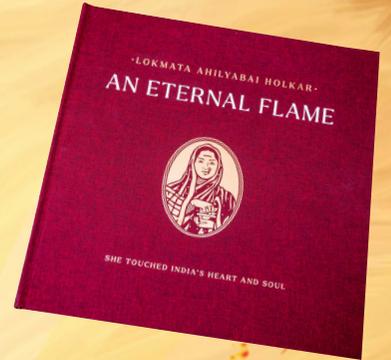


UNHEARD VOICES®



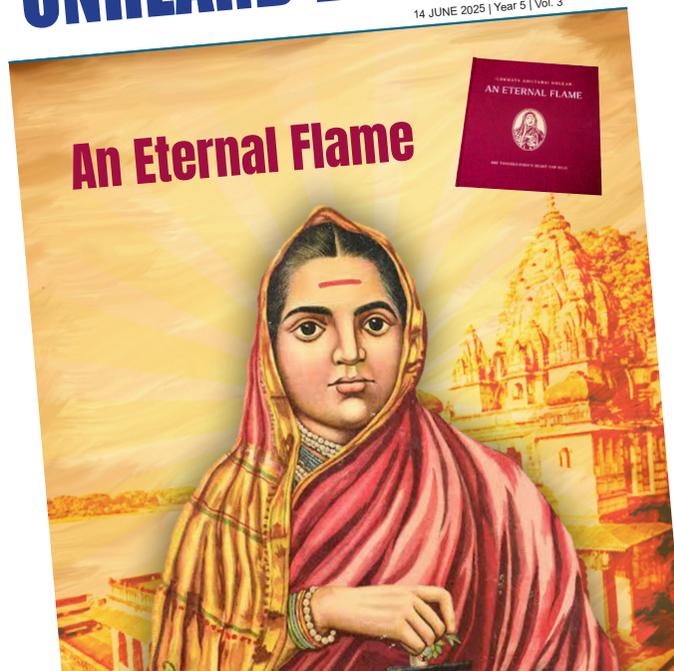
14 JUNE 2025 | Year 5 | Vol. 3

An Eternal Flame





E-PERIODICAL
UNHEARD VOICES[®]
14 JUNE 2025 | Year 5 | Vol. 3



CONTENTS

05 Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar:
Decolonizing Consciousness

10 Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar: An Eternal
Flame of Leadership and Legacy

14 Coffee Table Book
– The Making

16 Remembering Lokmata
throughout a year

20 Concluding Ceremony of Lokmata
Ahilyabai Holkar's Tricentenary Year

22 None Found Suitable :
An unsuitable excuse



Caste and Abrahamic Religions

The debate surrounding caste within the two major Abrahamic religions in India—Christianity and Islam—has once again taken centre stage. Recent legal and policy changes have reignited a long-standing and contentious discussion: Can caste, a fundamentally hierarchical structure, exist in religions that doctrinally reject it? The issue is far from settled and continues to provoke strong responses from both legal and religious communities.

The Maharashtra government recently declared its intention to implement reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in educational institutions operated by religious minorities. This policy decision marks a significant departure from established legal norms. Expectedly, Bombay High Court has questioned propriety of this decision even though it was not compulsory for minority institutions to execute the decision. However, any such decision cannot stop debate on the issue in a democratic set up.

According to Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, minority-run educational institutions—managed by linguistic or religious minorities—have the right to administer themselves without external interference, including the imposition of reservation policies intended for socially and educationally disadvantaged groups. The judiciary, including the Supreme Court, has repeatedly affirmed this autonomy. As a result, the state government's decision is not merely administrative—it challenges a long-standing legal interpretation and is likely to face stiff judicial examination. Minority institutions have already expressed their opposition, asserting that they cannot be legally compelled to implement such quotas. Whether this move will hold up in court remains uncertain.

Adding another dimension to this already complex issue, a recent ruling by the Madras High Court has stirred a fresh controversy. Justice L. Victoria Gowri ruled that individuals who voluntarily marry under the Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872 are legally considered to have converted to Christianity. This verdict could have far-reaching implications, especially for individuals from Scheduled Castes, who choose to marry under this law but wish to retain their caste identity and the constitutional safeguards that come with it. The judgment might also affect areas such as inheritance, personal legal rights, and eligibility for reservation benefits under affirmative action programs.

While Christianity and Islam officially reject untouchability and claim to uphold principles of equality, various forms of social stratification persist within these communities. The appeal of conversion to these religions often lies in the promise of dignity, social mobility, and liberation from the Hindu caste hierarchy. Ironically, many converts continue to face caste-based discrimination even after embracing a new faith, highlighting the social reality that conversion alone cannot erase entrenched inequalities. This paradox is further underscored by the fact that followers of Christianity and Islam—religions that reject caste in doctrine—are now seeking the benefits of caste-based reservations originally intended for historically marginalized Hindu communities.

Historically, the architects of the Indian Constitution restricted caste-based reservations to Hindus who faced untouchability. During the Constituent Assembly debates, there was no discussion about extending these benefits to converts from Hinduism to Christianity or

For feedback please click the below link : <https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xC1CyNr6e7>

'Unheard Voices' monthly publication is owned by Social Studies Foundation, Printed and Published by Hari Sowani, Printed at Sanwad Trade Prints, Gowaikar Bldg, 595, Shaniwar Peth, Pune- 411030 and Published at 1196, Sadashiv Peth, Pune- 411030.

Editor : Vijendra Sonawane

Advisory Editorial Board : Dr Aditi Narayani Paswan, Edward Mendhe, Prakash Raj

Disclaimer : The views expressed in the periodical are personal views of the author.

The editor & publisher may not agree to it.

Islam, as these religions were perceived as inherently egalitarian. However, the social and political dynamics in India began shifting dramatically from the 1990s onward. The rise of the Hindutva movement, the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, and increasing attention to conversions—particularly among SCs and STs—brought new complexity to the reservation discourse. Critics argue that the current demand for extending reservation benefits to SCs and STs who have converted to other religions reflects an attempt to assert religious identity amid changing socio-political conditions.

The conversions that do occur are often motivated by the hope for greater dignity and an escape from systemic discrimination. Yet, these expectations are frequently unmet. This reveals the limitations of conversion as a solution to deep-rooted social injustice. Additionally, many such conversions are not the result of informed choice but are driven by a lack of awareness or influenced by religious leaders whose primary goal is to expand their faith's demographic strength. It is particularly problematic that while Abrahamic religious communities claim to uphold equality and reject caste, their institutions often do not implement reservation policies for SCs and STs—yet they demand that their followers receive the same benefits.

A further layer of complexity comes from the Indian judiciary, which has failed to deliver a consistent interpretation of caste identity following religious conversion. Various high courts have offered divergent views—some affirming that social discrimination persists post-conversion, while others maintain that embracing a new religion severs caste ties, thus negating eligibility for reservation. This legal inconsistency has created significant confusion and has left many individuals in a state of legal uncertainty.

The recent developments in Maharashtra and the Madras High Court ruling are not isolated events. They are part of an ongoing, broader debate that challenges the notion that conversion provides an effective remedy for caste-based discrimination. In many ways, conversion can exacerbate existing problems, introducing new forms of tension and undermining social harmony. Religious minorities in India already enjoy several privileges under the label of "minority status," including representation under the Mandal Commission. Therefore, it is contradictory and unreasonable to demand reservations in public institutions while simultaneously refusing to adopt such policies within minority-run establishments. These actions raise serious questions before the credentials of the parties involved in the issue.

Appeal for financial assistance



Social Studies Foundation (SSF) is working with the prime objective of conducting social studies and research of the society in a multi-disciplinary fashion. SSF focus, however, is on those people, who have been facing discrimination and are deprived of benefits of the development and democratic process. SSF logo, thus says, "Knowledge for Empowerment".

"UNHEARD VOICES" is a small step in this direction. It provides a platform to all those people, who have to be listened to by the Indian citizens to make this country united and integral. We will raise the voice of these people fearlessly. Social Studies Foundation has currently a small set-up to carry out its objectives. We, however, need financial support from our well-wishers, who agree with our objectives. We appeal to the readers and well-wishers to donate generously to the foundation.

CIT EXEMPTION, PUNE/80G/2020-21/A/10158

.....
Please contact : 9699644930, (020)29526979
or mail us to : uv@unheardvoices.co.in
.....

For feedback please click the below link :
<https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xC1CyNr6e7>



Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar: Decolonizing Consciousness

Dr. Aditi



For Punyashloka Ahilyabai Holkar religion was an important element to bring India together, recreate a medium through which people can unify. These we can define as spiritual nationalism of the 18th century through the vast network she built connecting the temples. The temple reconstruction was not only an architectural marvel but was to initiate a sense of oneness and togetherness amongst the people of Bharat.

The British not merely rule over us politically, but they too shaped our knowledge production in a significant way. As a result, they colonised not merely our land, but also our mind, knowledge and great cultural traditions. Unfortunately, our intellectuals inherited those traditions without critical engagement with it. This uncritical borrowing by the liberal the intellectual class created an inferior psychology and identity crisis. Everything Indic, everything related to our land, i.e. Bharat is treated lesser than the western. In order for us to restore the glory of our civilisations, and ancient knowledge system we must revisit not only colonial past but post-colonial reconstruction of our past. Bharat need regeneration, and a cultural renaissance to restore the ancient wisdom and glory this renaissance is essential, and in knowledge production it is inevitable to



decolonise our mind.

