



## Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh: A Pioneer in Education and a champion of Women's Empowerment in Maharashtra

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### Abstract

Before India's independence, during British rule, several social reformers made significant contributions to improving the country's social and educational landscape. Among them, some established movements aimed at social reform through education. One such effort was the establishment of the Maratha Education Society, which focused on educating rural students, particularly the children of farmers. These reformers believed that a platform for progress was essential for the happiness and prosperity of the people. Since 1959, they have provided such a platform to farmers through the Krishi Pradarshan (Agriculture Exhibition), which has benefited many farmers over the years. Veer Uttamrao Mohite spoke highly of Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh, a key figure in agricultural and social reform. In 'Jagতিক Krushak kranti cha vidhata: Lokneta Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh' in this book he described Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh is an Encyclopedia and reference book of rural India, acknowledging his profound knowledge of social issues. Dr. Deshmukh's expertise and vision were instrumental in improving the welfare of society, especially in rural areas.

### Introduction:

Maharshi Krishi Ratna Dr. Punjabrao Deshmukh, affectionately known as Bhausahab Deshmukh, was born in December 27, 1898 in the village of Papal, Amravati district, to a farming family. His father, Shamrao Bapu Deshmukh, and his mother, Radha Deshmukh, had a strong influence on his life and career, as did his first teacher, his mother, and his mentor, Gosavi Guruji. Dr. Deshmukh completed his primary education in his village before moving to Laad Karanja for further schooling, where he studied up to the 7th standard.

He then continued his education in Amravati. During this time, he developed his skills in Marathi and English by maintaining a daily diary. In 1918, he passed his SSC exam with distinction and earned a ₹14 scholarship. He then enrolled at Ferguson College



in Pune with the help of his friends, where he actively participated in the 'C.P and Berar Club' and enjoyed playing hockey and tennis. He had a deep appreciation for music and was an avid reader. During his student life, Dr. Deshmukh was known for his confident public speaking and ability to express his thoughts clearly. To pursue higher education, he went to England and was admitted to Cambridge University. Since a postgraduate degree was required for the I.C.S (Indian Civil Service), he first completed his Master of Arts with honors in Sanskrit. Under the guidance of Prof. Keith, he earned his PhD, focusing on the 'Vedic Vaidgmyatil Dharmacha Udgam W Vikas'(Origin and Development of Vedic Dharma).

Despite financial difficulties, Dr. Deshmukh returned to England in 1924 to complete his remaining degrees. In January 25, 1925, he was conferred the title of Barrister at Law at Lincoln's Inn, London, by the British Prime Minister at the time. In 1926, he completed his Doctor of Philosophy degree. After returning to India, he married Vimalbai in 1927, who later pursued her B.A and L.L.B, with Dr. Deshmukh's full support. Throughout their marriage, he upheld equality and rejected the patriarchal system, valuing his wife as an equal partner. Dr. Deshmukh devoted his entire life to serving the nation, particularly focusing on rural areas. This great reformer passed away on April 17, 1965, due to a heart attack.

### **Political Career :**

He served as the first Minister of State for Food and Agriculture from 17<sup>th</sup> April 1957 to 10<sup>th</sup> April 1962, and again as the fifth Minister of Food and Agriculture from 29<sup>th</sup> October 1954 to 25<sup>th</sup> November 1954. During this period, from 1952 to 1965, he was also a member of the Lok Sabha. Throughout his political career, he introduced new initiatives aimed at improving the lives of farmers, women, and children, with a particular focus on providing access to high-quality education.

### **Educational Movement :**

After completing his degrees, Dr. Punjabrao Deshmukh returned to India and began his career as a lawyer. Despite his legal work, he spent his evenings teaching Sanskrit, Mathematics, and Geography at Shri Shivaji Maratha High School without any remuneration. Realizing the challenges faced by students who lived far from school, he worked to establish hostels for them. In 1926, in Amravati city, he built the 'Swami Shraddhananda Hostel', which was open to students of all religions. Dr. