow remarriage and eradication of superstitious practices.

These were all debates within a society which was trying to figure out the best ways of dealing with each other and with ourselves as a nation. The remarkable feature of these debates was that they were not restricted to armchair discussions within the elite class. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, from the Mali caste which traditionally grew fruits and vegetables, took up cudgels for raising issues related to justice within the society and freedom from oppression from Brahminism. He can be considered a pioneer in this aspect of social reform and to this day continues to inspire activists striving for equality. Like many other giants of his period, his contribution was not limited to just one area. While he started with education of Dalits and girls along with his wife Savitribai, he took up the wider causes of justice for the oppressed classes and highlighted the plight of the agriculturists.

As Dr. Y.D. Phadake points out in his book "Visavaya Shatakatil Maharashtra – volume I" (Maharashtra in the Twentieth Century – Volume I), Mahatma Phule suggested to the British government to accord priority to primary education over higher education. He founded the Satyashodhak Samaj aiming at religious and social reform (political discussions were prohibited in the Samaj). Satyashodhak means a seeker of the truth. The movement produced many activists in Maharashtra and Mahatma Phule certainly prepared the ground for and inspired another great crusader for social justice, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Dr Ambedkar's life is an inspiring example of the struggle for exploring ways of dealing better with each other in the society. His compromise, on the demand for separate electorates for the depressed classes, in signing the Pune pact in the face of the fast undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi could evoke divergent reactions but it certainly is a lesson for activists in the importance of negotiating during agitations for a less unjust society. At the same time, he continued his struggle and when he realised that agitations for temple entry and for rights for drawing water from community sources had their limitations, he finally took the step of leading his brethren into leaving the religion in which they were born and chose a religion which he thought best represented justice.

The place of women in society and family life is another area where the region witnessed some extraordinary efforts. The contribution by Mahatma Phule and his wife Savitribai to the education of women, especially of those from the classes earlier deprived from access



to education, is already mentioned. The contribution of Gopal Ganesh Agarkar as a reformer who advocated widow remarriage and education of women has also been mentioned. He started the periodical "Sudharak" which means a reformer. A person whose name is not much known even today, and whose name has been included in the book "Makers of Modern India" mentioned earlier, is Tarabai Shinde, a person from a Maratha family, who published a pamphlet in 1882 comparing the situation of men and women. As Ramchandra Guha points out, while other reformers talked of "women's uplift", Tarabai called for parity and questioned the presumed superiority of men.

A person who made outstanding contribution to the empowerment of women is Prof. Dhondo Keshav Karve, a professor of mathematics who took up the cause of widows. He practised what he preached and married a widow himself, for which he was ostracised. He opened a school and a shelter for widows and later founded the first university for women in India which is now known as the Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey University (S.N.D.T.). His son, Raghunath Dhondo Karve, also faced ostracism and legal action for starting, along with his wife, a periodical called "Samaj-Swasthya" (Health of the Society) through which he advocated sex education and birth control. He not only made condoms available through the periodical but also advocated women's right to enjoy sexual pleasure as much as men. He was a Professor of mathematics but had to resign for his views. Dr. Ambedkar fought one of the court cases for him in 1934 when he was accused of spreading vulgarity.

Another court case which finally led to the enactment of the Age of Consent Act, 1891 is also a story of the fight of Dr. Rukhamabai Raut for her rights when she, at the age of 11, refused to consummate her marriage with her husband on account of her age, in the year 1884. 2 Dr. Rukhamabai Raut later studied medicine and became one of the first practising female doctors in India. Dr. Anandibai Joshi, another woman from Pune, encouraged by her husband Gopalrao Joshi to study medicine in America, completed her M.D. in 1886. Maharashtra always had a fair number of women in politics right from the days of Mahatma Gandhi who encouraged women to participate in his movement. Godavari Parulekar, who along with her husband mobilised the Warli tribe members in Thane District was a communist leader. Ahilyabai Rangnekar, Mrunalta Gore, Pramila Dandawate were some of the other prominent leaders from the socialist and communist parties. Social activists included Medha Patkar, Dr. Rani Bang, and Dr. Manda Amte who works with the tribals of Gadchiroli. It should also be mentioned that the first woman President of India is from Maharashtra.

The tradition of social reform movements continues after Independence. Maharashtra has always been a land of voluntary social activists. From Anna Hazare and others working for rural development to those working for environmental conservation to people like Dr. Narendra Dabholkar working for the eradication of superstitions and irrational practices (for which he was assassinated), there is a vast canvas covering various fields and activists.

In the matter of political mobilisation, Maharashtra has provided leaders for all the major ideological formations. Many of Gandhiji's foremost disciples were from Maharashtra. There were many leaders in the socialist and communist parties from Maharashtra (Dr. Pandurang Khankhoje is one of the lesser-known communist leaders – he was a member of the Ghadhar Party in the USA, had discussions with Lenin on the nature of the communist movement in India as a colleague of M.N. Roy and is credited with having led successful experiments in crop breeding as the Director of Agriculture in Mexico).

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar advocated Hindutva and Dr. K.B. Hedgewar, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was from Nagpur. Piloo Mody and Minoo Masani from the then Bombay were prominent leaders of the Swatantra Party, perhaps the only party in India then to have advocated free market policies. An interesting part is that Kanshi Ram, the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party was inspired by the Dalit movements in Maharashtra during his employment in a Central Government undertaking in Maharashtra.

Among the various movements, the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal founded by Hamid Dalwai and his colleagues deserves special mention. He campaigned for reforms within the Muslim community and demanded the introduction of an Uniform Civil Code as a measure of true secularism.

All these political and social movements were essentially efforts to find ways of dealing better with others – to proceed on the path to a more just and equal society. It was natural that all these debates were also reflected in literature and drama – two areas with a rich tradition in Maharashtra. It is no wonder that Maharashtra was the birthplace of Dalit literature too.

Dealing better with others has another important component – that of ensuring economic well-being as a starting point in the journey to equality. Maharashtrians are not known for commercial acumen and enterprise, but it is interesting that the first co-operative sugar mill was erected in Maharashtra which later led to a large network of co-operative sugar mills. Co-operative banking too has strong roots in Maharashtra. The first labour union in India was started by Narayan Meghaji Lokhande in Mumbai.

The agriculturists in Maharashtra are known for their progressive practices. It is also noteworthy that a bureaucrat such as Sharad Joshi took to farming and became a voice of the farmers and presented an ideological framework for ensuring a better deal to farmers in the 1970's. Lekha Mendha, a village in Gadchiroli district, was the first village in India to be granted community forest rights for the tribal communities. An important aspect is also about the large population of immigrant workers contributing to the economy in Maharashtra while earning their own livelihoods and enjoying harmonious relations with the local population.

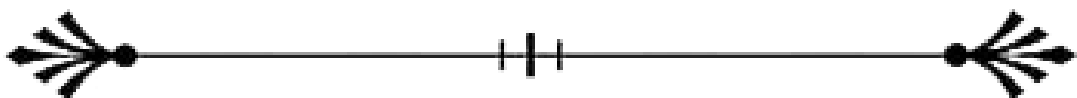
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<sup>2</sup> (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/as-sc-looks-again-at-conjugal-rights-recalling-rukhmabai-7409834/>).

The impact of the Bhakti movement and the varkari tradition, the reverence to Shivaji, the openness along with the greater contact with the rest of the country which the Maratha expeditions provided, the legacy of the political and social movements and the rich cultural and spiritual traditions would continue to act as a guiding light in the journey towards greater justice and peace not only for the population of Maharashtra but for the entire country. After all, Maharashtra is best suited to act as a blend of the northern and southern cultures in India.



Varkaris on the way to Pandharpur. Source: Lokmat.com



# **The Ongoing Transformation in Maharashtra – Renaissance at the Grassroots**

**by Dinkar Gangal<sup>3</sup>**

The history of the last eight hundred to thousand years of Maharashtra would justify its description as the land of capabilities and accomplishments. This was facilitated by the feature of Maharashtra as a land of diversity and assimilation. The early dynasties which ruled the land such as Satavahans and Shilahars had their roots in neighbouring regions. The Bene Israeli Jews landed on the Konkan coast about two thousand years ago. The Parsees came to Navsari in Gujarat a thousand years ago and they moved southwards to Palghar and Dahanu in Maharashtra. The contribution of Parsees as also the Gujaratis in the growth and progress of Mumbai is significant. It is well known that some of the warrior families of Maharashtra such as the Sawant and Rane families migrated from Northern India. Many Gujarati families shifted to Maharashtra along with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj after his expedition to Surat. The stream of migration from Gujarat continued since then.

The region of southern Maharashtra and Karnataka share a close relationship in the same manner as the relationship between parts of Maharashtra and the Telugu speaking states of Andhra and Telangana. There are many colonies of displaced persons from East Bengal in Chandrapur. Similarly, refugees from Sindh have settled in Maharashtra for the last seven decades. The market for sweetmeats and snacks has been dominated for over a century by Rajasthani migrants who have now been integrated in the social life of the locals. All these immigrants from various places follow the cultural practices of their original lands in their personal life, but in social interactions they are Maharashtrians and speak Marathi. As a land of immigrants, Maharashtra deserves to be called a “melting pot” even more than the U.S.A.! Immigrants always need to prove themselves. As a result, Maharashtra has always been a land of the brave, the capable and large-hearted people.

The history of the last one hundred to one hundred and fifty years reveals that Mumbai – Maharashtra had been the center of the Indian freedom struggle. While Mahatma Gandhi hailed from Gujarat, Maharashtra was his place of action and a large number of his followers were Marathi speaking people. His relationship with Vinoba Bhave was of a Guru and Shishya and at the same time that of a Shishya and a Guru. According to Mahatma Gandhi, Appasaheb Patwardhan enjoyed the same status as that of Pandit Nehru amongst his followers. Appasaheb was exceptionally gifted. He experimented with various innovative ideas and also thought of currency reform and negative interest rates! He founded a unique ashram such as Gopuri Ashram in Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra. While many Gandhian organisations are now almost defunct, the work of Gopuri Ashram continues to be carried out in a principled way and is expanding. One comes across many such persons of the earlier generation in various parts of Maharashtra.



After a period characterised by the history of valour, the spirit of service, which got kindled during the Gandhi era, continues to glow in Maharashtra. Baba Amte adopted Gandhi's service of leprosy patients and provided a new paradigm. Patient-care led to a novel model of rural development. The model was then adopted at Shantivan in Nere Village near Panvel

Numerous service organisations devoted to the pursuit of a variety of objects are spread out throughout Maharashtra and there is a continuous stream of new ones being founded. Mahatmaji used to describe Maharashtra as a beehive of volunteer workers - selfless volunteers enthused with the spirit of service. The glorious tradition of valour starting from Shivaji and his son Sambhaji was kept alive for over a century. The Maratha sardars had brought the Mughal subedars to their knees in district after district. It is accepted by all that the Marathas would have dominated the national scene if the English had not entered India. The spirit of service blossoming in Maharashtra around the twentieth century, which has been described earlier, stands out in the backdrop of this period of military prowess and valour.

The advent of the British, no doubt, had its own beneficial impact. It brought in its wake modernity, novel schools of thought, democratic values and western mores, customs and ways of thinking. The period comprising of the whole of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century was an era of enlightenment and renaissance and in Maharashtra. A period of about 125 years of reformation from Balshastri Jambhekar (who published the first periodical – Darpan- in Marathi and is considered the father of Marathi journalism) to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar! It is remarkable that Darpan was started in 1832 – within just fourteen years of the fall of the Peshawas and the commencement of the British rule in 1818! How inspired he must have been!

This was followed by a period when the Maharashtrian social consciousness was churned by two distinct and parallel streams. One consisted of thinkers and leaders in the tradition of Mahadev Govind Ranade- Bal Gangadhar Tilak- Gopal Ganesh Agarkar and Gopal Krishna Gokhale (though they had their own differences in thought and approach).



<sup>3</sup> <https://indianhistorycollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IHCFEATfnl2.png>

Gokhale portrait from book cover edited by Shiv Gajrani and S.Ram

The other tradition started from Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and was taken forward by Shahu Maharaj -Sayajirao Gaekwad- Ambedkar- Keshavrao Jedhe. Modern formal education was the essence of the transformation and the objective was to strive for modernistic thinking and values. As a result, people began interpreting their experiences based on the insights gained which led to the birth of the new age.



Source: Newslaundry

The trisutri (three-point message) given by Dr. Ambedkar “Get educated, get organised and agitate” to his followers was, in fact, the mantra of the times. Countless thought-based organisations were formed. An important part of these were libraries. Maharashtra today has over a hundred libraries which are in existence for over 150 years. These served as the meeting points – addas- for acquisition of knowledge and research. They were the sources of socio-cultural initiatives. These libraries continue to organise events and get-togethers. However, it seems as if they are fast losing their souls under the influence of technology and media.

The state of Maharashtra came into existence in 1960, after a struggle of about seven years for its formation. The first Chief Minister, Yashwantrao Chavan, accorded primacy to education and cultural affairs. Education had spread rapidly in Maharashtra since the nineteenth century. There are many organisations, especially in Konkan and Vidarbha, with a tradition of educational excellence. The region popularly known as Western Maharashtra took the lead in the spread of education in the first half of the twentieth century. The history of educational institutions; formed by Bhaurao Patil and Vithal Ramji Shinde in Satara, Kolhapur, Nasik etc.; is inspiring and needs to be well documented. However, the spread of educational institutions subsided during 1930 to 1950 and was later revived. Y.B. Chavan brought these private, voluntary efforts into the ambit of formal government regulations. Overall, he encouraged the spread of knowledge and education. The vision of Chavan was instrumental in the spread of educational and knowledge institutions which resulted in the social and political awakening, the growth of the co-operative movement, the rise in innovative efforts in agriculture etc.