Having a bias reading of our past for their negative aim to rule over us, Britishers depicted our past as savage and uncivilised. The question of women was taken up by British administrators and authors to malign our civilization. Little did they know the foundation of Bhartiya civilisation, is a mother, a Goddess and a woman. From the beginning to the modern times the Goddesses, philosophers, rulers and extra-ordinary women have manifested in our land which has no parallel in world history. Our civilizational wisdom is deeply rooted in the stories of courage, valour and intellect of women who has written the history of Bharat. The land of Bharat has always celebrated a woman centric tradition; this is the land of ardhnarishwar; absolute spiritual unity of both body and soul of two individual of male and female. This is the highest manifestation of ideal relationship that any civilization has produced. Discovering and celebrating women Goddesses, philosophers, rulers, leaders and powerful ordinary women who have shown great courage, valour and ethical wisdom from our history is our way to establishing Indic epistemology. Through applying this epistemology, we will reconstruct our past, culture, political and social life of the past. It will be a way of owning our cultural and social narratives that will create a future path of Viksit Bharat. We are a land of enlightened women who have with rational acumen has argued and have established their footing from beginning itself, from Vedic times, whether is Maitreyi or Lopamudra we all have heard of Mira Bai, her undying devotion, we have all heard Jhalkair Bai and her roar against British empire, Uda Devi, Rani Abbakaa who have fought the British. Unfortunately, our colonised mind was not in a position to see the great disservice British has done to us by destroying our great traditions by fabricating our language, philosophy, history and culture. In taking one step forward in the attempt of decolonisation of our knowledge production my research is dedicated to search the lost, fabricated and modified histories. To create our epistemic base, it is important to celebrate figures like Queen Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar and her great contribution in unifying India, with her highest consciousness of spiritual nationalism, her sense of duty, service, and Indic wisdom.

Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar was born on May 31, 1725 Chondi village of Maharashtra. She ruled Malwa territory from 1767 to 1795. Under her command Holkar dynasty achieved its glory. A fervent devout of Lord shiva, her

life service as a testament of unwavering devotion and spirituality, notions these leaders championed. Since her childhood, she had been a fervent devotee of Lord Shiva. She had her first meeting with Malhar Rao at the Shiv temple in the village Chondi. Even after her marriage, when she became the daughter-in-law of the Holkar family, her culture of religiosity accompanied her. She was even determined to become Sati after the death of her husband as per the prevailing convention. However, she was forced to give up her resolution at the insistence of her father-in-law in favour of the subjects of the kingdom. After that incident, worship of God and service of her subjects had become the sole objective of her life. Service, renunciation, expiation, and making donations have always been a significant part of our culture. Accepting the existence of God in all the beings and thus serving them with complete devotion has been assumed as the service to almighty God. The way with which Lokmata Ahilyabai served her subjects unselfishly, despite being the owner of a huge kingdom, has no parallel in history. The Holkar's were ardent devotees of Lord Shiva. Lokmata Ahilyabai had dedicated her kingdom to Lord Shiva and ruled the kingdom as a representative of Lord Shiva. Her edicts used to be issued in the name of Lord Shiv Shankar. This is evident from the construction and re-construction works undertaken by Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar at the 12 Jyotirlingas (Somnath, Kashi Vishwanath, Omkareshwar, Rameshwar, Mahakaleshwar etc). She built a large number of Shiva temples such as at Nasik, Kurukshetra, Ellora, Chaundi and other places. In the construction of the Shiva temple at Gaya, we find Lokmata Ahilyabai giving detailed instructions regarding the quality of the stone being queried for the Nandi and desiring that the Assembly-hall of the temple must be "strong, beautiful and first-rate." She even dedicated the personal fund of sixteen crore rupees in the service of God putting basil leaves on it. With the money of the fund, she got restoration of the temples and places of pilgrimage done throughout the country. Her whole life passed in making donations and serving the people. She did not confine her services within the limits of her kingdom. Entire country was her arena and the service of the entire humanity is her object. All through her life, Lokmata Ahilyabai undertook innumerable construction works throughout the country. Constructions done by her and the services started by her in all the pilgrimage of the country continued even today. Her governance was



rooted in civilization ethos of social cohesion which represents a philosophical vision that transcends the conventional confines of social justice. It is not merely a response to social disparities, but a dynamic and continuous process aimed at fostering an equitable society where every segment of the community is provided with dignified means to participate and thrive. In cohesion, harmony and inclusion are deeply ingrained in the social fabric. Social justice based on division on the other hand social cohesion believed in continued engagement, integration and mutual respects. She followed these principles in her work with disadvantaged groups, specifically the Bhill's, Gonds, and Dalits. Her approach involved direct community engagement, creation of economic prospects, and elimination of social barriers, thus establishing a framework for an all-encompassing society.

Her administrative strategy helped these communities from being excluded groups into becoming active members in the social and economic activities. Social cohesion offers a framework that incorporates fairness, respect, authenticity, equality, and persistence. This outlook envisions a society where all individuals receive recognition

and empowerment. She recognized these communities as vital components of society and launched comprehensive policies to better their socio-economic conditions. She chose inclusion rather than isolation and instead of excluding tribal groups who had participated in plundering activities, she instead established direct communication channels with them. Through diplomatic discussions, she convinced these communities to abandon their unlawful pursuits.

Additionally, she introduced a structured taxation system that required locals to pay for utilizing forest resources owned by tribal communities. This arrangement ensured that tribes received proper compensation for their natural resources. This dual-purpose strategy effectively reduced criminal activities while simultaneously empowering tribal communities by integrating them into the broader economic framework. Through her policies, she successfully stopped raids by offering employment alternatives to these tribal communities and because of these initiatives both tribal and other marginalized communities were able to transition from marginalization to life of dignity. Her administration has great focus on education and industrial training



helped these communities progress. her unequivocal defence of widows' rights to retain their late husbands' properties, protecting them from appropriation by the state and greedy relatives were way ahead of time before such issue becomes the discourse of feminist struggle. The infrastructural evidence of her excellent governance can be seen through the fortifications and transport routes in Malwa, along with various religious institutions (encompassing temples, dharmshalas, water tanks, bathing ghats and comparable facilities) within Malwa and at distant sacred

Punyashloka Ahilyabai Holkar religion was an important element to bring India together, recreate a medium through which people can unify. These we can define as spiritual nationalism of the 18th century through the vast network she built connecting the temples. The temple reconstruction was not only an architectural marvel but was to initiate a sense of oneness and togetherness amongst the people of Bharat. She saw temples as a way to instil a sense of spiritual consciousness, a feeling imperative for unity of the country.

sites including Varanasi, Dwarka in Gujarat, Rameshwaram and Gaya. These infrastructural developments help bridge the great gulf that existed not only among different territory but also among the people. Her governance model was people centric, and she ensured the wellbeing of all citizens irrespective of caste and class, and under her astute leadership and firm governance, the state experienced unprecedented peace and prosperity. Her reign was marked by peace and plenty, an absence of famine, social harmony, and a contented populace and officials. By commissioning the construction of religious structures, temples, and public works, she provided her subjects with tangible symbols of prosperity, faith, and care. These architectural wonders were not merely tools of political control but expressions of her commitment to the well-being of her

kingdom. Her approach was rooted in a sense of inclusivity and respect for her people's spiritual and cultural practices, which fostered a genuine sense of devotion and reverence. Her emphasis on building places of worship, rest houses, and other communal spaces demonstrated a leader who prioritized the welfare of her subjects over personal glory.

This thoughtful and compassionate approach to governance helped her cultivate lasting respect and affection, establishing her as a ruler who was loved and revered, rather than feared. Ahilyadevi showed foresight in environmental conservation through her governance and her infrastructure projects. She understood ecological sustainability and their effects on subsequent generations. Ahilyabai Holkar introduced several progressive reforms to encourage farmers and promote self-reliance. She was a visionary as she was one of the first to lead people into animal husbandry as a complementary activity to farming, increasing both income and agricultural productivity. She adopted mixed cropping and the cultivation of spices as cash crops, especially on the fertile banks of the Narmada River. Her promotion of orchards and fruit cultivation diversified farming and improved the common people's diet.

Understanding the value of forest produce, Ahilyabai expanded markets for fruits and honey, providing new livelihood opportunities for Adivasis. This initiative further led to significant forest conservation in which forest yields were obtained; hence, the green cover in her state increased. Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar's rule incorporated comprehensive economic growth and cultural conservation alongside traditional governance. Her leadership established Maheshwar as a prominent textile production hub, specifically in the Maheshwari handloom industry. She created weaving facilities that generated employment opportunities, particularly for women and families. Her administration supported artisans with resources, training, and patronage to improve their skills. She implemented balanced trade practices, developed markets, and established quality standards.

The nine-yard fabric known as saree has transformed into an intrinsic part of Indian clothing. This traditional attire symbolizing dignity, perfection, and uniqueness of women, whilst maintaining the cultural legacy of India's handloom craftsmanship is what stood out. Situated in Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh, handloom weaving represented feminine grace, elegance, and cultural heritage



to the populace then and continues to be that way for the populace to this day. Their unique motifs and rich heritage make them emblematic of India's traditional weaving mastery and cultural legacy. In Maheshwar during the 18th century, Ahilyabai Holkar established an integrated system balancing artistic merit, economic sustainability and social progress. Contemporary successful social-cultural enterprises in traditional craft revival often adopt the comprehensive approach demonstrated in historical patronage systems. These strategies recognize that cultural preservation, economic sustainability, and community advancement requires simultaneous attention rather than isolated or sequential treatment.

