

A guiding light for generations: PM Modi pays tribute to Phule on birth anniversary

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"As we mark the beginning of his bicentenary year, the most fitting tribute to Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is about renewal. Renewal of our commitment to subjects close to his heart, such as education. Renewal of our sensitivity to injustice. Renewal of our faith that society can improve itself from within"

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Paying tribute to social reformer Jyotirao Phule on his birth anniversary, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was an example of how social change could happen within society and did not have to wait for a change from outside.

“Our land has been blessed, time and again, by great men and women who have strengthened society through thought, sacrifice and action. They did not wait for change to arrive from somewhere else. They became its source. For hundreds of years in our land, the clarion call for social betterment has often risen from within society itself, from those who could see suffering clearly and refused to accept it as fate. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was one such voice,” PM Modi said.

“Today, 11th April, is a deeply special day for all of us. It is the birth anniversary of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, one of India’s greatest social reformers and a guiding light for generations. This year, the occasion carries even greater significance, as it marks the beginning of his 200th birth anniversary celebrations,” the PM said. “His contribution to our civilisational journey lies in the hope he aroused, the confidence he instilled and the strength his thoughts continue to give to millions of people across the nation.” He said Mahatma Phule was blessed with a spirit of enquiry since his childhood, which remained constant in his journey. Quoting the reformer, the PM said: “The more questions we generate, the more knowledge emerges from them.”

Hailing Phule as “one of India’s greatest social reformers and a guiding light for generations”, Modi said: “Throughout his life, learning and education became central to Mahatma Phule’s mission. He recognised with rare clarity that knowledge is not a privilege to be guarded, but a force to be shared. At a time when the joys of learning were denied to many, he opened pioneering schools for girls and for those kept out of formal education. He used to say, ‘Any improvement that comes in children through mothers is deeply valuable. Therefore, if schools are to be opened, they should first be opened for girls’. He worked to create a new social imagination in which the classroom became an instrument of justice and equality.”

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PM Modi sought to link his government's policies with the inspirations derived from the life of Phule. "His vision for education inspires us greatly. Over the last decade, we have worked to make research and innovation a cornerstone for the youth of India. Efforts are being made to create an ecosystem where young minds are encouraged to question, explore and innovate. By investing in knowledge, skills and opportunity, India is empowering its youth to become problem solvers and drivers of national progress."

Locating Phule's social milieu, Modi said, "Born in the great state of Maharashtra in 1827, Mahatma Phule emerged from modest beginnings. But his initial hardships never stood in the way of his learning, his courage or his commitment to society. This is a trait that remained with him forever. Whatever the challenges may be, one must work hard, acquire knowledge and mitigate those challenges instead of doing nothing about it... From his school days, young Jyotirao was deeply curious and became a voracious reader, often reading books far beyond what children his age were expected to engage with."

"Due to his knowledge and wisdom, Mahatma Phule developed a strong understanding of areas such as agriculture, healthcare and rural development. He often said that injustice towards our farmers and workers weakens our society. He saw how social inequalities manifested themselves in daily life, be it in the farms or in villages. Hence, he immersed himself in ensuring dignity for the poor, the downtrodden and the marginalised. At the same time, he made every possible effort to ensure social harmony was maintained," the PM said.

Citing Phule's opinion that "true freedom can't be achieved until everyone in society is granted equal rights", the PM said: "He built institutions that translated this vision into action, contributing to a just society. The Satyashodhak Samaj, founded by him, was one of the most important social reform movements in modern India... It became an effective voice for women, youngsters and those living in villages... This movement reflected Mahatma Phule's intrinsic belief that society could be strengthened by placing at its core justice, respect for every person and a spirit of collective progress."

PM Modi said working tirelessly among people took a toll on Phule's health, but it did not deter him. "His personal life, too, carried lessons in courage. Always working and being among the people took a toll on his health. But even the most serious health challenges did not dim his resolve. After suffering a debilitating stroke, he continued

to work and fulfil his vision. Yes, his body had been tested, but his commitment to society had not yielded.”

PM Modi also paid tribute to Savitribai Phule. “No remembrance of Mahatma Phule can be complete without a respectful mention of Savitribai Phule, who was herself one of the tallest reformers of our nation. As one of India’s pioneering women teachers, she played a defining role in advancing education for girls, thus giving them the opportunity to pursue their dreams. After Mahatma Phule’s passing, Savitribai carried forward that torch and, in 1897, during a plague outbreak, she served victims with such devotion that she herself contracted the disease and lost her own life.”

“I fondly recall my visit to [Pune](#) in 2022, when I had offered tributes to Mahatma Phule at his grand statue in the city. As we mark the beginning of his bicentenary year, the most fitting tribute to Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is about renewal. Renewal of our commitment to subjects close to his heart, such as education. Renewal of our sensitivity to injustice. Renewal of our faith that society can improve itself from within,” PM Modi said.

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