It was after 1970 that Maharashtra witnessed a surge of innovation and agency of the people at the local level in all its districts. Political power had been decentralised due to the panchayati raj. This resulted in an efficient network of political power flowing from the Chief Minister of the state to the sarpanch at the village level. Political power can work miracles in the society if used constructively which did happen in Maharashtra in many of the districts.

This helped in internalising the concept of trickling down of development. Of course, there was criticism of many leaders in the co-operative sector. A film like Saamna (a film of the 1970's directed by Dr. Jabbar Patel which depicts the conflict involving a sugar baron played by Nilu Phule and a school teacher played by Dr. Shriram Lagoo) was an example of the same. However, in hindsight one realises that it was all a part of the process of development.

The growth of the co-operative movement led to the emergence of many "islands of development". Interestingly, while struggle was being waged at various levels to bring about equality, the fruits of development had also begun to reach people at the grassroots. What were the various platforms where struggle was being waged? The agitations by the industrial workers were in full force, women were demanding their rightful place, scientific temperament was being spread through the institutional and formal forms and was also reaching the grassroots through initiatives like the lok-vignyan movement. The efforts at eradication of superstition were a part of the same movement. Maharashtra was witnessing a period of aggressive agitations and at the same time was undergoing a process of constructive transformation. Mumbai was the centre of all agitations – whether against price rises, against the Emergency or the bandhs and strikes by various labour unions.

It was a period of awakening as well as of demanding one's rightful place. The creative transformation in that period included the spread of education across the region, the increased opportunities for courses in medicine, engineering and other professional courses and the spread of industrialisation through the industrial estates. The voluntary sector was also strengthened during this period. Many volunteers who were drawn into politics during the opposition to the Emergency were later disillusioned and turned to the social sector. A prominent example is Bapu Upadhye who successfully organised water-users associations in the command area of a dam which led to the greening of the Ozhar belt. A similar example in Vidarbha is of Dr. Abhay and Dr. Rani Bang. They devoted themselves to the field of public health and developed a world-renowned model of addressing the issue of infant mortality.

Mohan Hirabai Hiralal successfully developed an innovative model of Gram Swaraj (village autonomy) in Mendha Lekha village in Gadchiroli in collaboration with the members of the local tribal community.

In fact, these examples are of a relatively earlier period. Robust models of social development have been implemented in various districts of Maharashtra which have resulted in strengthening the society to a considerable extent.



The name of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is generally in the news for political reasons. However, the work done by Vanwasi Kalyan Ashram and other affiliated social organisations have resulted in changes at the grassroots. Overall, it has to be noted that the various experiments of social mobilisation drew their strength from the disillusionment with politics.

If the last century has to be divided into various periods, I would define three eras – dominated by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Prahlad Keshav Atre (editor, politician, playwright, poet, film maker) and Yashwantrao Chavan (the first Chief Minister of Maharashtra and former Deputy Prime Minister). Two other personalities who captured the imagination of the people were Bal Gandharva (Narayan Rajhans, who played female roles in the era of musical theatre and enthralled the audience with graceful acting and melodious singing – was popularly known as Bal Gandharva after the epithet given to him by Lokmanya Tilak) and P.L. Deshpande (writer, humourist, playwright, music composer and film director who also supported social causes). The birth centenary of P.L. Deshpande, Ga. Di. Madgulkar (poet and lyricist) and Sudhir Phadke (singer, music composer, freedom fighter) was celebrated concurrently in the year 2019.

A list of people notable persons born in Maharashtra between the years 1901 and 1930 (accordingly, whose birth centenary years would fall between 2001 and 2030) was prepared by our group. The list came to include about two hundred and fifty persons. One can only imagine the wide canvas which the contributions of these two hundred and fifty persons would cover! These persons were those whose influence was over the entire area which constitutes Maharashtra today. If the list is expanded to include people who contributed within their local or regional spheres, it would be the subject of a book or a different series of presentations.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.iccaconsortium.org/index.php/2018/03/26/village-mendha-lekha-icca-in-maharashtra-india/>



The transition in political and social aspects had its influence on the world of arts and culture. Maharashtra witnessed a resurgence of exploration in various forms of arts. The versatility of P.L. Deshpande made its mark in the field of entertainment, V. P. Kale held the middle-class captive in a sort of an emotional bond. Various experiments were carried out in literature and the theatre. Vijay Tendulkar aroused the audience out of its slumber and provided a new paradigm to the world of arts. It is remarkable that he continues to inspire youth in spite of a lapse of over a decade after his death.

The political scene in Maharashtra is getting messier in the last three or four decades. The Janata party experiment was carried out after the Emergency and it also failed very quickly. It appeared, for a while, that issues based on ideology were at stake in that period; however, this was not so in reality. Marxist ideology (popularly called the leftist ideology) took roots in India after the Russian Revolution. The centre of Marxist politics in that era was Maharashtra.

Maharashtra also occupied a central position when world socialist movement found its way in India. An amazing facet about Maharashtra is that the reformation movement of the nineteenth century continued till the seventies or eighties in the twentieth century. Alongside the political formations based on the diverse ideological thoughts espoused by persons such as S. A. Dange, B. T. Randive, N. G. Gore, S. M. Joshi, Dattopant Thengadi and others, Maharashtra was the place where the experiment of organisations based on ideologies -such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Rashtra Sewa Dal – was initiated. A similar initiative was the holding of Anandmelas.

Pandurang Sadashiv Sane, popularly known as Sane Guruji, was a freedom fighter and social reformer. “Shyamchi Aai” (Shyam’s mother) an autobiographical account by him of his childhood days and of the values taught by his mother, achieved a legendary status in Maharashtra’s cultural world and was read by almost every school going child in the post-independent generation). Sane Guruji was an exceptional and extraordinary person who provided leadership in thought as well as activism in his times. Emotion as a noteworthy facet of his personality. The soft-hearted Sane Guruji of “Shyamchi Aai” who could effectively capture the spirit of Indian culture and present it to Marathi readers and also observe satyagraha at Pandharpur insisting for allowing entry of Dalits in the famous Vitthal temple. I sometimes feel that Sane Guruji’s philosophy could provide a key to the conflict between the Western and Indian approaches to life arising out of the growing materialism in India. One finds a co-existence of the modernity in Western thinking and the traditional aspect in Indian lifestyle in the creations and thought of Sane Guruji.

The blend of Vinobaji’s ethics and Sane Guruji’s philosophy laced with emotion has been the basis of good living in Maharashtra. The virtue and the simplicity in the lives of these two persons has also been placed high in the value system in Maharashtrian ethos. In spite of the richness of talent, ostentation or hunger for status was never a part of Maharashtra’s

culture. The modesty flowing from thoughtfulness was noteworthy right from the days of Shivaji Maharaj to the days of the Gaekwads of Vadodara, Shahu Maharaj (of the princely state of Kolhapur) and the Pants of the princely state of Aundh in Satara District, with the exception of the period covering the later half of the Peshawa rule. Of course, the lifestyle of the later part of Peshawa rule nurtured forms of performing arts such as the shahiri and lavani and provided a new dimension to the arts and culture in Maharashtra.

The tradition of reformation in Maharashtra tenaciously survived till the nineties in the last century through various experiments, expeditions (yatras) and events. However, it rapidly lost its vigour with the onslaughts of globalisation and technological developments. Maharashtra lost its identity in the last three decades. Maharashtra was left leaderless in the last three decades and there were evidences of only a scattered and fragmented leadership. The last thirty years have been characterised by an absence of ideology or philosophy and by the influence of technology. As a result, liberty of the individual started acquiring prominence. The tendency of an individual is towards being self-fulfilled.

While this was evident in Maharashtra as well, it indicated a new dimension of the agency of the people. Initially, the decentralisation of power led to the empowerment of the people in various far-flung districts, which was a political development. Subsequently, as politics turned into a scramble for power, people started opting for diverse fields for the expression of their capabilities. While access to education already existed, access to the knowledge and technology from all over the world also started becoming available during the same period. People from almost every taluka (tahsil) started exhibiting their capabilities in diverse ways.

As per the data compiled by the organisation "ThinkMaharashtra.com", it was found that there were at least ten to fifteen persons in every tahsil who had impactful initiatives. These included initiatives as diverse as developing an e-library through scanning of ancient manuscripts to the invention of new equipment for agricultural operations. To provide some examples,

- Harshad Vibhandik has digitalised the operations of 1100 schools of the Zilla Parishad in Dhule district;
- Dr. Vishwas Yevle of Pune has been taking out a jal dindi from Pune to Pandharpur (along with the dindi of the warkari devotees walking to the Vitthal temple at Pandharpur) for the last twelve years thus trying to create awareness about water;
- Subhash Kadam has discovered traces of platinum in the soil at Mangalwedha in Solapur district and has also acquired a patent for it;
- Ashok Surwade, an enterprising farmer from a small village called Pimplas in Niphad tahsil of Nasik district, has travelled up to Antartica for research on the penguins and has also erected a winery project with an investment of a mere eight and half lakh rupees;
- Shaila Yadav from Khatav village of Man tahsil of Satara has been working for the education, livelihoods and empowerment of the Kolhati- Dombari community;

- Sajal Kulkarni of Nagpur works for the identification of cattle and has taken up classification of the non-descript varieties of domestic cattle in Vidarbha.
- Ashutosh Patil and Shantilal Purwar are custodians of history – Ashutosh has earned recognition at a young age as an expert on ancient coins and Prakash Purwar has about seventeen thousand ancient artefacts in his possession right from the fingerprints of the early homo sapiens to the copies of the Holy Quran written by Aurangzeb;
- Navnath Kaspate of Barshi Taluka in Solapur district, Dnyaneshwar Bodke from Mulshi Taluka in Pune district and Vilas Shinde from Sinnar taluka in Nasik district are inquisitive and innovative farmers;
- Manish Rajankar who has done his M.A in English works for the study and conservation of tanks in Bhandara district;
- Kuldeep Rathod works for the conservation of the Tanmor bird; Prasad Pawar is trying to take the paintings in the Ajanta caves to households with the help of modern technology.

These are but a few examples. I often quote the example of the stories of the various incarnations of Vishnu from the Vishnu Purans. The stories are narrated and listened to by the devotees with devotion but have relevance only from the perspective of the Puranas. ThinkMaharashtra. Com has a collection of hundreds of stories which are as good as miracles and a story a day could be narrated throughout the year. These are not imaginary stories like those of the Puranas but could be presented factually to the audience and readers. A thought comes to my mind while looking at this vast canvass depicting the capabilities of hundreds of men: all these innovations are in a way akin to the Renaissance in Europe in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. A similar aura of knowledge has spread all over Maharashtra. All these people are doing their work with commitment, diligence and sincerity. It is the responsibility and a moral duty of the educated and cultured sections of society to take cognisance of this ongoing transformation.



## Part I – How do we deal with the Self?

### **Pasaydan – Sant Dnyaneshwar Maharaj<sup>5</sup>**

पसायदान or Pasaydan is one of the most popular, well known and widely versed prayer in Maharashtra. I strongly believe that, even though Pasaydan is not so well known as a prayer outside Maharashtra, the devotees of Lord Krishna will be interested to understand the meaning of this beautiful prayer. So here, we give the meaning of Pasaydan in both Hindi and English so that everyone can understand the true meaning. Please note that it is not mere translation, I have given in between the lines meanings in the brackets as well.

The word Pasaydan is a composition of two words Pasa (पसा) which means palms spread joined together (like we make when someone is about to give a lot of chocolates in our hands) and Dan (दान) which means gift. Together they mean a gift which can be taken or received in palms spread joined together. Usually in India, especially Hindu's accept Prasad (god's gift) in Pasa (पसा).



Photo by [Chungkuk Bae](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Pasaydan was composed by [Sant Dnyaneshwar Maharaj](#). Devotees and warkari's fondly call him Mauli which means mother. Pasaydan is actually a portion of Bhavarth Deepika or Dnyaneshwari which is a Prakrut Marathi version (translation) of Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta. It is collections of verses or ovi's (ओवी) from 1794 to 1802 from Eighteenth Adhyay (final adhyay) of Dnyaneshwari.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.robасworld.com/pasaydan-meaning/>



In Pasaydan, Sant Dnayneshwar, pray the Supreme Lord, his guru Nivruttinath to grant him the Pasaydan or Prasad of what he asked in these verses. This prayer is pure humanitarian prayer which in my opinion also resembles another Vedic prayer in terms of tone and asking wellbeing (सुख) for everyone.

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः  
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।  
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु  
मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् ।  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

### Pasaydan – Prayer with Meaning in Hindi and English

आतां ववश्वात्मके देवे, यि वाग्यज्ञे तोषावे, तोषोनन मज दयावे, पसायदान हे ॥१॥  
अतः मैयह कामना करता हूँके ववश्व के आत्मा स्वरूप भगवान देव (परमेश्वर), मेरी वाक्  
यज्ञ (वीर दवारा ककये गए यज्ञसे) सांतुष्ट हो – प्रसन्न हो, और सांतुष्ट हो कर मुझे यह  
पसायदान (प्रसाद) दें (क्रमशः)

Now, I pray the supreme lord who is the soul of this universe, will be pleased with my writings, scribblings and happily grant me this Prasad (see above for explanation) gift which I can contain in my palms (to be continued..)