Those mentioned women in the introductory part and many others women unnamed here, define what we are today. Nari Shakti is a composite idea. Nari Shakti is one of the central and composite concepts in Bharatiya darshan sastra. The concept of 'Nari Shakti' (women's power) symbolized by deities like Durga and Kali are a testament to India's deep rooted traditional ideas of what it means to be a powerful woman. However, over a period of time the status might have declined due to external factors in many cases as a result, women were often denied that sort of agency, autonomy and respect that would be seen as a key feature of these divine figures. Lokmata Ahilyabai bridged this gap by embodying the ideals of Nari Shakti in her governance and personal life. She showed how women could be both compassionate and strong, nurturing, and decisive. This duality, which is central to modern feminism that speaks of embracing femininity and doesn't just view masculine traits to be superior, was a defining feature of her leadership.

There are rulers, king or queen, merely to rule its subjects, however there are few individuals who transcend being merely that ruler. Devi Ahalya is such a figure in our history. To call her just a queen will be an understatement, she was a great visionary leader and a thinker of our land Bharat. When the world was defining different waves of feminism she had emerged as the feminist leader, she was feminist before feminism was established.

She defined what nationalism and spiritual nationalism was. Her legacy was clearly manifested in the two great nationalist and reformer Shri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) and Deendayal Upadhyay (1916-1968). She developed the praxis of antoydaya before antoydaya even a philosophic concept. In

her praxis the lowest of the low will be the beneficiary of her welfare. Her firm belief in the notion of antoydaya is evident with the introduction of "Bhil wadi" tax, which focussed on integration of Bhil and Gond in the administrative fold with a sense of dignity. In many instances such integration often worked as a one-way street, however with her courage and virtue, she attempted to bring different groups with a sense of dignity without losing themselves to any dominant tradition.

Free India defined us as a secular nation. This secularism was a heavily loaded concept with western bias in it. It couldn't see the Indian way of secularism. However, in most part of the history, whether it is east or west, religion and other aspects of lives were not necessarily separated. It was linked together. For Punyashloka Ahilyabai Holkar religion was an important element to bring India together, recreate a medium through which people can unify. These we can define as spiritual nationalism of the 18th century through the vast network she built connecting the temples. The temple reconstruction was not only an architectural marvel but was to initiate a sense of oneness and togetherness amongst the people of Bharat. She saw temples as a way to instil a sense of spiritual consciousness, a feeling imperative for unity of the country. Her reign truly embodied the principles of Ram Rajya wherein not only the economy flourished but inclusivity was the very essence of her administration.

Later on, many leaders such as Deen Dayal Upadhyay developed the concept of spiritual nationalism. He defined it as the feeling that is deeply rooted in our cultural tapestry, a national identity defined by India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage, rather than solely focusing on political or territorial aspects. It envisions a nation as an organic whole, united by a shared cultural consciousness and a commitment to universal values. This nationalism, unlike Western-style nationalism, is not about national superiority or aggression but about fostering a sense of unity, harmony, and service to humanity. Her life, contribution, and philosophy need more engagement from our scholars, activists and common masses. With a proper past, we can understand our present, we can understand how far we have fared, and we can guide our future with an Indic knowledge system that will have a vision for a holistic approach to the world.

*Author is an Assistant Professor of Sociology in Laxmibai College, University of Delhi
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

On the historic occasion of the 300th birth anniversary of one of India's most revered monarchs, a fitting tribute was paid through the launch of a coffee table book titled Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar – An Eternal Flame. The grand event, held at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai on May 28, 2025, was graced by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and a host of dignitaries from across the political, cultural, and literary spheres.



Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar: An Eternal Flame of Leadership and Legacy

Team UV

Published by the Social Studies Foundation and edited by senior journalist Ambarish Mishra, the book is a vivid and richly designed homage to the remarkable life and work of Ahilyabai Holkar — a sovereign whose visionary governance and deep compassion continue to inspire India centuries later.

A Monarch of Vision and Virtue

In his keynote address, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis hailed Ahilyabai Holkar as a symbol of cultural preservation and civilizational strength during one of the most tumultuous periods in Indian history. "In a time marred by invasions and civilizational disruption, Ahilyabai emerged as a beacon of resilience. Her contribution to the reconstruction of India's cultural ethos is sacred and unparalleled," said Fadnavis.

Drawing a powerful parallel to the legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Fadnavis underscored Ahilyabai's unwavering commitment to dharma (righteous conduct), justice, and inclusive governance. Her administration was not just about maintaining order but about actively enhancing the moral and social fabric of her kingdom.

Ascending the throne of the Malwa region in 1767 after enduring profound personal losses — the deaths of her husband, son, and father-in-law — Ahilyabai ruled with wisdom and courage

until her death in 1795. Her reign stands as a golden era marked by integrity, foresight, and deep empathy for her people.

The Book: A Tribute in Print and Pictures

Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar – An Eternal Flame offers a sweeping view of the queen's life, achievements, and legacy. With its elegant design and scholarly depth, the book bridges historical research with artistic storytelling. Through rare archival photographs, detailed illustrations, and narrative commentary, readers are taken on a journey — from Ahilyabai's humble beginnings in Chaundi, Maharashtra, to her reign as one of India's most benevolent monarchs.

A central theme of the book is Ahilyabai's extraordinary contribution to India's architectural and spiritual landscape. The queen personally funded and oversaw the construction and restoration of hundreds of temples across India. Her work spanned the length and breadth of the subcontinent — from Kashi, Somnath, and Dwarka to Rameswaram, Mathura, and Ayodhya. She also built public infrastructure including ghats, dharamshalas, wells, and tanks — many of which still stand today, continuing to serve communities.

The book also documents her pioneering policies in education, healthcare, law, and social justice. She was a rare leader who



promoted the rights of women and marginalized communities' centuries ahead of her time. Ahilyabai ensured financial support for soldiers' widows, encouraged widow remarriage, and appointed women to important administrative roles — a revolutionary act in 18th-century India.

What makes this coffee table book stand out is its harmonious blend of factual richness and visual artistry. It doesn't just chronicle history; it evokes a living memory, a legacy of service, justice, and faith.

A Musical Offering: Kalapini Komkali's Soulful Homage

Adding to the evening's emotional and cultural gravitas was a musical tribute by Vidushi Kalapini Komkali, an eminent Hindustani classical vocalist from Madhya Pradesh — the karmabhoomi (land of action) of Ahilyabai Holkar. Daughter of the legendary Kumar Gandharva, Komkali transported the audience to a spiritual realm with her deeply resonant recital.

Performing bhajans and ragas rooted in the Malwa tradition, her music captured the queen's essence: humility, devotion, and inclusivity. As the auditorium resonated with Komkali's melodies, it became a sacred space of remembrance and reverence — a reminder that Ahilyabai was not only a patron of infrastructure and temples but also a nurturer of the arts and culture.

Her support for musicians, poets, and saints further deepens our understanding of her inclusive worldview, where governance and culture were two sides of the same coin.

Esteemed Guests and Their Reflections

The launch ceremony saw the presence of several distinguished personalities who came together to honour Ahilyabai's timeless legacy. Among the key guests were Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi, Retired Justice Mrudula Bhatkar, lyricist and CBFC Chairman Prasoon Joshi, Culture and IT Minister Ashish Shelar, and Minister of Skill Development Mangal Prabhat Lodha.

Union Minister Annapurna Devi spoke of the queen's unparalleled leadership and relevance in today's India. "Ahilyabai Holkar was a visionary in inclusive governance and women's empowerment. At a time when we're striving for equity and justice, her life offers a powerful template," she said.

Minister Ashish Shelar highlighted the collaborative spirit behind the book and emphasized the importance of bringing such inspiring historical figures into the public discourse. "Ahilyabai's contributions are not buried in the past. They are alive in our culture, our architecture, and our governance models,"

he remarked.

A Model of Good Governance

Ahilyabai Holkar's rule is remembered as one of transparency, discipline, and welfare-driven administration. Unlike many rulers of her time, she personally reviewed petitions and made decisions affecting even the smallest communities. Her understanding of raj dharma — the ethical duty of rulers — was both profound and pragmatic.

What truly sets her apart is her deep religious tolerance and inclusive spiritual vision. A devout Hindu, Ahilyabai respected all faiths and supported religious institutions across communities. She is known to have donated to mosques and helped preserve communal harmony within her kingdom — a value sorely needed in the contemporary world.

More Than a Book — A Revival of Values

The launch of *An Eternal Flame* is not just a celebration of a past icon; it is a cultural and philosophical assertion of values that remain eternally relevant. In a world facing growing inequality, identity divisions, and moral ambiguity, Ahilyabai Holkar's life story offers clarity. She was not just a monarch but a moral force — her power rooted in compassion, her governance anchored in equity, and her decisions shaped by justice.

The book reintroduces her as a figure whose example can guide contemporary policy-making — be it in gender equity, cultural revival, or grassroots governance. It is a gentle yet firm call to reclaim our civilizational values through the stories of those who embodied them.

Lighting the Way Forward

Ahilyabai Holkar's legacy is deeply etched into India's soil — from the ghats of Varanasi to the courtyards of Maheshwar. But it is not just stone and scripture that remember her; it is the people, the traditions, and now, through this book, a new generation of readers.

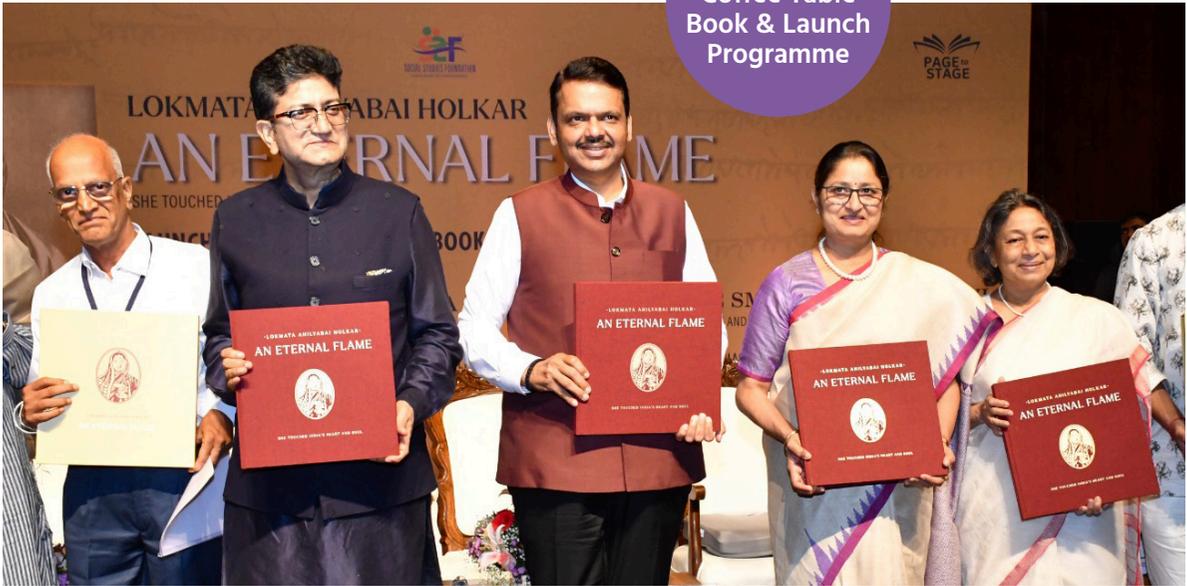
Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar — *An Eternal Flame* does more than document history. It keeps her spirit alive — as a guidepost for leadership, as a reminder of the transformative power of empathy, and as an enduring flame that continues to illuminate India's moral and cultural landscape.

In celebrating her life through this elegant publication, India doesn't merely look back in pride — it also looks forward with hope, inspired by a queen who ruled not with a sword, but with service. Her story, once known to a few, now has the power to reach millions — igniting minds, kindling hearts, and guiding a nation toward a more just and compassionate future.

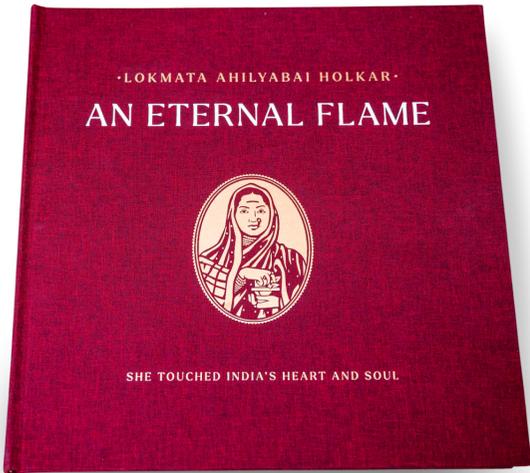
uv@unheardvoices.co.in



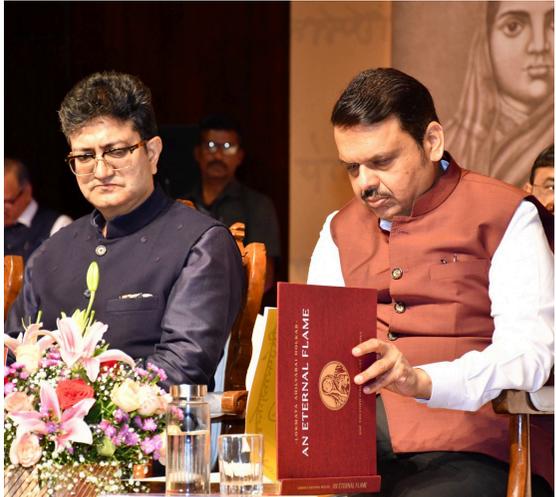
Glimpses of Coffee Table Book & Launch Programme

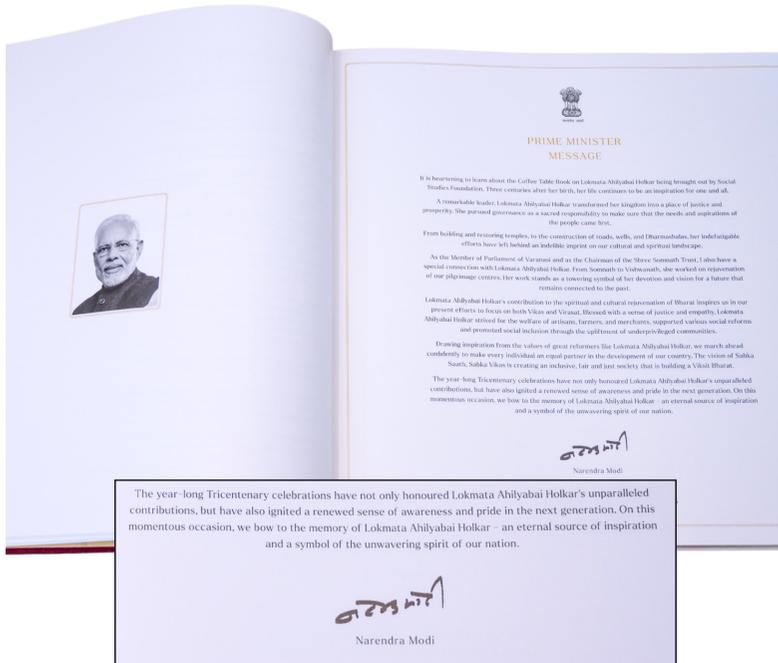


(L To R) Mr Avinash Mulye, Director, SSF, Mr Praseon Joshi, Chairman CBFC, Mr Devendra Fadanvis, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Ms Annapurna Devi, Minister of Women & Child Development, GOI, Former Judge Mridula Bhatkar



Vidushi Kalapini Komkali





Received message from Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi for Coffee Table Book.



Mr Devendra Fadanvis, Chief Minister of Maharashtra,



Ms Annapurna Devi, Minister of Women & Child Development



Mridula Bhatkar, Former Judge



Mr Praseon Joshi, Chairman, CBFC





To present a book which would serve as a reference book on Ahilyabai's life, national vision and works across the country; top in content, quality and presentation was our goal. I think SSF has achieved this goal by giving a best quality book, decorated with immense efforts of all concerned and at a reasonable cost!

Coffee Table Book – The Making

Pramod

It was sometime in April 2023 that we (SSF team) were sitting in a meeting at the Social Studies Foundation's office and discussing the upcoming birth / death anniversaries of saints, social reformers and great people who shaped Bharat's history and culture to build up a strong nation. It is then, that we realized, that 31st May 2024 would be the 299th Birth Anniversary of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar and the beginning of her tri-centenary birth anniversary. After going deep into her character sketch, we further realized that she was the woman who rose from a girl belonging to an ordinary animal rearing family to an extraordinary ruler. Her life and works can be an inspiration to the people at large, more particularly, the youth. However, history had done little justice to her national vision and works. It is then, that we decided to come up with a Coffee Table Book on the Lokmata, and present to the people a befitting tribute both - pictorial and rich with content.

Identifying the Team:

Once the idea was finalized, we scratched our heads on who could give us rich content, design and pictures for the book. Quality, Efforts and Costs were our prime consideration. Accordingly, we zeroed down on the names of Ambarish Mishra, senior journalist, artist

and master of a few languages for the English content, Satyaprakash Mishra – a copywriter in the Advertising field for the Hindi content, and Raj Kamble, Founder and CCO of Famous Innovations, one of the most awarded and globally recognized Indians in advertising for the overall concept and design. It was in the first meeting held at Raj's residence that Raj had roped in Lokesh Karekar of Locopopo Design Studio, Arundhati Ranade Joshi - a seasoned media professional and a passionate linguaphile, Prathamesh Gogari a promising photographer for the task. We further brought in Prashant Godbole, a senior professional photographer and an internationally acclaimed name in the world of Brand advertising and Mandar Godse, a senior media professional, corporate filmmaker and an experienced photographer to the team.

The Roll-on:

Once the idea, concept and the focus was finalized, the team rolled on to work. A team, under the leadership of Prashant Godbole visited Indore, Maheshwar and other places to get a first-hand feel of Ahilyabai's subtle presence (even today) and to take first hand pictures of places adorned by Ahilyabai's being. Another team under the leadership of Mandar Godse toured Somnath, Gokarn, Chaundi and



other related places to take pictures to visually present the expanse of Ahilyabai's works. While Ambarish Mishra, with his elegant articulating skills, penned the contents, Satyaprakash Mishra very lucidly translated the content into four-line Hindi ditties.

The Treasure:

We were very fortunate to have had Shri Udaysinharaje Holkar and Shri Bhushansinharaje Holkar from the Holkar dynasty (close descendants of Ahilyabai) on board to the team who provided valuable inputs, rare photographs from their family archives and opened up the invaluable ancient personal belongings of Ahilyabai to the SSF team. It was again our fortune to have received the same kind of support from Shri Rambhau Lande, a historian and a researcher who has worked on Ahilyabai for a long time.