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जे खळांचि व्यांकटी सांडो, तया सत्कमी रती वाढो, भ तां परस्परे जडो, मैत्र जीवार्ति ॥२॥  
के खल याने दष्टुट प्रवट्टिके लोर्गोकी दष्टुटता, कुट्टलता का अतां हो (वे यह छोड़ दे, या उनसे यह  
छ ट जाए) और उनमे सत्कमम करने की इच्छा प्रबल हो, भ त लोकमें (पथूवीपर) सभी प्राखियोंमें  
आपसमें ममत्रता, अनुराग और प्रेम का भाव बढे और यह भाव कायम रहे.

That with this evil thought evils, cruelty of cruel comes to an end (they themselves will get enlighten and abandon their sinful thoughts and acts), they shall get more power and energy to perform pious and righteous acts (sat karma – Good actions). All living beings shall become friends for life with each other and live happily and with passion with each other.

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दरुरतार्ति नेतममर जावो, ववश्व स्वधमम स येपाहो, जो जे वांछील तो ते लाहो, प्राखिजात ॥३॥  
पापी के मनमें जो अधां :कार फैला हुवा हैवह दर हो, ववश्व स्वधममका स यम प्रदीप्त होते देखें,  
इस प्राखिजगतमें जो शजस की कामना करे उसे वह प्राप्त हो

Diminish the darkness of sins from the sinner's minds, let the world witness rise of the Sun of self dharma (faith in righteousness, Swa-dharma = Self's Dharma). Grant any living being whatever (rightfully) it demands.

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वषमत सकळ मांडळी, ईश्वरननष्णां मांडयाळी, अनवरत भ मांडळी, भेटतुभ ता ॥४॥  
सवम ईश्वरननष् मनुष्योंकी वषाम इस भ ममपर होती रहे, इन ईश्वरननष् लोगोंका अवतरि  
भ मण्डलपर होकर, एक जमघट बन जाए, और यह सब सभी प्राखियोंको प्राप्त हो, उन्हें यह  
ईश्वरननष् लोग ममलते रहें.

Let there be shower of (blessings of) God loving folks on earth, let them ascend on earth and  
let earth become a great gathering of such God loving people. And let their  
acquaintance/company be granted to all common people on earth.

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चला कल्पतरूंचे आरव, चेतनाचिंतामणींचे गाव, बोलती जे अर्णव, पीयूषांचे ॥५॥

### (१) (चला – पृथ्वी, Earth)

जिनकी (संतोंकी, सज्जनोंकी) वाणी और शब्द जैसे अमृतका समुद्र है, उनकी वजहसे यह पृथ्वी  
कल्पवृक्षोंका बगीचा बन जाये (जाता है), वे चेतनारूपी चितामणियोंके जैसे गांव हैं.

Those people whose uttering is like an ocean of elixir, because of whom this earth has  
become a garden of Kalpavriksha (A tree which can grant everything that can be thought of,  
wish fulfilling trees). Those folks are nothing but, towns of blessing pearls (wish fulfilling  
pearls, the pearls which can give solace from anxieties and grant anything that can be  
thought of) of consciousness.

### (२) (चला – सौभाग्य की देवी, Goddess of Fortune)

जिनकी (संतोंकी, सज्जनोंकी) वाणी और शब्द जैसे अमृतका समुद्र है, वे लोग सौभाग्य प्रदान  
करनेवाले देवी जैसे कल्पवृक्षोंका बगीचा हैं, वे चेतनारूपी चितामणियोंके जैसे गांव हैं.

Those people whose uttering is like an ocean of elixir, these folks are nothing less than the  
Goddess of fortune like a garden of Kalpavriksha. Those folks are nothing but, towns of  
blessing pearls (wish fulfilling pearls, the pearls which can give solace from anxieties and  
grant anything that can be thought of) of consciousness.

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चन्द्रमेंजे अलांछन, मार्तण्ड जे तापहीन, ते सर्वाही सदा सज्जन, सोयरे होतु ॥६॥  
चंद्र जैसे तेजस्वी होकरभी जिनके ऊपर कोई दाग नहीं (पवित्र हैं), खोट नहीं और लांछन नहीं  
हैं, सूर्य (मार्तण्ड) जैसे प्रखर (ज्ञानसे प्रदीप्त) होकरभी जो तप्त, उष्ण (अहंकारसे भरे) नहीं हैं,  
वे सर्वथा सदैव सज्जन, करुणा और दया से युक्त होते हैं.

Those who are, spotless even being beautifully lit (having good outlook and morality) as the  
Moon (pious); Calm, soothing and cold (egoless) even if as bright (enlightened with  
knowledge) as the Sun, are really eternal saintly people who are filled with love and  
compassion for all.

किंबहुना सर्व सुखी, पूर्ण होवोनि तिहीं लोकी, भजिजो आदिपुरुषीं, अखण्डित ॥७॥  
किंबहुना वे जो (मनुष्य) विश्वके आदि पुरुष का (परमेश्वरका) अव्याहत भजन करते हैं, उसका  
मनन और चिंतन करते हैं, वे तीनों लोकोंमें अपने कर्तव्य और मनोकामनाओंको पूर्ण करके,  
सर्व सुखी (मुक्त) जाते हैं.

Actually, the people who constantly pray the Adi-purush, the first being (Supreme Lord),  
shall fulfil all their duties and desires in all three worlds and finally shall attain the supreme  
satisfaction and then salvation.

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आणि ग्रंथोपजिवीये, विशेषी लोकी इये, दृष्टादृष्टविजये, होआवेजी ॥८॥

और जो लोग (मनुष्य) ग्रंथोंके आधारपर जीते हैं (धार्मिक ग्रंथोंका पालन करते हैं, उन्हें अपने  
जीवन का आधार बनाते हैं, जिसमे संत ज्ञानेश्वर रचित भावार्थ दीपिका भी है जिसका यह  
प्रार्थना एक भाग है) वे विशेष लोग हैं (उन्हें विशेष ऊर्जा व सामर्थ्य प्राप्त होता है). उन  
मनुष्योंको दिखने वाले और न दिखनेवाले भोगोंपर (वस्तुओंपर) विजय प्राप्त हो.

And those who leave by the word of the books (holy books such as Veda's, Upanishads etc  
including the Bhavarth Deepika or Dnyaneshwari of which this Pasaydan is a small portion),  
who use the teachings of these books as guiding principles of their lives, are special kind of  
people. Those people shall win over all the seen-unseen (visible-invisible) adversities.

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येथ म्हणे श्री विश्वेश्वरावो, हा होईल दानपसावो, येणे वरे ज्ञानदेवो, सुखिया झाला ॥९॥  
यहाँ श्री गुरु निवृत्तिनाथ (विश्वेश्वर) ने कहा, यह तुम्हारा प्रसाद है (पसायदान). यह प्रसाद  
पाकर यह ज्ञानेश्वर सुखी हो गया.

Here, Shri Nivruttinath (Guru or Sant Dnyaneshwar, the Vishweshwar) said that this shall be  
your Prasad (Pasaydan). After consuming (having) this Prasad, Dnyaneshwar became  
satisfied, blessed and filled with great joy.

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For a rendition of Payaadan by Lata Mangeshkar click on  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQTKecWB9OM>



# Gita Pravachan by Vinoba Bhave<sup>6</sup>

## Chapter 2

It is really a pity that India, the land where Brahmaavidya (the science of realising the Brahman) was born, is now teeming with innumerable incongruent groups and castes. We are so much afraid of death that one wonders whether such fear has any parallel anywhere else in the world. No doubt, it is a consequence of a long period of subjection; but then one must not forget that it is also one of the causes of that subjection.

We hate the word 'death'. It is considered inauspicious. Jnanadeva had to write regretfully: 'अगा मर हा बोल न साहती । आणि मेलिया तरी रडती ।।' ('They cannot bear the word 'death' and cry over death.') If someone dies, what tears! What wailing! Why, we think all this is our duty! People go to the extent of hiring professional mourners!. Even when death is imminent, we do not tell the patient. He is kept in the dark even when a doctor has told us that the patient cannot live. Even doctors do not speak plainly to the patients and go on pouring medicines down their throats till the last moment. If, instead, the doctor were to tell the patient the truth, give him courage and direct his thoughts towards God, what a help that would be! But it is feared that this little pot might crack of shock before its time. But can death ever come before the right moment? Besides, even if it comes a little earlier, what does it matter? We should certainly not be loveless and hard-hearted; but attachment to the body is not love. On the contrary, unless attachment to the body is overcome, true love does not emerge.

When we are freed of that attachment, we would realise that the body is an instrument for service; and then the body would gain its true dignity. But today we regard pampering of the body as the sole purpose of our lives. We have totally forgotten that life is to be lived for the fulfillment of swadharma and to do this one has to look after the body. It should be given proper nourishment; but there is no need to indulge the palate. It is all the same to a ladle whether you use it to serve shrikhand (a sweet dessert) or plain curry; it feels neither happy nor unhappy. The same should be the case with our tongue. It should, of course, be able to distinguish between different tastes, but should not feel any pleasure or repulsion. The body is to be paid its due hire, and nothing more. A spinning wheel has to be oiled regularly to keep it in working condition; in the same way we should provide fuel to the body so that we can take work from it. If that is our approach, the body, although having little intrinsic worth, would become worthy and valuable and gain true dignity.

But, instead of using the body as an instrument, we lose ourselves in it and stunt our spirit whereby the body, which has little intrinsic worth, is made of less worth. That is why the saints vehemently say, 'देह आणि देहसंबंधें निंदावी। इतरे वंदावी श्वानसूकरें।' ('One should censure the narrow confinement to the body and the blood-relations and venerate others, even the pigs

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.mkgandhi.org/talksongita/talk\\_gita.htm](https://www.mkgandhi.org/talksongita/talk_gita.htm) These talks were delivered by Vinoba while in the Dhule jail in 1932 and one of the inmates, Sane Guruji took notes and got these printed later.



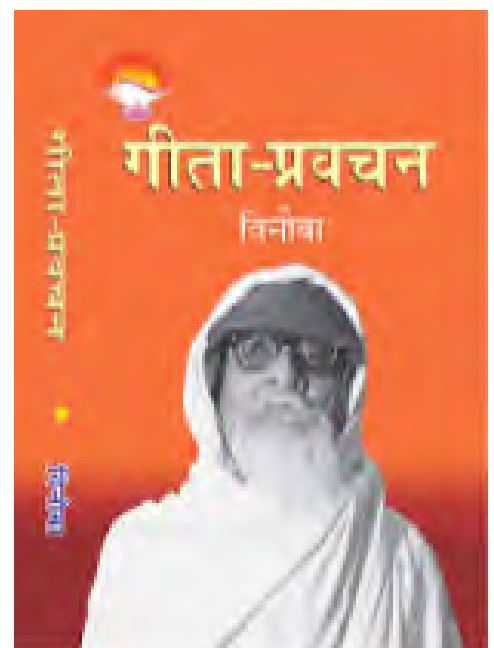
But, instead of using the body as an instrument, we lose ourselves in it and stunt our spirit whereby the body, which has little intrinsic worth, is made of less worth. That is why the saints vehemently say, 'देह आणि देहसंबंधें निंदावी। इतरें वंदावी श्वानसूकरें।' ('One should censure the narrow confinement to the body and the blood-relations and venerate others, even the pigs and the dogs!') Do not, therefore, worship the body and its ties all the time. Learn to relate to others as well. The saints are thus exhorting us to broaden our horizon. Do we ever open our hearts to others outside our narrow circle of friends and relatives? Do we ever try to identify ourselves with others? Do we let our swan-Self-the bird of the spirit- escape from the cage of the body and breathe freedom? Does it ever occur to us that we should widen the circle of our friends continually so as to ultimately encompass the whole world and feel that the whole world is ours and that we belong to the whole world? We write letters to our relatives from the jail. What is special about it? But would you write to a thief convict-not a political prisoner-whom you have befriended here, after his release?

The soul is ever restless to reach out to others. It longs to embrace the whole world. But we shut it up in a cell. We have imprisoned the soul and are not even conscious of it. From morning till evening, we are busy minding the body. Day and night we worry about how fat or thin we are. One would think that there was no other joy in the world. But even beasts experience the pleasures of the senses. Will you not like to taste the joy of giving, the joy of controlling the palate? What joy there is in giving away your full plate of food though you too suffer from hunger? A mother, when she works hard for the sake of her child, knows something of this joy. In fact, even when one draws a small circle around the 'I and the mine', one is unconsciously striving to experience the joy in the enlargement of the self. Thereby the self, otherwise encased in the body, is released to a limited extent and for a little while. But what sort of a release is this? It is like a prisoner coming out of his cell into the prison courtyard. This hardly satisfies the self's aspirations. It wants the joy of unbounded freedom.

In short, (i) a seeker after truth should avoid the by-lanes of adharma (un-righteousness) and paradharma (the dharma which is not his own) and take to the natural and straight path of swadharma. He should follow it steadfastly.