The Editing:

Apart from the team working on the book, we had all the three directors of SSF in the editorial team. In addition, we had Pramod Bapat, a voracious reader and art lover and Vilas Bhagwat, an efficient organizer in the team. We all sat together in the meeting room of Kamala Vihar Sports Club, Kandivali (Mumbai) a number of times, to choose the pictures and check the content. Both, the pictures and the content, were amazing. Many times it became a difficult task to choose the best of the best in pictures. Sometimes, it became difficult to make the choice of the words. For e.g. whether to say 'Ahilyabai' or 'Ahilyadevi' was one of the most difficult choice of the words. While Ahilyabai is most respectfully and commonly called or referred to as 'Devi' in Madhya Pradesh 'Bai' resonated still closer with the common man's heart. Hence the reference 'Ahilyabai' was made the choice. All in all, while most of the choices were made unanimously, some of the choices were left to the author and Chief Editor Ambarish ji for his final take. The Editor's choice prevailed. Logical sequencing and consistency was maintained.

The Title:

The title 'An Eternal Flame – She touched India's Heart and Soul' was an outcome of a small brainstorming session. We wanted Ahilyabai's 'National' vision and works to be displayed in the title which, in my opinion, is displayed now. Hence the book is rightly dedicated to 'The mountains, rivers, trees and people of India'.

The Design:

While Raj conceptualized the designed, Lokesh Karekar contributed his skill in designing the layout, choice of colours, font size, font colour, paragraphing styles, placement of

pictures, background colours and other aspects. Arundhati contributed with her crisp titles to the pictures and complementary write-ups wherever required. All this helped in bringing out the desired aesthetics of the book.

The Proof-reading:

Proof reading was, in my opinion, the most difficult task. Around 8-10 sittings were made at different stages to check the spelling, grammar and placement of words, construction of sentences and the like. Some of the sittings were made by the entire editorial team and some by a part of the team. However, all sittings were joint sittings. This ensured capturing and correction of errors and mistakes at the right stage.

Fact Check:

The contents were then fact-checked by Dr. Devidas Pote, a writer and a scholar who has authored several books on Ahilyabai. His research on Ahilyabai for last 50 years, ensured the correctness of the data and content. It has helped the book to become authentic.

The Value Addition:

We were fortunate to get inspiring messages from the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the most revered spiritual leader Mata Amritanandamayi (Aamma) for the book. The messages have adorned the book with immense value.

The Printing:

All the efforts would have been meaningless, had the printing not been up to the mark and above all standards. The printers, Parksons Graphics Pvt Ltd, Mumbai have done justice to the book by rendering just the required quality and aesthetics to the book. The paper colour and quality, the golden colour which spreads across the opening page of the book is visually graceful and soothing. The elegance is displayed in the book case and cover and from first to the last page of the book.

The Funding:

It was again proved that noble cause has no dearth of funds. Our patrons, whose names have been mentioned in the Coffee Table Book, provided their valuable support which enabled us to achieve best of the quality and content for the book.

Goal Achieved:

To present a book which would serve as a reference book on Ahilyabai's life, national vision and works across the country; top in content, quality and presentation was our goal. I think SSF has achieved this goal by giving a best quality book, decorated with immense efforts of all concerned and at a reasonable cost!

*Author is a Director of Social Studies Foundation
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

The Tricentennial Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar marked a monumental chapter in honouring one of India’s most visionary rulers and social reformers. Spanning an entire year, this extensive commemoration was spearheaded by the Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar Trishatabdi Samaroh Samiti and supported by countless organizations, institutions, and individuals across India and abroad. Through a rich tapestry of cultural programs, scholarly engagements, literary contributions, and public events, the celebrations sought to revive and reimagine the extraordinary legacy of Ahilyabai Holkar—celebrating her as a beacon of justice, governance, devotion, and empowerment whose influence continues to inspire generations.



Remembering Lokmata throughout a year

Prajvalant



In a fitting tribute to one of India’s most revered rulers and social reformers, the Tricentennial Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar unfolded over the past year with remarkable enthusiasm and mass participation. Spearheaded by the Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar Trishatabdi Samaroh Samiti, this year-long celebration witnessed a massive cultural and social outreach across Maharashtra and beyond.

A Historic Campaign by the Samaroh Samiti
Under the leadership of the Samaroh Samiti,

a total of 16,282 programs were conducted, each aimed at spreading awareness about the values, life, and contributions of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar. These events were thoughtfully curated to reflect the multifaceted legacy of the queen — from governance and temple architecture to social welfare and women empowerment.

The programs included:

- Historical exhibitions
- Cultural performances
- Public lectures
- Debates and essay competitions



- Women's empowerment workshops
- Community service activities

The response from the public was overwhelming. These Samiti-led events saw a participation of 23,10,816 people, marking a significant outreach effort and deep community engagement.

Widespread Support from Civil Society and Institutions

The celebrations extended far beyond the Samiti's efforts. Educational institutions, NGOs, cultural bodies, local self-governments, and various other organizations contributed wholeheartedly by organizing 46,046 independent programs. These efforts reflected the deep-rooted admiration that the wider community holds for Ahilyabai Holkar.

These programs attracted an impressive 43,51,395 attendees, underscoring the widespread impact of the queen's legacy on contemporary society.

A Monumental Collective Impact

The cumulative scale of the celebrations stands as a testament to the enduring influence of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar:

- Total Programs Conducted: 62,328
- Total Participation: 66,62,211 individuals

These figures highlight not just the scale of execution but the emotional and cultural resonance of Ahilyabai Holkar's life across generations.

Celebrating an Eternal Flame

The Trishatabdi Samaroh has reaffirmed Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar's place in the collective conscience of the nation. Known for her visionary leadership, commitment to justice, and progressive governance, she remains a beacon of inspiration even three centuries after her birth. The celebrations have not only revived historical memory but also reignited public discourse around values of integrity, service, and inclusive development. The legacy of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar continues to shine brightly — not just in statues and books, but in the hearts of millions who gathered this year to pay her homage.

A Multilingual Literary Salute to Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar

As part of the Tricentennial celebrations of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, numerous books were published across various Indian languages to honour and document the remarkable life, vision, and governance of this legendary queen — a symbol of indomitable spirit, justice, and compassion. These literary contributions not only preserve her inspiring legacy but also make it accessible to a wider audience across linguistic and regional boundaries. A few of the

notable publications are listed below:

Books Originally Published in English

1. Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar: Queen of Indomitable Spirit - Author: Ms. Chinmayee Mulye
 - A comprehensive tribute capturing her journey as a just ruler and compassionate leader.
 - Translated into Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Punjabi, Telugu, and Tamil.
2. Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar: An Eternal Flame – She Touched India's Heart and Soul Edited & Narrated by Shri Ambarish Mishra
 - A visually rich coffee table book encapsulating the queen's spiritual and administrative legacy.
3. She The King – Rise of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar - Author: Dr. Aditi Narayani
 - A powerful narrative on the rise of Ahilyabai as a sovereign leader in a patriarchal era.

Books Published in Hindi

1. राजयोगिनी अहिल्यामाता – Hanuman Singh Rathod
2. श्री देवी अहिल्याबाई होलकर गादी रक्षण समिति – Committee Publication
3. कर्मयोगिनी देवी अहिल्याबाई होलकर
4. अहिल्याबाई होलकर: एक आदर्श सम्राज्ञी – Shaikshik Manthan Publication
5. प्रातः स्मरणीय अहिल्याबाई – Laxmi Prasad Jaiswal
6. लोकमाता अहिल्याबाई – Arvind Jawalekar
7. अजेय चेतना की घनी साम्राज्ञी – Author: Chinmayee Mulye, Translator: Shashi Kant Lomesh
8. महाराणी अहिल्याबाई होलकर – Dr. Uma Shankar Singh

Books Published in Gujarati

1. मातोश्री अहिल्याबाई होलकर (संक्षिप्त चरित्र)
Compiled by: Ashish Padhariya

Books Published in Punjabi

1. जन-जन की माता अहिल्याबाई होलकर – अद्भुत चेतना की रानी - Author: Chinmayee Mulye, Translator: Dr. Devinder Kumar

Additional Works in Regional Languages

Several translations and original compositions in Telugu, Tamil, and other Indian languages have further broadened the reach of Ahilyabai Holkar's life story to diverse audiences across the nation.

These books serve not only as scholarly



works or historical records but as living tributes — narrating the saga of a queen whose legacy of justice, devotion, and governance continues to inspire generations. Through these literary endeavours, Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar truly remains an eternal flame in the heart of India.

Cultural Presentation of Dance Dramas and Theatrical Performances

As part of the Tricentennial Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, grand dance dramas depicting her life and contributions were presented across various parts of the country. These performances beautifully combined historical facts with cultural sentiments, leaving the audience deeply moved and inspired.

The Trishatabdi Samaroh has reaffirmed Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar's place in the collective conscience of the nation. Known for her visionary leadership, commitment to justice, and progressive governance, she remains a beacon of inspiration even three centuries after her birth. The celebrations have not only revived historical memory but also reignited public discourse around values of integrity, service, and inclusive development. The legacy of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar continues to shine brightly — not just in statues and books, but in the hearts of millions who gathered this year to pay her homage.

The dance dramas were staged in the following cities: Gurgaon, Berhampur, Raipur, Prayagraj, Kochi, Kolkata, and Kashi (Varanasi).

In addition, impactful theatrical performances were organized in the following states/cities: Nagpur, Hyderabad, Punjab, and Haryana.

These performances vividly brought to life the extraordinary philosophy, administrative brilliance, and selfless service of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, inspiring audiences of all age groups.

Documentaries and Exhibitions on the Life of Punyashloka Ahilyabai

As part of various events held across India,

the inspiring life and legacy of Punyashloka Ahilyabai were showcased through specially curated documentaries and exhibitions. These initiatives aimed to highlight her exemplary contributions as a ruler, reformer, and spiritual leader.

The documentaries and exhibitions were produced in multiple Indian languages, including Kannada, Hindi, Marathi, and Bengali, ensuring a wider reach and deeper impact among diverse linguistic communities.

In recognition of her unparalleled contribution to women's empowerment and social justice, the National Commission for Women (NCW) also organized a dedicated exhibition honouring Ahilyabai Holkar. This exhibition served as a powerful tribute to her enduring legacy and was well-received by audiences across the country.

These efforts not only celebrated her life but also educated the public, especially the youth, about the values of integrity, compassion, and visionary leadership that she embodied.

Several eminent personalities graced various programs organized during the Tricentennial Celebrations of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar. Distinguished attendees included: Meira Kumar, former Speaker of the Lok Sabha; Dr. Kumar Vishwas, renowned poet and public speaker; Ramesh Bais, former Governor of Maharashtra; Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh; Smriti Irani, Former Union Minister; Rekha Gupta, Chief Minister of Delhi; and Devendra Fadnavis, Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

These leaders participated in different events across the country, lending their support and reverence to the legacy of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar and her invaluable contribution to Indian society and governance.

Statue Unveilings Across India

As part of the nationwide celebrations, statues of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar were unveiled in several prominent locations including Bharatpur, Gochar (Mahabaleshwar), Kandakurthi, Haryana, and Siddipet. These ceremonies were held not only in specific cities but across all states of India, with programs conducted in various regional languages, ensuring widespread participation and inclusivity.

Special Tribute at the Kumbh Mela

In a historic gesture during the Kumbh Mela, the Juna Akhada Parishad dedicated an entire day in honor of Ahilya Devi, recognizing her as a spiritual and cultural icon. This tribute emphasized her deep connection to dharma, service, and temple restoration across India.



Academic Outreach in Telangana

In an extraordinary initiative led by institutions of higher education in Telangana, a total of 365 programs were conducted within 300 hours, specifically designed for faculty members. These sessions covered various aspects of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar's life, leadership, governance model, and relevance in contemporary society.

Global Reach

The legacy of Ahilyabai Holkar extended beyond national borders, with commemorative programs held in several countries outside India. These international events shared her inspiring biography with global audiences, underlining her significance as a timeless icon of justice, wisdom, and devotion.

Academic Engagements Across Colleges and Universities

As part of the Tricentennial Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, numerous educational institutions across India organized seminars, conferences, and cultural programs to honor her legacy and inspire future generations. These events highlighted her visionary leadership, commitment to justice, and unparalleled contribution to social welfare and education.

Prominent institutions that hosted special programs included:

- Indore Medical College, Indore
- Government College of Engineering, Amravati
- Narsamma Hirayya College, Amravati — hosted a National Conference dedicated to Ahilyabai Holkar

- Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology (VNIT), Nagpur
- Vikram University, Ujjain
- Andhra University, Andhra Pradesh
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Law College, Visakhapatnam
- Kalindi College, University of Delhi
- The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI)
- National Women's Conference, Indore

These academic events served as platforms to explore Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar's profound impact on Indian governance, ethics, women empowerment, and her continued relevance in today's world. Scholars, students, and educators actively participated in discussions and cultural presentations that enriched public understanding of her legacy.

The Tricentennial celebrations of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar not only rekindled the historical memory of a queen renowned for her wisdom and compassion but also ignited a renewed public discourse on leadership, social justice, and cultural pride. The widespread participation across diverse platforms—ranging from grand cultural performances and academic forums to literary works and grassroots initiatives—stands as a testament to her enduring relevance in contemporary India and beyond. As an eternal flame in the nation's heart, Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar's legacy continues to guide and inspire, reminding us of the power of visionary governance and selfless service in shaping a just and inclusive society.

uv@unheardvoices.co.in



Concluding Ceremony of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar's Tricentenary Year

Avinash

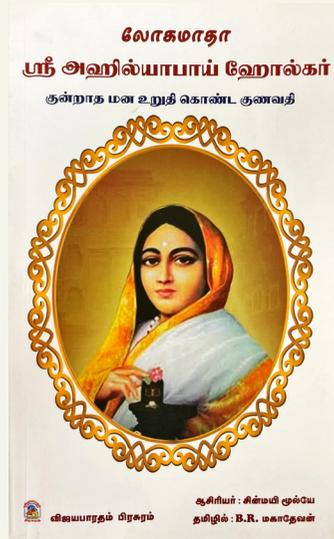
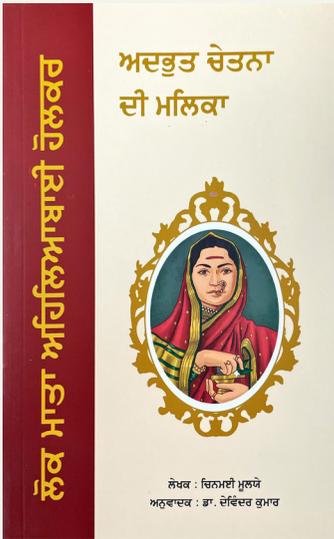
The nation celebrated the tricentenary year of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar from May 31, 2024, to May 31 through a series of events highlighting her exemplary legacy. To commemorate this historic milestone, the Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar Tricentenary Year Celebration Committee was constituted, comprising more than 40 eminent personalities from across the country. Distinguished members included Former Lok Sabha Speaker, Padma Bhushan Smt. Sumitra Mahajan, famous Indian classical Dancer, Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh, famous folk singer, Padma Shri Malini Awasthi, and Smt. Chandrakala Padia, among others. The committee was spiritually guided by the revered Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Amma), who graciously accepted its patronage.

The committee organized numerous events across India throughout the year to pay tribute to the great queen. The grand concluding ceremony was held on May 31 at the Basketball

Stadium in Indore. The programme commenced with the ceremonial lighting of a lamp before the portrait of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, followed by a captivating dance drama based on her life, which received a rousing reception from the audience.

On behalf of the committee, Smt. Mala Thakur presented a detailed report of the year-long celebrations. In her address, she revealed that over 65,000 programmes were conducted nationwide as part of the tricentenary year, witnessing the participation of more than 6.5 million people. She also highlighted the temple and ghat cleanliness drives initiated during the celebrations, which saw enthusiastic public involvement.

The event was graced by notable figures such as renowned classical dancer Dr. Sonal Mansingh and Smt. Chandrakala Padia, who paid heartfelt tributes to Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar. In their speech, Dr. Mansingh proposed



Punjabi : जन-जन की माता
अहिल्याबाई होलकर –
अद्भुत चेतना की रानी

Tamil : Lokmata Shri
Ahilyabai Holkar : A woman
of unwavering determination

Hindi : कर्मयोगिनी देवी
अहल्याबाई होलकर

that the Government of India institute an annual “Ahilya Gaurav Samman” and include her biography in the school curriculum.

The Chief Guest, Union Minister and former Cabinet Minister Smt. Smriti Irani, in her eloquent address, extolled Ahilyabai Holkar’s visionary leadership. She emphasized her exceptional administrative acumen, strategic prowess, commitment to dharma-centric welfare governance, and pioneering role in women empowerment.

Renowned folk singer and Padma Shri awardee Malini Awasthi, the keynote speaker, narrated the inspiring life journey of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar. She remarked that Ahilyabai never considered herself a queen but saw her subjects as her extended family, caring for them like a mother. She had surrendered her power and actions to Lord Shiva and envisioned a united and prosperous India. All her initiatives were deeply rooted in spiritual values. Awasthi passionately urged the audience to imbibe and

awaken Ahilyabai’s ideals in their lives.

A special highlight of the evening was the launch of an exclusive Coffee Table Book on the life and work of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, published by the Social Studies Foundation. Before its unveiling, Shri Avinash Mulye, Director of the Foundation, shared brief insights into the making of the book and its significance.

The dais was adorned by spiritual leader Pujya Shankaracharya Gyananand Tirth of Bhanpura Peeth, Padmavibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh, Padmabhushan Smt. Sumitra Mahajan, Former Union Minister, Smt. Smriti Irani, Padma Shri Malini Awasthi, Smt. Chandrakala Padia, Smt. Meera Dave, Bharti Kushwaha, Smt. Mala Singh Thakur, Shri Uday Singh Holkar, Shri Manoj Fadnis, Raghuraje Angre, and other committee members.

The ceremony concluded on a patriotic note with the soulful rendition of Vande Mataram.
*Author is a Director of Social Studies Foundation
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



None Found Suitable : An unsuitable excuse

The misuse of the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) clause, we may also note that it often leads to prolonged vacancies in academic positions, with re-advertisements stretching over months or even years. These delays severely disrupt the academic environment by overburdening existing faculty, who are compelled to take on additional teaching, administrative, and mentoring responsibilities. As a result, the quality and consistency of academic delivery suffers.