(ii) Bearing in mind that the body is transient, it should be used for the sake of the performance of swadharma and should be given up for its sake when the need arises

(iii) Remaining ever aware of the eternal and all- pervading nature of the Self, the distinction of 'mine' and 'thine' should be removed from the mind. The Lord has expounded these three principles of life. One who follows them would undoubtedly have, some day or the other, the experience of 'नरदेहाच्चेनि साधनें, सच्चिदानंदपदवि घेणें।' (using the human body as an instrument, one can reach the exalted state of sat-chit-ananda.).



## Chapter 3

- The similarity and difference between the actions of a worldly man and those of a karmayogi are immediately clear. For example, if a karmayogi is engaged in the care of the cows, he will do the work with the idea of serving the society by providing it with plenty of milk; and at the same time he will look to it as an opportunity to have a relationship of love with all the lower orders of beings through the service of the cows. He will certainly get his wages, but that is not his motivation. Real joy lies in the divine feelings informing the actions.

- Every act of a karmayogi unites him with the whole universe. We are supposed to take meals only after watering the Tulsi plant in the courtyard. This is for creating a bond of love with the whole world of plants. How can I eat, keeping the Tulsi plant starved? Beginning with the identification with the cow and the Tulsi plant we are to progress till we are one with the whole creation. In the Mahabharata war, fighting used to stop at sunset and everybody would then go for performing religious rites etc. But Lord Krishna would rejoice in actions like unyoking the horses from the chariot, giving them water, gently massaging their bodies and nursing their wounds. What a joy the Lord found in such service! The poet is never tired of describing all this. Bring before your mind's eye the picture of the divine charioteer carrying the feed of the horses in the folds of His lower garment and feeding the horses with His own hands and realise how joyful karmayoga is. In karmayoga, all actions attain the highest spiritual character. Take khadi work. A khadi worker hawking khadi from door to door carrying its load on his head never feels tired, for he knows that millions of his brothers and sisters are famished and is inspired by the idea of providing a few morsels to them. His work of selling a few yards of khadi is linked to daridranarayan-God in the form of the poor.

Work of a karmayogi helps sustain him. It keeps his body healthy and intellect radiant. It results in the welfare of the society as well. It also confers on the karmayogi a great gift in the form of the purity of his mind. It is said that work is a means for the purification of the mind-*'कर्मणा शुद्धिः'*. But this is true only of the work done by a karmayogi, as it is charged with the spirit of selfless service, and not of the work ordinarily done by the people. In the Mahabharata, there is a story of the trader named Tuladhar. Jajali, a Brahmin goes to him seeking true knowledge. Tuladhar tells him, "My dear fellow, what is really required is that the scales must always be held even." The outward action of weighing had made Tuladhar's mind straightforward and perfectly balanced. Whosoever came to the shop, Tuladhar's balance was always true. Work does have effect on one's mind. A karmayogi's work is like japa 10 -a form of prayer. It purifies the mind and it is only the clean and pure mind which receives true knowledge. A karmayogi's work ultimately leads to the attainment of wisdom. Tuladhar learnt equanimity of mind from the weighing balance.

Sena was a barber who cut the hair and cleansed the heads of his customers. While doing this work, a realisation dawned on him. He thought, "I have been cleansing others' heads, but have I cleansed my own head, my own mind?" Such words of spiritual wisdom came to his lips while working. While removing weeds from the field, it occurs to a karmayogi that the weeds of base desires and passions should also be removed from the mind. Gora Kumbhar, the potter, realised, while shaping and baking earthen pots, that his own life should also be properly moulded and baked in the fire of desireless action. He eventually attained such an exalted status by virtue of his wisdom that he earned the authority to judge the degree of spiritual development of others. 11 Karmayogis gained true knowledge through the terms used in their respective vocations. To them, their vocations were like schools of the spirit. Their work was imbued with the spirit of worship and service. Although it appeared worldly, it was spiritual in essence.

#### Chapter 4

The Gita uses the word 'karma' (action) in the sense of swadharma. We eat, drink, sleep; these are all actions. But these are not the actions that the Gita refers to when it talks of karma. Karma refers to the performance of swadharma. But in order to attain desirelessness through such karma, an important aid is necessary. One must overcome desire, attachment and anger. One cannot have desirelessness unless and until the mind has become pure and calm like the waters of the Ganga. The actions necessary for the purification of mind are called 'vikarma' by the Gita. Karma, vikarma and akarma - these three terms are important in the Fourth Chapter. Karma means the outward actions done in the pursuit of swadharma. Vikarma means total involvement of the mind therein. We may bow to somebody, but that outward action is meaningless without inner humility in the mind. There should be unity between the inner and the outer. I may worship the image of the Lord; but that act is worthless if it is not accompanied with devotion. In the absence of devotion, the idol will just be a piece of stone and so shall I; and the worship will only mean that a stone is facing a stone! Desireless, selfless karmayoga is attained only when outward actions are complemented with the inward action of the purification of mind.

In the term 'desireless action', the adjective 'desireless' is more important than the word 'action', just as in the phrase 'non-violent non-cooperation', the adjective 'non-violent' is more important than the word 'non-cooperation'. Non-cooperation without non-violence could be a terrible thing. In the same way, it could be dangerous if performance of swadharma is not complemented with vikarma of the mind.

Those engaged in social service today are certainly pursuing their swadharma. When people are poor and destitute, it is a natural duty to serve them and make them happy. But all social workers cannot, therefore, be called karmayogis. Social service without pure motives in the heart of the workers could have disastrous results. Such a social service can generate in equal measure the vanity, hatred, envy and selfishness that we generate when we serve our families exclusively. This is clearly evident in the world of social work today.

## 15. Karma + Vikarma = Akarma

The mind should be fully in tune with and involved in work. 'Vikarma' is the word that the Gita uses for this involvement and application of the mind in work. 'Vikarma' means the special karma which varies with the needs of each individual mind. Many kinds of vikarma have been illustratively mentioned in the Fourth Chapter. They have been further elaborated from the Sixth Chapter onwards. Only when we perform this special karma, only when the mind is in tune with the outward action, will the flame of desirelessness be lighted. Desirelessness is gradually developed when karma and vikarma come together. The body and the mind are distinct entities; so the means to be employed for their growth are bound to be different. The goal is reached when they are in tune with each other. To achieve harmony between them, the authors of the scriptures have prescribed a two-fold path. In bhaktiyoga (the yoga of devotion) they have prescribed penance and austerities without and japa within. If the japa within does not accompany outer forms of penance like fasting, the latter would be in vain. One should always reflect on why one is doing penance; the motive, the spirit should always be alive in the mind like a burning flame. The word 'upavas' (fasting) etymologically means 'to dwell close to God'. In order that our mind and heart may dwell close to God, sensual pleasures are to be abjured. But if we give up such pleasures and do not think of God, of what value is the physical act of fasting? If, instead of thinking of God, we think of things to eat and drink while fasting, that 'fast' would be worse than a feast! In fact, there is nothing more dangerous than thinking about sensual pleasures. Tantra (technique, means) must be accompanied by mantra (pondering over, meditation). Tantra in itself is not important; and mantra without action has no value. Only when the hands are engaged in service and there is spirit of service in the heart can true service be rendered.

Performance of swadharma will be a dreary affair without the warmth of feelings in the heart. It would not then blossom forth and bear the fruit of desirelessness. Suppose we undertake the work of nursing the sick. If there is no compassion in the heart, it would be a burdensome drudgery for us. The patients too will find the service to be a burdensome obligation. If the mind is not absorbed in it, such service will boost the ego. Expectations will then arise in the mind: "I am helping them today; tomorrow they should help me. They should praise me. People should admire me." Or else, we may get fed up and complain that the patient is peevish and irritable even though we are taking so much care of him. Sick men are usually in a depressed and irritable mood. If the spirit of service is lacking, we would get tired of nursing them.

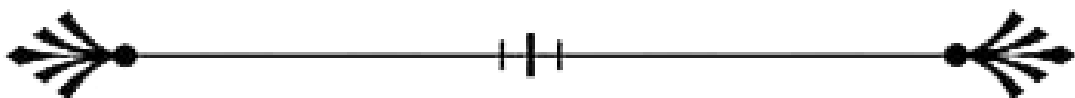
If the mind is in tune with the work, the work is transformed into something unique. When vikarma joins karma, desirelessness comes into being. When a spark touches the gunpowder, it explodes. Karma is like the gunpowder. It works wonders when the flame of vikarma ignites it. Karma in itself is inert and lifeless; it is the spark of vikarma that makes it indescribably powerful. We may keep a packet of gunpowder in our pockets or handle it



with impunity; but when ignited, it would blow up the body into pieces. The infinite power in swadharma is likewise dormant. Combine it with vikarma, and then see what transformation it can bring about! The resultant explosion would reduce to ashes ego, desires, passions and anger, and then supreme wisdom will be attained.

For a good article on Vinoba's life and work, click on

<https://theprint.in/theprint-profile/vinoba-bhave-the-walking-saint-who-talked-bandits-of-madhya-pradesh-into-surrendering/320600/>



## Phakt Ladh Mhana by Vi. Wa. Shirodkar

Vi. Wa. Shirwadkar or Kusumagraj was one of the four recipients of Jnyanpith award Marathi. Mostly known as a poet, he also has many plays to his credit, the most popular being his play "Natsamrat" based on the old age experiences of a retired stage actor. "Vishakha" is his first collection of poems. The poem "phakt ladh mhana" is about a person (ex-student?) visiting him and narrating about his condition after his house is damaged in floods. "Gangamai pahuni ali" means Ganga river visited as a guest. (Kusumagraj was from Nasik and Godavari is generally referred to as Ganga). On coming to know that the young man is trying to rebuild his house, the poet tries to offer him some money. The reply of the young man is in the last stanza. <https://youtu.be/sdoPvUCc7Xo>

### ओळखलत का सर मला वि वा शिरवाडकर कुसुमाग्रज

ओळखलत का सर मला?' - पावसात आला कोणी,  
कपडे होते कर्दमलेले, केसांवरती पाणी.  
क्षणभर बसला नंतर हसला बोलला वरती पाहून:  
'गंगामाई पाहुणी आली, गेली घरट्यात राहुन'.  
माहेरवाशीण पोरीसारखी चार भिंतीत नाचली,  
मोकळ्या हाती जाईल कशी, बायको मात्रवाचली.  
भिंत खचली, चूल विझली, होते नव्हते नेले,  
प्रसाद म्हणून पापण्यांवरती पाणी थोडे ठेवले.  
कारभारणीला घेउन संगे सर आता लढतो आहे  
पडकी भिंत बांधतो आहे, चिखलगाळ काढतो आहे,  
खिशाकडे हात जाताच हसत हसत उठला  
'पैसे नकोत सर, जरा एकटेपणा वाटला.  
मोडून पडला संसार तरी मोडला नाही कणा  
पाठीवरती हात ठेउन, फक्त लढ म्हणा'!

### Do you know me, sir- Translated by Vijay Nadkarni and Vijay Mahajan

It was raining when he came, "Recognise me,  
Sire"  
His clothes were soiled, water dripping from  
his hair.  
He sat down awhile, smiled, looked at me  
and said,  
"Gangamai came as a guest, in my mud hut  
she stayed"  
Like a girl in her Maher, she danced within  
the four walls  
She didn't go back empty handed, spared my  
wife, that's all  
"I lost my home and hearth, my spine is erect  
despite  
A wall collapsed, choolha doused, lost  
whatever we had  
She left some prasad - tear drops on our eyes  
so sad  
But my wife and I Sir, we are now fighting  
back,  
We are rebuilding the wall, removing the wet  
flak."  
As I reached for my purse, he said with a  
cheer  
"Haven't come for money, sir, just came to  
share  
So pat me on the back, Sir, and just ask me to  
fight!

## Part II – How do we deal with Other Human Beings?

### **Je ka Ranjale Ganjale by Sant Tukaram**



**मराठी अभंग - संत तुकाराम –**

#### **॥ जे का रंजले गांजले ॥**

जे का रंजले गांजले ।  
त्यासि म्हणे जो आपुलें ॥१॥  
तो चि साधु ओळखावा ।  
देव तेथें चि जाणावा ॥२॥  
मृदु सबाह्य नवनीत ।  
तैसे सज्जनांचे चित्त ॥३॥  
ज्यासि अपंगिता नाही ।  
त्यासि धरी जो हृदयी ॥४॥  
दया करणें जें पुत्रासी ।  
ते चि दासा आणि दासी ॥५॥  
तुका म्हणे सांगू किती ।  
त्या चि भगवंताच्या मूर्ति ॥६॥

Translations of Je ka ranjale ganjale by Mahatma Gandhi in Yerwada Central Jail in-1930.

Know him to be a true man who takes to his bosom those who are in distress. Know that God resides in the heart of such a one. His heart is saturated with gentleness through and through. He receives as his own, those who are forsaken. He bestows on his man servants and maid servants the same affection he shows to his children. Tukaram says: What need is there to describe him further? He is the very incarnation of divinity.