Prof (Dr) Parmod Kumar



The provision of "None Found Suitable" (NFS), used in faculty recruitment across Indian higher education institutions today, carries with it the weight of a colonial legacy that continues to stifle merit, inclusion, and reform. The provision has a colonial tag to it. Historically introduced during British rule, the clause served a strategic function — to keep Indians out of key administrative and civil service posts despite their qualifications. It was a tool of gatekeeping, enabling colonial officers to exercise subjective discretion over objective merit, thus denying rightful opportunities to the native population.

This outdated and discriminatory mechanism has survived well into independent India's academic structures. In the present times, the NFS clause is used at central and state Universities even when candidates meet all the mandatory qualifications — such as UGC-NET, Ph.D., and published research — prescribed by national regulatory bodies. The clause, in effect, becomes a convenient instrument to bypass fairness, delay appointments, or favour pre-decided candidates, all while denying opportunities to deserving individuals.

While officially presented as a quality control mechanism, in practice, NFS often serves as an exclusionary tool that protects privilege and sustains academic elitism. The informal and opaque use of this clause sidelines candidates



from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack social capital or access to influential networks. As a result, it deepens historical inequalities in faculty representation, denying diverse voices a place in shaping curricula, research, and institutional policy. For Indian academia to become truly inclusive and socially just, such mechanisms of veiled discrimination must be dismantled and replaced with transparent, accountable processes.

Needless to point out the harm to our global reputation, the widespread and arbitrary use of the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) clause weakens India’s global academic reputation by creating instability and unpredictability in faculty structures. International rankings and academic collaborations heavily weigh factors such as faculty strength, diversity, and institutional consistency. When teaching positions remain vacant for extended periods due to opaque recruitment practices, it signals inefficiency and a lack of seriousness in maintaining academic excellence.

At a time when education is globally recognized as a tool for inclusive and sustainable development, India must re-examine such colonial holdovers. Time and again, it has been pointed out that exclusion from education often stems from entrenched social inequalities, and removing systemic barriers is key to progress. The persistence of NFS, despite available talent, is a glaring example of such a barrier. UNESCO notes that “exclusion from quality educational opportunities are often related to inequalities in society.” This exclusion doesn’t just impact student access; it extends to who gets to teach, research, and shape academic discourse. When qualified candidates are denied entry into academia without valid reasons, it undermines the very goal of inclusive, socially responsive education.

This continued use of NFS is not only unjustified but also deeply detrimental to the academic ecosystem. It erodes trust in institutions, undermines the morale of aspiring

scholars, and reinforces systemic exclusion. In a country with a vast pool of qualified young academicians — many of them first-generation learners from marginalized communities—such discretionary gatekeeping blocks aspirations and fosters alienation. It goes against the constitutional values of equality, justice, and opportunity.

Senior teachers often ask the question as to how can a ‘none found suitable’ clause be invoked when a candidate has completed all relevant degrees from the same institution or possesses skill sets already certified by regulatory bodies such as the University Grants Commission and similar authorities? In such cases, the mandate should be to select the best candidates from the available pool. If certain gaps or deficiencies are identified, the candidate may be given an opportunity to address them during the probation period, rather than being outrightly rejected while seeking employment.

It will be relevant to take stock of how this clause brings down the glory and sheen of the Indian higher education ethos. The use of the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) clause starkly contradicts the principle of merit-based selection in higher education recruitment. According to UGC norms, candidates who meet the minimum eligibility criteria — such as possessing a Ph.D., clearing the NET and having requisite publications—should be fairly considered for appointment. However, the NFS clause allows selection committees excessive discretion, enabling them to reject qualified candidates without providing clear, objective justification.

This unchecked authority often results in opaque and subjective decisions, eroding the integrity of the recruitment process. In public institutions, where transparency and accountability are foundational expectations, such arbitrary use of NFS undermines trust in the system. It opens the door to biases, favouritism, and exclusion, contradicting the ethos of fair opportunity in academic appointments. Unless this provision is strictly regulated or replaced with a more transparent mechanism, the credibility of the higher education hiring process will continue to suffer.

In British-era, governance, such arbitrary selection processes were tools of exclusion, reinforcing patronage and blocking qualified Indians from entering positions of power. Unfortunately, the continued use of NFS in modern academia mirrors this outdated mindset. It allows institutions to sideline deserving candidates based on subjective



preferences, often prioritizing convenience or internal biases over fairness and equity. This perpetuation of colonial bureaucratic elitism undermines the goals of democratizing education and building a merit-based academic ecosystem in independent India.

The application of the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) clause without providing any explanation to candidates in a big way violates the principles of natural justice, particularly the right to know the grounds of rejection and the right to respond. Qualified individuals—often with UGC-mandated credentials like Ph.D. and NET—are summarily rejected without transparency or a fair hearing. This opaque process not only denies them due recognition but also strips them of the opportunity to improve or contest the decision. The absence of any formal grievance redressal mechanism further compounds the problem, creating a system that appears arbitrary and unaccountable. Such treatment discourages capable scholars, especially from underrepresented or rural backgrounds, from applying again. Over time, this leads to either a brain drain—where talent moves abroad—or internal academic disengagement, as the system appears rigged and unwelcoming. To restore credibility and fairness in recruitment, institutions must uphold transparency and ensure adherence to the basic principles of justice.

Also, it has often been argued that the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) provision disproportionately impacts marginalized and first-generation scholars, even when they meet all the prescribed qualifications. Despite holding Ph.D. degrees, clearing NET, and publishing research, many such candidates are routinely

rejected without transparent reasoning. This reinforces existing structural inequities in higher education by enabling caste, class, and gender biases to operate through the veil of institutional discretion.

This may also be argued that in its current usage, NFS often serves as an artificial barrier that excludes qualified candidates from faculty positions, despite their meeting all eligibility norms. Such exclusions directly conflict with the global vision of education as a driver of inclusive and sustainable development. By preventing diverse and competent individuals from entering academia, NFS hampers efforts to diversify faculty bodies—an essential step toward fostering socially inclusive pedagogy, curriculum reform, and student engagement. A heterogeneous faculty ensures representation of varied social, regional, and intellectual experiences, enriching the academic environment and promoting critical thinking. When institutional gatekeeping overrides merit and fairness, the result is a narrowing of perspectives within higher education, defeating its transformative potential. To achieve national and international development goals, India’s academic institutions must eliminate such exclusionary practices and embrace more transparent, inclusive recruitment models.

The arbitrary use of this effectively devalues nationally recognized qualifications such as the UGC-NET, Ph.D., and other mandated academic benchmarks. These credentials are the result of rigorous, standardized assessments designed to ensure academic competence and subject-matter expertise. When candidates holding these qualifications are rejected without transparent justification, it sends a troubling





message—that national eligibility systems lack credibility or relevance. This practice not only undermines the legitimacy of these assessments but also fosters systemic distrust among aspiring academicians.

It raises serious concerns about the consistency and fairness of the recruitment process in public institutions. If qualifying through national exams and meeting all prescribed criteria do not guarantee fair consideration, the purpose of such qualifications becomes questionable. Ultimately, the unchecked use of NFS discourages genuine academic pursuit, disrespects national education standards, and weakens confidence in institutional integrity. A fair, transparent system must uphold the value of these qualifications, not disregard them.

Needless to say, that the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) clause often becomes a convenient tool to delay or derail appointments until a preferred or “internal” candidate becomes eligible or available. Rather than serving as a genuine quality control measure, it is frequently misused to create space for favouritism and nepotism within academic institutions. By arbitrarily rejecting qualified candidates, institutions can manipulate recruitment timelines and outcomes to benefit those with influence or internal connections. This not only sidelines meritorious applicants but also corrodes the values of fairness and integrity essential to a healthy academic culture. Over time, such practices erode trust in institutional processes, lower faculty morale, and damage the credibility of higher education establishments. When hiring is influenced more by personal affiliations than by academic excellence, the quality of teaching, research, and governance suffers. To preserve academic standards and public trust, it is critical to eliminate such discretionary loopholes and uphold transparency and merit in all recruitment decisions.

In our evaluation of the misuse of the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) clause, we may also note that it often leads to prolonged vacancies in academic positions, with re-advertisements stretching over months or even years. These delays severely disrupt the academic environment by overburdening existing faculty, who are compelled to take on additional teaching, administrative, and mentoring responsibilities. As a result, the quality and consistency of academic delivery suffers. Courses may be delayed, inadequately staffed, or even dropped, directly impacting student learning outcomes and academic progression. Moreover, departments with understaffed

faculties experience a significant decline in research productivity, collaborative projects, and curriculum innovation. The absence of fresh appointments stifle intellectual diversity and innovation, weakening the academic environment and frustrating both students and teachers. This systemic inertia, rooted in arbitrary hiring practices like NFS, obstructs the educational mission of institutions and fails the aspirations of learners. For Indian higher education to thrive, filling sanctioned posts with qualified candidates must be prioritized over procedural stalling.

Needless to point out the harm to our global reputation, the widespread and arbitrary use of the “None Found Suitable” (NFS) clause weakens India’s global academic reputation by creating instability and unpredictability in faculty structures. International rankings and academic collaborations heavily weigh factors such as faculty strength, diversity, and institutional consistency. When teaching positions remain vacant for extended periods due to opaque recruitment practices, it signals inefficiency and a lack of seriousness in maintaining academic excellence. This undermines India’s image as a credible and reliable higher education destination. Global partners seek institutions with robust academic governance and inclusive hiring practices—criteria that are compromised when NFS is used to block or delay appointments of qualified candidates. Such systemic dysfunction deters international faculty, researchers, and students from engaging with Indian institutions, limiting opportunities for exchange, joint research, and global visibility. If India aspires to be a world leader in education, it must reform internal recruitment practices and prioritize transparency, merit, and timely appointments in academia.

In a nutshell, it is time to retire this colonial vestige. Indian higher education must replace NFS with transparent, accountable recruitment processes rooted in merit and equity. Written justifications for rejections, independent review panels, and appeal mechanisms should be institutionalized. If India aspires to be a global knowledge leader, its academic corridors must no longer echo with exclusion but resonate with opportunity, fairness, and the promise of transformation. An unambiguous ordinance against NFS appears to be the important remedy.

*Author is working as a professor of English in IGNOU, New Delhi
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Caste Based Cyber Bullying

Social media platforms have become powerful tools in today's world, connecting people and sharing ideas. But they also have a dark side, where hate and division thrive. A report by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent shows how online spaces are being used to abuse SCs and STs in India. These platforms, meant for communication, are often turned into tools for spreading caste-based hate, targeting marginalized groups with cruel words and harmful ideas.

The online world mirrors the real world, where caste divisions run deep. On platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, influential people often push casteist ideas. They attack SCs and STs, especially during events like Ambedkar Jayanti, Ravidas Jayanti, or Constitution Day on November 26. Words like 'Bheemta', 'Aarakshan jeevi', & 'Mand buddhi'



are thrown around to insult and belittle these communities. I once saw an X user, a lawyer who called himself an ideologue, post the word "Bheemta." I asked a mutual friend to urge him to delete it, but he refused at first. Only after explaining that this was an atrocity against Dalits did he remove the post. This shows how deeply casteist attitudes are rooted, even among educated people, and how they divide us further.

The report studied 1,000 posts across social media and found that caste-based abuse takes many forms. The most common is direct verbal attacks, with harsh slurs and threats aimed at SCs and STs. X had the most slurs & followed by YouTube and Instagram comments, with Facebook showing fewer cases. These words are not just insults—they spread harmful stereotypes and make people feel less human. Another form of abuse is through memes and jokes. These may seem harmless, but they mock the struggles of oppressed castes and make discrimination seem normal. By laughing at these issues, people become less sensitive to the pain of others, which hurts efforts to create a fairer society.

False stories and stereotypes about SCs and STs are also common online. Many posts

falsely claim these communities don't deserve reservations or portray them as inferior. This strengthens biases and keeps old prejudices alive. Cyberbullying is another serious issue, especially for women from SC communities. They face not only caste-based slurs but also gender-based attacks, like rape threats and slut-shaming. A well-known Dalit journalist, for example, is constantly harassed because of her caste and gender, showing how these forms of discrimination overlap and make life harder for marginalized people.

Some groups on social media proudly promote their own caste, like Kshatriya Sena or Brahman Mahasabha. While they may not always attack others directly, their pride in their caste often leads to abusive language against SCs and STs. This sense of superiority fuels division. The report also notes that while some SC individuals respond with abusive language toward upper castes, they face far more hate and discrimination overall. This reflects the unequal power in society, where marginalized groups are targeted the most, even online.

Caste-based hate often spikes when real-world events, like news of caste atrocities or political campaigns tied to caste, are discussed online. Comments on these posts can turn violent and hateful, spreading division further. The report lists many Hindi and regional language slurs used to attack lower castes, like 'Bheemta' and 'arakshan ki bheek.' These words are not about free speech—they are hate speech that goes against the idea of equality. India's Constitution promotes fairness, but social media platforms often care more about profits than tackling this problem.

To fight this, we need strong rules and actions. Social media companies must create teams to spot and remove casteist content, especially in regional languages, since current technology often misses these slurs. The government should treat caste-based hate speech as seriously as racial hate speech and make clear laws to stop it. Platforms should follow India's laws, just as they do in Western countries, to ensure they don't allow hate to spread. Communities can also fight back by working together, using campaigns on TV, radio, or youth events to speak out against caste hate. When people come together, they feel stronger and more capable of challenging this abuse.

Creating safer online spaces means being open about the problem and understanding India's culture. Caste must be recognized as



a category that needs protection, and those affected should help shape solutions. Social media companies, the government, and people must work together to tackle this issue. India has been fighting for a fairer society for decades, and online platforms should support this by respecting the country's laws and

values. If we ignore caste-based hate, it will continue to harm society, both online and offline. By addressing it head-on, we can build a digital world that stands for equality and respect for all.

*Author is Pune based journalist.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

SC Residents Protest Exclusion from Temple Festival in Tamil Nadu Village

Scheduled Caste (SC) residents of Thittanimuttam village in Tiruvarur district staged a sit-in protest on June 9 at the Sri Koothaiyanar Temple, demanding the right to participate in the annual temple festival and inclusion in its management.

Protesters alleged that they have been barred for years from temple rituals and decision-making by members of the Backward and Most Backward Classes, despite contributing to temple taxes. "We're denied basic participation, even in carrying milk pots during festivals," said local resident A.N. Vijaya Kumar. The protest drew support from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Workers Union and CPM. Officials, including Koothanallur Tahsildar S. Vasumathi, intervened and assured a peace meeting on June 12. The festival has been postponed, and the protest temporarily withdrawn.

SC Sub-Categorisation Ruling Ensures Fair Share for Most Marginalised: CJI Gavai

Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai defended the Supreme Court's 2024 ruling allowing sub-categorisation within Scheduled Castes (SCs), saying the move aims to ensure the most marginalised among them receive equitable access to reservation benefits.

Speaking at the Oxford Union on the theme From Representation to Realization: Embodying the Constitution's Promise, CJI Gavai said, "This was not to question the relevance of reservations but to ensure a fair share for the most marginalised within marginalised groups."

The August 1, 2024, ruling had overturned the 2004 E.V. Chinniah verdict, which treated SCs as a homogeneous group, disallowing internal classification. Reflecting on his own journey from a municipal school to the country's highest judicial office, Gavai underscored the Constitution's transformative power: "It is a feeling, a lifeline, a quiet revolution etched in ink." He added that Dr B.R. Ambedkar viewed representation as a safeguard against the

dominance of powerful caste and class groups, and the Constitution compels the state to not just protect rights but "to affirm, to uplift, to repair."

Maharashtra Cabinet Clears Bill for Statutory Status to SC Commission

The Maharashtra cabinet has approved a draft bill to grant statutory status to the State Scheduled Caste Commission. The bill is expected to be tabled in the upcoming winter session of the legislature.



Established in 2005 along with the Scheduled Tribe Commission, the SC body currently lacks statutory backing. Officials said the move follows a recommendation from the Central Janajati Council to separate commissions for SCs and STs due to their distinct concerns. The cabinet also approved the transfer of 27 sanctioned posts to support the SC Commission's establishment.

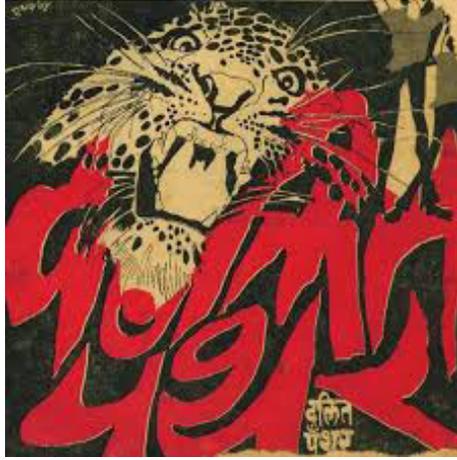
Karnataka Extends SC Survey Deadline to June 22 Amid Low Bengaluru Response

The Karnataka government has extended the deadline for its Scheduled Caste (SC) population survey to June 22, citing poor participation in Bengaluru, where only 46% of the estimated 13.62 lakh SC residents have responded.

Launched on May 5, the survey aims to collect caste-wise data for internal reservation among 101 SC groups. While state-wide participation has reached 90%, urban turnout has lagged. The extension follows petitions from SC community groups and staffing issues after survey workers returned to academic duties.

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

DIN VISHESH



Dalit Panther Establishment Day

9th July

The Dalit Panther was a revolutionary social and political movement founded in 1972 in Maharashtra, inspired by the Black Panther Party of the United States. Emerging during a period of heightened caste discrimination and social unrest, the Dalit Panther was formed by young Dalit writers and activists. It aimed to challenge systemic caste oppression, untouchability, and socio-economic exploitation through radical means.

The movement represented a new voice of assertiveness among Dalits, especially in urban areas like Mumbai. Unlike earlier reformist approaches, the Dalit Panther adopted a militant stance, emphasizing self-respect, dignity, and

the need for direct action. Its manifesto addressed not only caste injustices but also economic inequality, gender oppression, and political marginalization, making it a broader social justice movement.

Through powerful literature, poetry, street protests, and public campaigns, the Dalit Panther brought national attention to the plight of marginalized communities. Though it faced internal conflicts and gradually declined by the late 1970s, its impact was profound. The movement played a key role in reasserting Ambedkarite ideology, influencing Dalit politics, and inspiring future generations to fight for equality and social transformation.



4th July

Swami Vivekananda
Death Anniversary



6th July

Babu Jagjivan Ram
Death Anniversary



26th June

Chhatrapati
Shahu Maharaj's
Birth Anniversary

To subscribe us,
simply scan or click
on this QR code and
fill the form.