Je ka Ranjale Ganjale - Abhanga – with English Lyrics, sung by Pandit Bhimsen Joshi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkTk0GQwzMQ>



# Awagha Rang ek Zala - Abhang by Sant Sohirabai (Soyarabai)<sup>7</sup>



Source: Ambedkaritetoday.com

अवघा रंग एक झाला । रंगि रंगला श्रीरंग ॥१॥  
मी तूपण गेले वायां । पाहतां पंढरीचा राया ॥२॥  
नाही भेदाचें तें काम । पळोनि गेले क्रोध काम ॥३॥  
देही असोनि विदेही । सदा समाधिस्त पाही ॥४॥  
पाहते पाहणें गेले दूरी । म्हणे चोखियाची महारी ॥५॥

- All colours are coming together as one (colour). Colour of Shrirang (Lord Vishnu) is becoming one with this colour.
- All the feelings of I and You are gone (vanished) when I witnessed (saw) the King of Pandharpur, Pandurang or Vitthal.
- There is no place for any kind of discrimination here (in Advaita). All your anger and desires die and go away in this state.
- The supreme element i.e. Parabrahma (Param Tattva) even if being part of my body is in a state far away from the body (Nirguna state). I always see it in a state of samadhi (eternal meditation)
- What is there to see and show now? I have left that state behind. So says, the Chokhamela's Mahari (Sant Soyarabai herself)

<sup>7</sup>  
<http://www.robasworld.com/avagha-rang-ek-zala-english-meaning/?unapproved=6103&moderation-hash=03e2e38f6db4869803f2fb3a65ce777c#comment-6103>



### अवघा रंग एक झाला । रंगि रंगला श्रीरंग ॥१॥

**Translation:** All colours are coming together as one (colour). Colour of Shrirang (Lord Vishnu) is becoming one with this colour.

**Commentary:** रंग (Rang / Colour) in Marathi language doesn't just mean physical colour. In Marathi language रंग also means psychological status, thoughts and internal outlook (basis of existence). Sant Soyarabai, is explaining a condition or state of mind where, she can feel that all her thoughts and existence is becoming one with the supreme Lord Vishnu himself. It also signifies, journey of a devotee from Dvaita to Advaita.

### मी तूंपण गेले वायां । पाहतां पंढरीचा राया ॥२॥

**Translation:** All the feelings of I and You are gone (vanished) when I witnessed (saw) the King of Pandharpur Pandurang or Vitthal.

**Commentary:** You will find a lot of references to 'मी तूंपण' or 'मीपण' which literally means belief in I and You. This in other simpler words means believing in difference between existence of You and I as two separate entity. But, as a devotee climbs highs of Advaita, the difference between self and others diminishes. Sant Soyarabai is explaining about her experience of Advaita, when she sees the idol of Lord Pandurang at Pandharpur. We must understand that, being from a Dalit family Sant Soyarabai and her family were not even allowed to enter the temple. So, you can imagine the emotions of a devotee when he/she is not allowed to visit the most prestigious place for him/her!

### नाही भेदाचें तें काम । पळोनि गेले क्रोध काम ॥३॥

**Translation:** There is no place for any kind of discrimination here (in Advaita). All your anger and desires die and go away in this state.

**Commentary:** Sant Soyarabai is explaining that there is no place for discrimination here in Advaita. So if you really want to practice Advaita then you must leave this discriminatory thinking about you and me, me and others and me and supreme energy or Paramatma or Parabrahma. Once, you practice these principles, you will see that all kinds of malicious thoughts in your mind will die down. You will be free from क्रोध (Krodha – anger) and काम (Kama – desire).

### देही असोनि विदेही । सदा समाधिस्त पाही ॥४॥

**Translation:** The supreme element i.e. Parabrahma (Param Tattva) even if being part of my body is in a state far away from the body (Nirguna state). I always see it in a state of samadhi (eternal meditation).

**Commentary:** This verse addresses or talks about the Parabrahma (Param Tattva) and the way Sant Soyarabai witnesses and experiences it. She says that, this Param Tattva lies in our body but it is beyond bodily existence. It is Nirguna. It knows everything, rather it is the source of all knowledge. Sant Soyarabai is explaining her experience with the Param Tattva where she can always witness it in eternal meditation inside her. So, this nirguna even though exists in all bodies, it still is Nirguna and has its own existence beyond senses and mortal existence.

पाहते पाहणें गेले दूरी । म्हणे चोखियाची महारी ॥५॥

**Translation:** What is there to see and show now? I have left that state behind. So says, the Chokhamela's Mahari (Sant Soyarabai herself)

**Commentary:** Once you reach a spiritual level where you become embodiment of Advaita, that's the end point of the journey. That is the completion of the travel from Dvaita to Advaita. So Sant Soyarabai is explaining about her feelings after achieving this hight of spirituality. After reaching this point she feels there is nothing more remaining to see or to show. Which in a way also means, there is nothing more to gain or find, person becomes full of satisfaction and bliss. Also there is nothing more to show since, there is nothing beyond this point. So whatever was there to seek or show is left far behind in this journey. म्हणे चोखियाची महारी literally means 'says Chokhamela's Mahari' ie so says Sant Soyarabai herself!

For an informative essay on Sant-soyarabai, please click on

<https://feminisminindia.com/2017/03/15/sant-soyarabai-essay/>

For a rendition of the Abhang by Kishori Amonkar

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&q=avagha+rang+ek+zala>



## “Mainstream historians have deliberately ignored the history of Dalits, Adivasis” says leading Dalit writer Sharan Kumar Limbale in an interview by Vaibhav Purandare<sup>8</sup>



*Leading Dalit writer Sharan Kumar Limbale was recently awarded the ‘Saraswati Samman’, instituted by the K K Birla Foundation to recognise the best work annually in Indian literature, for ‘Sanatan’. The Marathi novel covers several centuries of caste oppression and portrays the harrowing reality of the Mahar and Adivasi communities. In an interview with Sunday Times, Limbale, whose autobiography ‘Akkarmashi’ (‘The Outcaste’) is considered a landmark work of Dalit literature, explains why he decided to accept the award despite protests from a section of Dalits*

*Not long ago, a Marathi writer refused to accept an award named after Goddess Saraswati and, many were surprised you chose to accept an award in Saraswati’s name. How do you explain your stand?*

It is a national award, and a Marathi book has won after 20 years. How could I refuse it? It’s a sign of respect for Marathi language and literature. Though I’ve been writing in Marathi for four decades, trolls targeted me. They’re dead against Saraswati’s name. But they forget the many Hindu names among Dalits. I gave names of Dalit Marathi writers: Namdeo Dhasal, Gangadhar Pantavane, Laxman Mane, so many of them. Can we change these names? Even the name of our country, ‘Bharat,’ or Babasaheb’s name, ‘Bhimrao,’ or Babasaheb’s father’s name, ‘Ramji,’ or Savitribai Phule’s name have all originated from Hindu culture. There are Dalits employed with institutions which have Hindu names. Should they all resign? Many Marathi publishers are Saraswati’s worshippers. Can we avoid them if we want to publish Dalit literature? These things aren’t practical. We live in a diverse society. We should take rejection seriously; it’s a weapon we should use carefully and judiciously.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/all-that-matters/mainstream-historians-have-deliberately-ignored-the-history-of-dalits-adivasis-says-leading-dalit-writer-sharan-kumar-limbale/articleshow/84927408.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/all-that-matters/mainstream-historians-have-deliberately-ignored-the-history-of-dalits-adivasis-says-leading-dalit-writer-sharan-kumar-limbale/articleshow/84927408.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

*What made you choose historical fiction to narrate the story of the historical exclusion of India's Mahar community?*

Indian history is full of kings, queens, kingdoms and wars, but mainstream historians have deliberately ignored and neglected the history of Dalits and Adivasis. I wrote a historical novel so I could correct the cultural imbalance. The other reason was the Bhima Koregaon battle. My novel came out on January 1, 2018, the battle's 200th anniversary. How the Dalit and Adivasi communities lived and survived here is important.

The narrative spans quite a few centuries and fuses into the present. You dedicate the work to victims of lynchings in present-day India. Was it a conscious choice to blend past with present?

Yes, because that's our history, and it's also our present. Dalits and Adivasis have been attacked, converted and compelled to forget their origins. I've felt many times that I'm living not in the 21st century but in the 16th. As a Dalit writer, I'm asking our country to listen to our demands. Our country is going to celebrate 75 years of freedom, and Dalits still lead lives of social slavery. As Babasaheb Ambedkar said, there are two countries in one: 'India' and 'Boycotted India'.

You state in your personal note in the book that not much has changed in terms of caste-based oppression and yet, you talk of a churn happening at the bottom. Are you saying that the pace of change isn't good enough despite affirmative action?

There's definitely a big social change because of the government's welfare and uplift programmes and because of reservations – all key to changing society. There is also the Atrocities Act to defend oneself. But the mindset of society is changing very slowly. Affirmative action by the government is blended with corruption and caste conspiracy. Budget provisions for Dalits aren't used fully and are diverted to other causes. There is greater awareness among Dalits about their rights but there is also an increase in atrocities against them. Within the administration, from the lowest to the highest levels, there are representatives of caste-based society who protect their own interest. We have to change this.

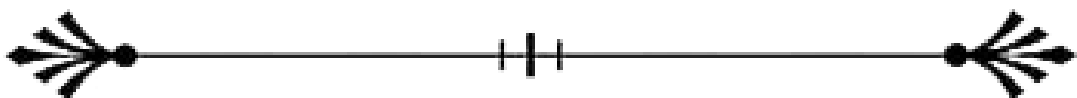
While talking of the beneficent role of missionaries in the face of neglect of entire sections of Hindu society, you appear to have taken a nuanced view of the issue of conversions, indicating they haven't helped the so-called "untouchables" and tribals, and saying they remain outcastes in Christianity and Islam. What's your take on this?



Dalits and no-Dalits converted many times, and with that the caste system entered other religions. They migrated to several countries and with them the caste system. Even after they had accepted Buddhism, atrocities against the Dalits grew. The faith changed, the ground reality didn't. The 2018 Bhima Koregaon riots are a good example of that. We'll have to work against the caste system and I am not talking only to Dalits but to all Indians to work together to wipe out discrimination.

You also spoke of reconciliation at the time of accepting the award...

The struggle of Dalits for human rights has been enormous. In this fight we will have to take along people who think similarly. An all-or-nothing struggle cannot be the norm. A reasoned approach will help us build a society based on equality, liberty and fraternity.



# "Khara to Ekachi Dharma, Jagaala Prem Arpaave" by Sane Guruji

खरा तो एकची धर्म  
जगाला प्रेम अपवि

जगी जे हीन अतिपतित  
जगी जे दीन पददलित  
तया जाऊन उठवावे

जयांना कोणी ना जगती  
सदा ते अंतरी रडती  
तया जाऊन सुखवावे

समस्तां धीर तो द्यावा  
सुखाचा शब्द बोलावा  
अनाथा साहा ते द्यावे  
जयांना गांजती सकल  
तया जाऊन हसवावे

कुणा ना व्यर्थ शिणवावे  
कुणा ना व्यर्थ हिणवावे  
समस्तां बंधु मानावे

प्रभूची लेकरे सारी  
तयाला सर्वही प्यारी  
कुणा ना तुच्छ लेखावे

असे हे सार धर्माचे  
असे हे सार सत्याचे  
परार्था प्राणही द्यावे

There is only one true religion, one  
should shower love on the world

Lift those who are meek and  
downtrodden, those who have been  
trampled upon

Offer solace to those who have none  
in this world and those who weep in  
their hearts,

Kindle courage in all around, speak a  
word of happiness, help the helpless

Go and make them smile, those who  
are weak and who are harassed by  
all

Do not trouble, do not disparage  
anyone without reason, treat all as  
brothers

All are children of God, all are His  
favourite, do not consider anyone  
insignificant

Whatever one has with oneself,  
wealth or knowledge, keep sharing  
the same

Fill the universe with happiness,  
cherish the aim to fill the world with  
well-being

This is the essence of religion and  
essence of truth, sacrifice even one's  
life for others

One who loves religion, one who  
loves God should be immersed in  
love

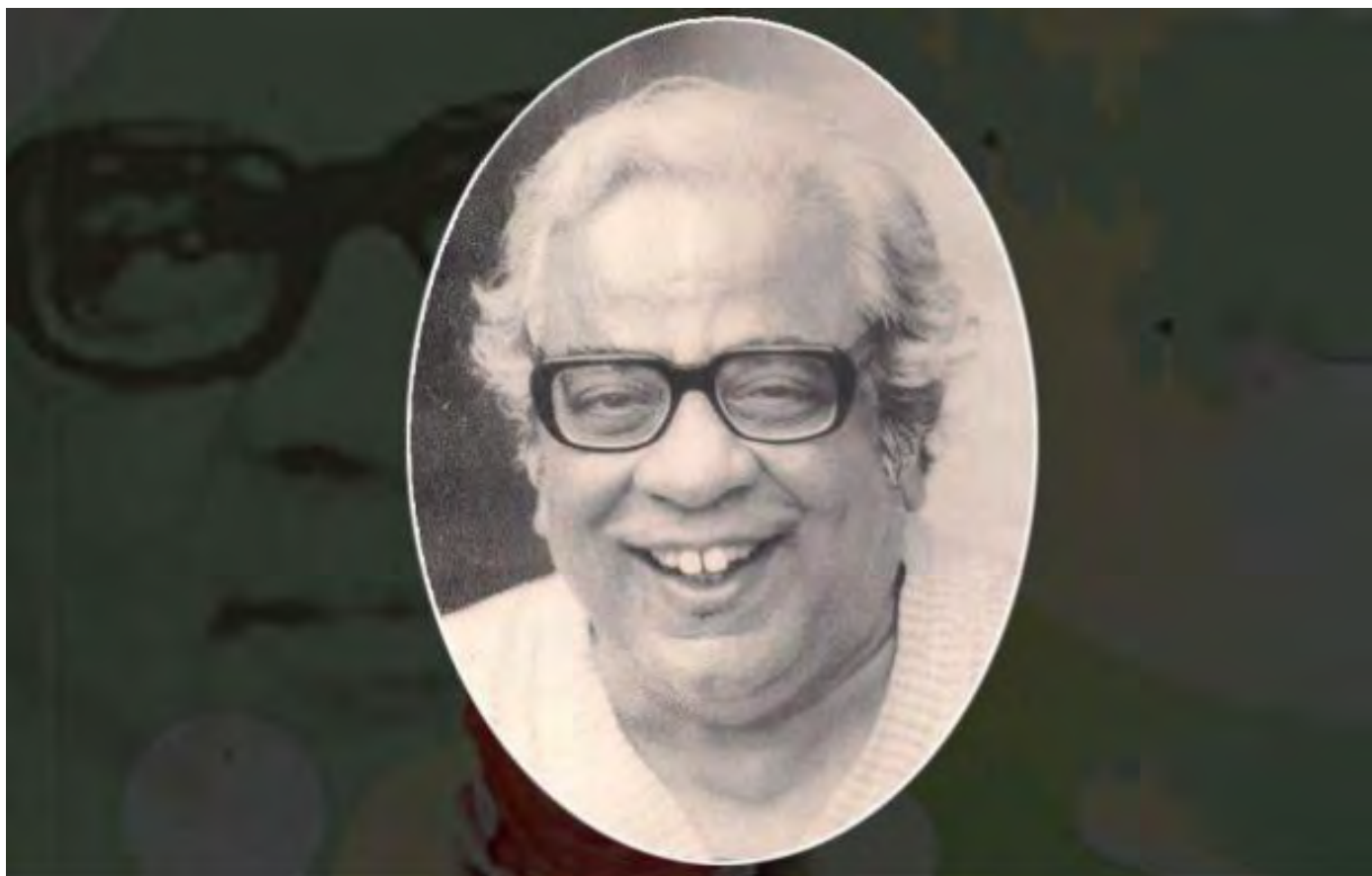
For listening to school children reciting this prayer, please click on:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s09\\_2enOqPc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s09_2enOqPc)

If you wish to hear a rendering of the prayer by Padmaja Fenani, an accomplished singer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q9R3XOeeuc>

## Celebrating PL Deshpande — the ‘RK Laxman of Prose’ by Tarun Deol<sup>9</sup>



**P.L. Deshpande | Commons**

“I don’t think I can write an autobiography. Some of the stories I write represent my life, while others are a part of my imagination. It’s almost as if the author is standing bare in front of an astute reader,” said P.L. Deshpande in a documentary.

And if you ask any Marathi reader who is familiar with his work, they’ll tell you that the man was a master at capturing aspects of life unique to Maharashtra — be it the chawl life of Mumbai or his take on Mumbaikars, Pune-kars and Nagpurkars, an essay that beautifully and hilariously dissects the Maharashtrian identity.

Popularly known as PuLa (an abbreviation of his first and second name) or Bhai, the multifaceted genius was an author, playwright, screenplay writer and film director, actor, singer, harmonium player, music composer and director, orator — and through it all, a keen observer of life and the human experience.

Salil Deshpande, a Mumbai-based journalist describes him as “the R.K. Laxman of prose, but less acerbic and more jovial”.

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<sup>9</sup>Source: <https://theprint.in/theprint-profile/celebrating-pl-deshpande-the-rk-laxman-of-prose/317184/>

One of his best-known works is a collection of character sketches titled *Vyakti aani Valli*, which won him the Sahitya Akademi award in 1965.

Earlier this year, Mahesh Manjrekar's two-part biopic on PuLa — *Bhaai, Vyakti Kee Valli* — released, starring Sagar Deshmukh and Irawati Harshe. The film attempts to tell the legend's life story recounting key incidents, punctuated by melancholic scenes of him on his deathbed. It faced criticism for not only in its lack of cinematic flair, but also for failing to bring to life the very essence for which its subject stood — to spread joy.

Today, on P.L. Deshpande's birth centenary, ThePrint flips the pages back over the life and legacy of this literary giant.

### **The argumentative philanthropist**

PuLa's deep understanding of the human psyche shone through the characters he developed in his work. He tapped into human behaviour like no one else with his trademark style of humour and satire.

Abhijeet Deshpande, a Mumbai-based film director and scriptwriter, believes that if there is one thing to learn from Deshpande's work, it is how he "presents complexity with simplicity". His insight into social behaviour set him apart. He noticed what a lay man could also see, and further elevated it with nuanced characteristics, like in his essay on the Maharashtrian identity.

The nuance also reflected in his own life, when he was up against strong political personalities. P.L. Deshpande and Bal Thackeray were both strong personalities from Maharashtra and raging successes in their respective fields. Thackeray, an accomplished cartoonist, had a lot to say on the political front, while Deshpande used his art on a more social level. The two men had an intellectual conflict of sorts, and often spoke against each other in public. Abhijeet describes it as akin to "watching Federer and Nadal play against each other. It was a treat for the Marathi audience to watch such great personalities disagree." However, in spite of the grudges, there was mutual respect between the two.

PuLa was also openly critical of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's move declaring Emergency, and translated Jayaprakash Narayan's 'Prison Diary' into Marathi. And while at Doordarshan, he became the first person ever to interview Jawaharlal Nehru on Indian television.

It wasn't just his professional work that has earned him respect. While Deshpande and his wife, Sunita Thakur lead a simple and austere lives, their philanthropy is well known. In the mid-1990s, they set up a foundation in his name that, till today, has donated over a crore of rupees for numerous causes. The foundation has benefitted various "re-addiction



and rehabilitation centres, a hostel for children of prostitutes, as well as a science laboratory at a village school meant for children displaced by the devastating Koyana earthquake”.

“During the India-China war, there was a blood donation camp and I decided to do my bit. With a needle in my vein, a volunteer came up to me and asked me to donate money instead. In that situation I really was in no state to deny for I feared that they’d just take all my blood. So I complied and organised multiple humorous acts and raised Rs. 40,000 for the soldiers,” he said.

At the Global PuLa Festival — a year-long celebration of P.L. Deshpande and his contribution to the artistic community of Maharashtra, which commenced last year and comes to an end today — social activist Dr. Anil Achavat recounted his first meeting with the man: “I don’t think any Marathi writer has done as much as he has for our society. He backed us with Mukhtangan (an innovative educational programme). During hard times, we turned to the government but we did not receive any grants. He helped us financially by giving us Rs 2.5 lakh.”

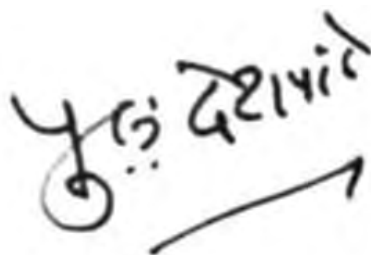
### **The legacy of PuLa**

Honoured with a Padma Shri in 1966, a Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1967, a Kalidas Samman in 1987, a Padma Bhushan in 1990 and a Punyabhushan in 1993, PuLa’s legacy is a culmination of the love and respect he received over time. His work continues to resonate with people long after his passing, despite the fact that much of it has not been translated into Hindi or English.

Abhijeet tells ThePrint, “When you come across such work so early in your career, it helps shape your thought process.”

On PuLa’s second death anniversary on 16 June 2002, the Department of Posts issued a commemorative stamp with a portrait and a sketch of him as Sant Tukaram — a character from his play Tuka Mhane Ata — along with a pen and a tanpura, symbolic of his contribution to literature and music.

In a documentary on his life, PuLa said, “When I die and go to heaven and God asks me ‘I gave you this gift, what have you given to the people in return?’ I would say, ‘Dear God, I haven’t kept track of what I have given to people, but what I have received is something even Gods aren’t given, which is their laughter.’”

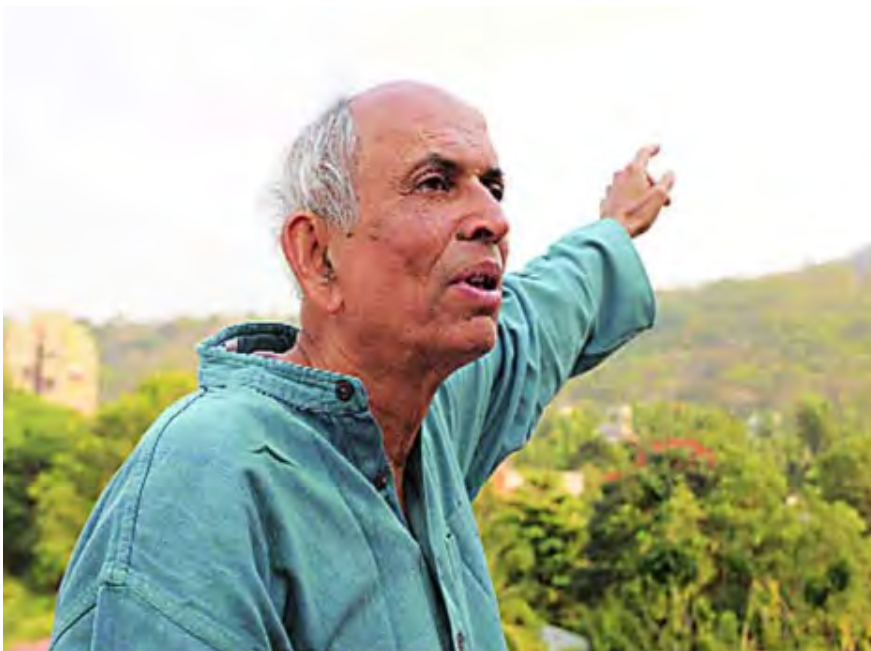
A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Yashwantrao Chavan', with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom right of the signature.

## Part III – How do we deal with Nature?

### **Today's Environmentalism: Time for Constructive Cooperative Action by Madhav Gadgil<sup>10</sup>**

*Environmental activism in India comprises two streams. The first focuses on protected areas and relies on the bureaucracy that often misuses its powers against communities that live in close contact with nature. The second focuses on protecting nature to safeguard people's livelihoods and health. The environmental agenda should focus on the reassertion of people's rights over natural resources, and this should be coupled with an action-oriented promotion of nature-friendly cooperative enterprises in sectors like quarrying, and mineral and sand mining.*

Indian environmentalism, faced by aggressive developmentalism, is in retreat even as people, baked by the heat wave of the summer of 2016, confronted with serious water scarcities, are becoming ever more acutely aware of the environmental crisis. We still have fresh memories of the Alakananda floods of June 2013, and the Chennai floods of December 2015, both caused by development gone haywire. At the same time, we see growing social violence all around us, violence linked to struggles over natural resources. For instance, a staunch anti-quarry activist, Anoop Vellolippil, died in stone pelting by goondas in Kozhikode district of Kerala, while in a peaceful demonstration,<sup>1</sup> and the endemic Naxalism that is fuelled by injustices against tribal peoples in the forests of mineral-rich central India (Saxena et al 2010).



Source:

<https://images.loksatta.com/2018/09/ch12.jpg>

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<sup>10</sup>Source: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/46/notes/todays-environmentalism.html>

## **Pro- and Anti-people**

Present-day environmental activism in India comprises two broad and distinct streams. The first approach, exemplified by many activists from the venerable Bombay Natural History Society, focuses on protected areas, and relies on government action favouring the guns and guards approach.

In its report, the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP 2011) had emphasised that this approach is often perverted into an excuse for harassment and extortion by a corrupt bureaucracy, citing the experience of the Mahabaleshwar–Panchgani Eco-sensitive Zone (WGEEP 2011). The second strand of environmental activism is motivated by the need to protect nature to safeguard people's livelihoods and health. This pro-people, pro-nature school extensively relies on protests and lawsuits, now more and more before the National Green Tribunal (NGT). However, both protests and litigation have serious limitations. Thus, today the Government of India as well as the Goa government, completely ignoring the many protests and lawsuits, are actively reviving mining in Goa, assigning leases to the same mining concerns that were held guilty of serious irregularities by the Shah Commission, and that too without taking action against any of the politicians and officials who had colluded in the mismanagement.

**People's concerns:** People at the ground level naturally resent the protected-areas focused anti-people strand in the environmental movement that believes that people at the grass roots are enemies of nature, and nature can be protected only through a bureaucratic gun and guards approach. Thus, a disinformation campaign, falsely portraying the WGEEP recommendations as being an instance of such anti-people nature conservation effort has succeeded in good measure in turning people against this report (Gadgil 2014).

To confront this challenge, the advocates of the pro-people, pro-nature approach need to focus on issues that touch people's lives and whose resolution would simultaneously contribute to protection of environment and betterment of the quality of people's lives. Examples of such issues are extractive economic activities such as mining of minerals and sand, and quarrying of stones, today being conducted in an environmentally destructive and socially abusive fashion. Indeed, recent developments all over the country provide abundant evidence that these supposedly economic enterprises have degenerated into criminal enterprises, so much so that newspaper reports and television broadcasts on the excesses committed by the mining mafia, sand mafia, and quarry mafia have become an everyday occurrence. With such degeneration, it is clear that the contention that these activities make a genuine contribution to India's development is a tragic delusion.

As the distinguished economist Joseph Stiglitz (2012) argues, we must aim at a harmonious development of a nation's four capital stocks: not just man-made capital that gross domestic product (GDP) emphasises, but natural capital, human capital, and social capital as well. Evidently, the positive gains to the GDP from criminalised extractive economic activities fuelled by massive profits are dwarfed by their negative impacts on the natural,

human and social capital (Kuttoo 2013). It is the pro-people, pro-nature environmentalists that are inclined to advocate a development agenda that would lead to a harmonious development of nation's four capital stocks. However, they have not thought through these issues, and all that they are engaged in today is fighting fires lit by the advocates of GDP-oriented development. This negativity must now be changed with a clearer articulation of

how we should move forward in the direction of genuine, harmonious development.

Perhaps our tiny neighbour, Bhutan with its bold declaration that it aims to maximise gross national happiness and not gross national product has significant lessons for us.

### **Community Control of Resources**

I wish to submit that this positive environmental agenda should focus on the reassertion of people's rights over natural resources, agricultural lands, grazing lands, forestlands, rivers, lakes and coastal lands and waters, as also rocks, sand and minerals. For it is the people living close to nature who have a genuine stake in maintaining a healthy environment and in protecting their environmental resources. This long-term policy agenda should be coupled to the more immediate action-oriented agenda of promotion of nature-friendly cooperative economic enterprises in sectors like quarrying, and mineral and sand mining. If properly organised, so as to be accountable to people at the grass roots, such cooperative enterprises could become a significant avenue for creating satisfying livelihoods on the massive scale that is required.

It is the people who are sovereign under our democratic constitution, and assertion of their will through the electoral process has resulted in a number of constitutional amendments and acts that have progressively empowered the people, at least in theory, through democratic devolution. Our 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution assign an important role to local self-governments—panchayats and nagarpalikas—in taking a variety of decisions, in particular, those relating to management of natural resources. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 takes this further, assigning a vital role to gram sabhas, as does the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006. But our governments have been sabotaging these democratic initiatives, as the Niyamgiri developments have so strikingly demonstrated (Saxena et al 2010). Hence, the foremost priority for the pro-people, pro-nature activists should be to ensure that our existing constitutional provisions empowering people and protecting the environment are actually implemented on the ground, and then further extended to other areas such as rights of fishing communities.

### **Community Forest Rights**

Fortunately, we do have shining examples of how manifold positive benefits can flow from empowering people. Over 900 villages in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra have won community forest rights under the Forest Rights Act over extensive areas. The struggle for these rights has been pioneered by the citizens of Mendha (Lekha), who have coined the inspiring slogan "Dilli–Mumbaime hamara sarkar, hamare gavme hamhi sarkar" (Delhi and



Mumbai have our government, and in our village we are the government). Beginning with the debate on the Forest Act in 1980s, they became involved in the Maharashtra-wide movement that had as its motto: “Jungle Bachav—Manav Bachav” (save the jungle, save the people). This movement led to their realising that there was substantial space in our democratic system for self-governance. Indeed that was the ideal that we should all work towards. So they injected life into their gram sabha, ensured that women came to participate fully in its deliberations, set up a self-selecting study circle that carefully looked at issues of interest to the community, and gradually implemented a number of decisions aimed at sustainable use and augmentation of natural resources arrived at through sarvasahamati or consensus.

The assignment of community forest rights conferring security of tenure has injected further vigour into these activities that are now beginning to yield handsome economic returns as well. There is meaningful skill development as people, especially the youth are motivated to assess the resource base carefully, plan its sustainable use and conservation, work out the potential of local level industrial processing and appropriate marketing strategies. Notably, they have spontaneously decided to set apart over 10% of the community forest resource areas as strict nature reserves. As early as 20 years ago, Mendha (Lekha) had initiated management of the stone quarry in their community land in a cooperative fashion by the women’s self-help group (Das 2011). The manual operation of this quarry with stone mettle as the end-product had generated substantial economic returns and employment till the quarry was closed two years ago as the stone resource was nearing exhaustion. There has, however, been an interesting spin-off. Since the transport by hired tractors ate substantially into the profits, the self-help group purchased a tractor 10 years ago with a bank loan, fully clearing the loan five years ago. Today hiring out this tractor is generating significant income for the self-help group.

### **Governing the Commons**

There are of course many difficulties in organising cooperative management of community-controlled resources, difficulties summed up in Garrett Hardin’s work on what he terms as the “tragedy of the commons.” However, as the Nobel Laureate, Elinor Ostrom has shown, through her theoretical as well as fieldwork there are conditions under which such cooperation will flourish (Hardin 1968; Ostrom 1990). Mendha (Lekha) is an apt example of how this can indeed work in practice.

Gadchiroli district is a Schedule V area, where tribal land cannot be transferred to non-tribals, whether individuals or corporate entities. Around the same time that the self-help group in Mendha (Lekha) initiated their cooperative stone quarry operations, the Government of Andhra Pradesh proposed to assign a mining lease in such a Schedule V area to Hyderabad Abrasives and Minerals, a private company. This was contested by Samata, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to safeguarding tribal interests. The Supreme Court finally ruled in this case in favour of Samata in 1997, observing that

*The further contention that the rich mineral wealth being a national asset cannot be kept unexploited which is detrimental to the national development, is devoid of force. Instead of getting the minerals exploited through non-tribals, by exploitation of tribals, the minerals could be exploited through an appropriate scheme, without disturbing ecology and forest, by the tribals themselves, either individually or through Cooperative Societies composed solely of the tribes with the financial assistance of the State or its instrumentalities. It would itself be an opportunity to the tribals to improve their social and economic status and a source of their economic endowment and empowerment and would give them dignity of person, social and economic status and an opportunity to improve their excellence.*

**It also noted:**

It is an established rule of interpretation that to establish Socialist Secular Democratic Republic, the basic structure under the rule of law, pragmatic broad and wide interpretation of the Constitution makes social and economic democracy with liberty, equality of opportunity, equality of status and fraternity a reality to 'we, the people of India,' who would include the Scheduled Tribes. All State actions should be to reach the above goal with this march under rule of law.

The clear extrapolation of this judgment is that to further the aims of our Constitution, it is advisable to assign mining leases to cooperatives formed by members of the local communities, regardless of whether these are inside or outside Schedule V areas.

**Cooperatives**

**Amul success story:** Community-based cooperative management of natural resources in India has a venerable history. For instance, all along the west coast, particular bays have been reserved through tradition for particular fishing communities. Hundreds of members of such fishing communities have been working in a cooperative fashion to operate several kilometres long "rampan" or beach seine nets. In independent India, there have been several successful cooperative ventures including the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union from Gujarat that led to the establishment of Amul (Anand Milk Union Limited) in 1946. Amul, an apex union of thousands of farmers, mostly with smallholdings is today a thriving and extremely efficient, very modern, commercial operation.

**Lessons from sugar cooperatives:** Another notable success story has been that of sugar cooperatives in Maharashtra, established in the early 1950s under the leadership of Vithalrao Vikhe Patil, a farmer from Ahmednagar district. There was tremendous scepticism in the initial years about the viability of such a complex operation as a sugar factory by the largely uneducated, smallholders of these dry tracts of Maharashtra. However, with grit the farmers succeeded, a story superbly narrated in the biography of Vikhe Patil, appropriately titled "The Fight." However, the sugar cooperatives of Maharashtra hold an important lesson. The acts governing cooperative enterprises, and the pertinent rules and by-laws have not been framed carefully enough to ensure full accountability of the elected

management to the sugar cane producers, sugar cane harvest or factory labour. As a result, these supposedly cooperative operations are now in the grip of a small coterie of crafty political operators, forcing the sugar cane producers who are not being paid adequately or in time to launch major agitations against the management (Parasnath 2016).

**Women's collective farming:** More than 94% of the female labour force in India is in the unorganised sector. Their work is not counted, remains invisible and they do not enjoy benefits of any welfare measures. A Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has been attempting to organise them since 1972. Today SEWA has more than a million members and their activities range over cooperative enterprises in agriculture, dairy, labour like construction work, and services like banking, health, insurance, domestic workers and cleaners, among others. Another recent notable success story of cooperative enterprises of women from weaker sections of the society is that of collective farming by neighbourhood groups of the Kudumbashree programme in Kerala, an experiment initiated in 2004. This has not only enhanced earnings by these poor women, but also contributed to the food security of their families. It has successfully brought substantial tracts of fallow and cultivable wasteland into agricultural use. Above all it has aroused in these women a sense of self-respect (Hindu 2011).

**Nurturing mutual relationships:** While India must, of course, continue to develop modern technology-based industries and services, it is clear that these cannot generate employment on the massive scale required (Bhaduri 2005). It is therefore imperative that this modern sector must rein in its adverse impacts on the labour-intensive, natural resource-based occupations and livelihoods and nurture a symbiotic relationship with this largely unorganised sector. This would be best accomplished through organising the unorganised in cooperative enterprises accountable to their communities. After all, the history of human evolution tells us that we humans are special in being "supercooperators" (Nowak and Highfield 2012). India should aim at replacing today's free-for-all society that has bred a "jungle raj" over large parts of the country by a cooperative commonwealth (Rath 2002).

**Jungle Raj:** There are endless television debates today on the "jungle raj" with claims and counterclaims of which states are under jungle raj. A good definition offered in these debates is that jungle raj prevails where the state victimises its citizens instead of protecting them. There are many accusations and counter-accusations, for instance, labelling Bihar (PTI 2016a), Punjab (PTI 2016b) and Gujarat (TNN 2016b) as harbouring jungle raj. Notably enough, there is little mention of the jungle raj obviously raging in the mineral-rich states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Goa. I have been personally working in the field in Goa for many years and have vivid experiences of the jungle raj that prevails there today and of how an utterly false picture of what goes on is being very effectively projected. In 2010, the Goa government constituted the Goa Golden Jubilee Development Council (GGJDC) and I happened to be one of its members (GGJDC 2012). At its first working meeting government officials made a presentation about Goa's economy, stating that agriculture was declining

with nobody wanting to continue in the occupation if they could help it. As a corollary, the possible damage by mining was a matter of little concern. Indeed, the farmers were happy to sit at home enjoying the compensation paid by the miners. Everybody but I concurred. The other distinguished members of GGJDC were scientific or technical experts, administrators, and entrepreneurs, completely detached from the life of the people at the grass roots.

As a professional field ecologist I demurred and said that I would like to verify the facts on the ground. So I got in touch with residents of several mining villages and arranged to visit six such villages, spending the night in the houses of the farmers to try to understand ground realities. It was clear that while a fair amount of agricultural land in Goa is not being cultivated, there are large numbers still wishing to continue in agriculture, partly because of lack of alternative employment, but also because for many of them farming is a satisfying choice. Their agriculture and community life is very adversely affected by mining. They are not being paid any reasonable compensation by the miners, and, certainly do not wish to remain idle. In fact, the Shah Commission on illegal mining that was subsequently appointed has observed that “But no inspection has been carried out (of the mines over decades in accordance with Part IV. Section 24 of the MM(DR) Act, 1957) resulting into fear-free environment which has caused loss to the ecology, environment, agriculture, groundwater, natural streams, ponds, rivers, biodiversity, etc.” As a result of the Shah Commission report, mining was suspended for several months. The Goa government then claimed that some 1,25,000 people had thereby been rendered jobless, and floated a scheme for their relief. Obviously, this is either a deliberate exaggeration, or crass ignorance, for a far smaller number actually applied to claim relief.

Three of the friends I made in this process included Bismark Dias, Hanumant Parab, Ravindra Velip, all of them highly respected and socially conscious members of their communities. I have been deeply disturbed that of these three, Das died recently in mysterious circumstances and both Parab and Velip have barely survived brutal attacks (Guha 2016).

### **Merit of Mining Cooperatives**

Velip comes from Cauvrem village, whose gram sabha has unanimously resolved to establish a multipurpose cooperative society, whose manifold objectives include mining. The villagers demand that if the mining suspended because of serious irregularities is to be resumed, it should be handed over to their cooperative which will ensure that mining is conducted prudently, without damaging the environment while ensuring that the benefits actually reach the weaker sections of the society. This is evidently a most desirable alternative, one that is very much in conformity with our prime minister's slogan: “श्रवण विकासको जन आंदोलन बनायेंगे! We will make development a people's movement.” Yet the Government of Goa is refusing to register the Cauvrem village cooperative society without citing any valid reasons. So I went along with Velip and two other activists of Cauvrem village to Vaikunth

Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management in Pune. The experts at this institution all agreed that the Cauvrem proposal was sound and that there was no hurdles in the acts relating to cooperative societies in going ahead with their proposal. Indeed as mentioned, the Supreme Court has positively recommended such a measure in its 1997 judgment in the Samata case.

**Mining engineer's perspective:** Notably, D N Bhargava, one of the country's most respected mining engineers and former director general of the Indian Bureau of Mines has strongly supported such an idea in a letter written to Indian Mining and Engineering Journal on 19 April 2016.

It is unfortunate that the Adivasis have experienced environmental degradation due to mining, particularly the decrease in availability of water. Naturally therefore they have stood up against mining. This should not however cause any concern as the mineral resource would remain in the ground for mining in future as and when the local community finds in it the potential of transforming their quality of life. In my opinion, this could be possible if concerned authorities consider a people-centric approach, give up the idea of granting mining rights for major mining projects and instead promote the idea of granting mining rights to the local community. The Government as a facilitator may provide them expert technical and managerial support and enable the community to get engaged in labour-intensive mining. Such a project would not require much capital investment. There is no need for investing on drilling and blasting; it could be out-sourced to contractors. Also transport could be arranged on contract by owner-driven trucks. The community will only spend on the purchase of crow-bars, pick-axes, and hammers and tagaries. Marketing would also not be any problem as demand for iron-ore will only grow further. I am suggesting (that) this approach could be adopted in respect of sand mining, and mining of lime-stone and bauxite. A beginning could be made from the areas where the local communities come forward to accept it as an opportunity of improving their economic condition and the quality of their lives. I consider that it is much easier to control environmental degradation in case of labour-intensive small-scale mining.

### **Economy of Non-violence**

Quite clearly, from all perspectives reserving mineral, stone and sand mining exclusively for the cooperative sector, ensuring that the cooperatives are made fully accountable to local communities is a most desirable alternative. It is not only compatible with our avowed aim of establishing a socialist secular democratic republic, but with the philosophy of the M K Gandhi as so well-articulated by his economist disciple, J C Kumarappa (1957: 10) in his landmark work, an Economy of Permanence: "Therefore, self-interest and self-preservation demand complete non-violence, cooperation and submission to the ways of nature if we are to maintain permanency by non-interference with and by not short-circuiting the cycle of life." Cooperative mining is an alternative that is likely to attract widespread support at the



grass-roots level. It is this fear of an upsurge in popular demand that would come in the way of prevailing economy of violence that seems to have driven the Goa government to arrest Velip on flimsy grounds with the authorities obviously conniving in an attack on him at night while he was in police lock-up. Fortunately, Velip has survived and the Cauvrem village community is steadfast in its resolve to march on its nature-friendly, non-violent, cooperative path (Guha 2016). Gandhi and Kumarappa insist on revival of rural industries, mainly dependent on agricultural produce. It is time now to promote other newly emerging village industries based on mineral resources like iron, manganese and bauxite ores, sand and stone, and revive village industries based on forest resources that had been destroyed by taking away resources like bamboo and handing them over to paper mills at throwaway prices. I believe that Indian environmentalists would be well advised to embrace such a constructive cooperative action programme as a key component of their agenda in the coming years.



## Women lead climate-smart farming in Marathwada by Soumya Sarkar<sup>11</sup>

*An increasing number of women in the climate-hit region Marathwada in Maharashtra are feeding their families and making money through diversified organic agriculture*



**Climate-resilient agriculture ensures food security for smallholder and marginal farmers in Marathwada (Photo by Swayam Shikshan Prayog)**

Marathwada is often called the the epicentre of India's agrarian crisis. Farmers in this dry region of the western province of Maharashtra have been killing themselves over wilted crops and intolerable debts. Erratic rainfall and rising temperatures due to climate change have added to the distress. Smallholder and marginal farmers are the worst-hit.

Farmers in this parched land continue to cultivate water-guzzling soybean, cotton and sugarcane, and when landholdings are less than five acres, they have no fallback at all if the crop fails.

In this dismal backdrop, Usha Pade came to Pimpri village of Kallam administrative block in Osmanabad district as a young bride to Sideshwar in 2001. Her husband owned a small patch of land where on one acre he tried, and mostly failed, to grow some sugarcane. The remaining three acres in this parched section of Marathwada remained unused.

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<sup>11</sup><https://indiaclimatedialogue.net/2020/01/11/women-lead-with-climate-smart-farming-in-marathwada-2/>

“We had no option but to work as labourers in other people’s farms,” recalls Pade. “We worked in the farms from sunrise to sunset. When my first daughter was a toddler, I had to carry her while working. Sometimes, we were so tired that we couldn’t make it back home and used to sleep in the field.” For all their toil, Pade and her husband were paid as little as INR 50 (USD 0.70) per day.

Life held out very little hope for Pade, now 35 and mother of two daughters and a son, if it had not been for a fortuitous association with Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in 2014. The Pune-based non-profit was at that time trying to empower women farmers through various farm and non-farm initiatives in many districts of Marathwada.

### **Organic convert**

Pade joined an SSP workshop and was immediately convinced to join an innovative farming initiative that relied on multi-cropping on a small plot of land without using any chemical inputs. She started cultivating a few varieties of vegetables on half an acre of her land and started a vermicompost pit (a form of composting using various forms of worms, mainly earthworms). Although the results were not too encouraging in the first season, she persisted and gradually brought her family’s entire four acres under diversified organic farming.

Today, Pade can be held up an example for women farmers all over Marathwada and beyond. “I’m harvesting four crops a year and earning at least INR 250,000 (USD 3,500) every year after feeding my family properly,” says a beaming Pade. She has become adept at cultivating a variety of crops ranging from okra, tomato, fenugreek, pigeon pea and coriander, and has started earning extra from a small papaya plantation as well.



**Rainwater harvesting and farm ponds play a big role in climate-smart farming  
(Photo by Swayam Shikshan Prayog)**



This is a remarkable achievement given that Marathwada continues to make headlines for its farming crisis. The region suffered from five years of consecutive droughts between 2012 and 2016, which has rendered agriculture unviable, especially for smallholder and marginal farmers. In a desperate attempt to earn some profit from diminishing resources, farmers are still growing water-hungry crops in this parched area and using ever more chemical inputs, resulting in not just loss of income but also soil fertility.

Monsoon rainfall, which is the mainstay of crops in Marathwada and adjoining Vidarbha regions of Maharashtra, has become increasingly erratic and scant, partly due to climate change. Studies have found that most of Marathwada is affected by frequent moderate or severe droughts, while some parts have seen extreme drought conditions.

Despite such dry conditions, cropping patterns paint an alarming picture. Water-guzzling sugarcane is cultivated widely, leading to an ever increasing water scarcity. Such unwise farming practices have led to a loss of more than 2 million farmer livelihoods, according to a 2015 study by South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), an advocacy group.

Marathwada farmers planted sugarcane on 230,530 hectares of land in 2013, SANDRP found, which required 4,322 million cubic metres of water to grow. Another 23 million cubic metres of water was needed while crushing the cane to extract sugar. "The region has already seen a rise in extreme weather events and unseasonable episodes," the study said. "In such a situation, a more diverse cropping pattern is imperative."

### **Millions at risk**

Marathwada is home to some 19 million people, according to the 2011 Census, out of which about 73% live in villages and depend mostly on rain-fed agriculture for a livelihood. But unsustainable farming, droughts, water scarcity and rising temperatures are now placing the survival of this entire population at risk.

India is grappling with a farm crisis and Maharashtra is one of the states where the situation has reached a tipping point. In 2016 alone, 11,379 farmers committed suicide in India, with Maharashtra accounting for nearly a third of these incidents, according to data released by the National Crime Records Bureau on November 9 this year. Approximately 250,000 farmers have killed themselves in India in the past 25 years, official data show.

In such a scenario, sustainable and diversified agriculture is the only solution to stop deepening India's agrarian crisis, especially since the impacts of climate change are now visible in many parts of the country. "Water insecurity lies at the core of the crisis," said Prema Gopalan, executive director of SSP. "We must reduce wasteful use of water. Shifting to organic farming (which increases soil fertility) to grow drought-resistant varieties that

provide additional incomes and household nutritional security is a viable option, as we have seen among thousands of smallholder women farmers in our field areas.”

SSP has enabled more than 70,000 women farmers in Marathwada to shift to what it calls the one-acre model, an innovative way of practising climate-resilient agriculture. Instead of the traditional approach of focusing on cash crops, these women have placed nutritional needs of their families first by growing mainly food crops and vegetables.

### **Putting the family’s needs first**

Under the one-acre model, multiple crops are grown to boost nutritional security, soil fertility, farm biodiversity and income viability. The women use sustainable methods such as hydroponics, bio-pesticides, organic fertilisers and water conservation techniques like drip irrigation, sprinklers, farm ponds, recharging of bore wells and tree plantation to boost scarce groundwater and improve soil fertility.

A shift from the traditional practice of growing cash crops like soybean and cotton that require more water and more chemical inputs also helps conserve the environment and health of the people. Once the women become successful, they start selling the surplus for an additional income that provides them with a buffer in lean years and also pays for household health and education costs.

“My daughter (18) is preparing for medical entrance exams,” said Vijaymala Shendage, 40, of Wagholi village in Osmanabad district. “My son (16) wants to become a civil engineer.” She has come a long way from the time when she and her husband were wage labourers struggling to eke out a living.

Shendage started her journey as an organic farmer at around the same time as Pade on 10 ghuntas of land (forty ghuntas make one acre.) Today, she has been able to ensure nutritional security for her family of five by practising diversified farming on one acre of land. The family continues to grow soybean on the remaining three acres.

### **Multiplier effect**

“As other families in our village saw how we have become successful, they too started adopting our methods,” said Shendage. Gopalan also pointed to this multiplier effect. “Although we have directly worked with some 70,000 women farmers, the cumulative effect of our intervention is at least three times of that,” she said.

This would mean that upwards of 200,000 women smallholder farmers across Marathwada are practising this model of climate-smart farming. A back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that there would be some four million farmer households in this water-stressed region, out of which about 40% own less than four acres of land.



The number of households who have become climate-resilient is already statistically significant. But for a wider transformation of Marathwada, many more need to be encouraged to shift to this eco-friendly means of livelihood. The most innovative aspect of this model is that it places rural poor women, who are traditionally treated as mere labourers, at the centre-stage as farmers and decision-makers. It empowers and recognises rural women as farmers, changemakers and mentors for innovation, knowledge transfer and replication.

“We have successfully demonstrated that it is possible to encourage women farmers to shift to water-wise and climate-resilient agriculture, and that too in fairly large numbers,” said Gopalan. “We now require wider participation by various government agencies and programmes to make a more meaningful and sustainable change in the agricultural landscape of Marathwada.”



# Vriksh Valli Amha Soyari Vanchare by Sant Tukaram<sup>12</sup>

This section is continued from the end of Vijay Nadkarni's article earlier.

The journey for a better relationship with others is inextricably linked with the journey to a better relationship with nature and to oneself. Sant Tukaram has said “वृक्ष वल्ली आम्हा सोयरी वनचरे” (the trees and plants are our kin). It is explained here in Hindi.

मराठी संतश्रेष्ठ तुकाराम महाराजजी के “वृक्षवल्ली आम्हा सोयरी वनचरे” इस अभंग का हिंदीमें भाषांतर/ अनुवाद। महाराष्ट्रके संतोंकी वाणी व्यापक स्तरपर पहुँचानेका मेरा एक प्रयास।

वृक्ष वल्ली आम्हां सोयरीं वनचरें ।  
पक्षी ही सुस्वरें आळविती ॥

यह पेड़ लताएँ (बेल) और वनमें रहने वाले प्राणी (हमें) बहुत प्रिय हैं

पंछी भी बहुत मिठे सुरोंमें कूजन कर रहे हैं

—  
येणें सुखें रुचे एकांताचा वास ।  
नाही गुण दोष अंगा येत ॥

जिसे ऐसे एकान्तमें रहने (वास करने) के सुखमें रुची है

उसे (दुनियादारीसे जुड़े/ निहीत स्वार्थसे युक्त ) गुण दोष (देखने) जैसे विचार छू भी नहीं

सकते

—  
आकाश मंडप पृथुवी आसन  
रमे तेथें मन क्रीडा करी ॥

(हम संतोंके लिए) आकाश छत है और यह पृथ्वी आसन (जहाँ बैठना होता है) है  
(इस विश्वरूपी घरमें) यह मन जहाँ उसे अच्छा लगे वहाँ (बालकके समान) रममाण होके

खेलता है (अच्छाही सोचता है)

—  
कंथाकुमंडलु देहउपचारा ।  
जाणवितो वारा अवसरु ॥

जीर्ण वस्त्र और कमण्डलु इस देहको चलानेके लिए काफी हैं  
(इसप्रकार निस्वार्थ जीवनमें) हवा भी बहुतही आल्हाददायक लगने लगती है

—  
हरिकथा भोजन परवडी विस्तार ।  
करोनि प्रकार सेवूं रुची ॥

हरी (विष्णू / विठ्ठल) कथा यही हमारा भोजन है, (हम) इसका हर प्रकारसे प्रचार करते हैं

हर तरहसे प्रयास करते हैं और रुचिसे (हरीकी) सेवा करते हैं

—  
तुका म्हणे होय मनासी संवाद ।  
आपुलाचि वाद आपणांसी ॥

कहे तुकाराम (के) तब अपनेही मनसे संवाद होता है (जब परमात्माके निसर्गरूपमें एकरूप होते हैं)

हम खुदही खुदसे विवाद (चर्चा, तर्कभेद) करने लगते हैं (अपनेमें उस परमात्मा को ढूँढ़ने लगते हैं)

Quite fittingly, the last stanza of the same abhang shows one of the ways of dealing better with oneself: तुका म्हणे होय मनासी संवाद । आपुलाची वाद आपल्यासी which can be loosely translated as "Tuka says: argue with oneself for a better communication with your own mind".

For a rendition of this by Lata Mangeshkar, click on  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKL6bvzMhUE>



# Cuisine of Maharashtra by Kaumudi Marathe

Kaumudi Marathé in conversation with Hema Devare and Suhas Borker, Curators of the Royal Cuisine from the Kitchen of the Peshwas @IIC (2021)-

<https://youtu.be/Cr0cJ-eSw4s>



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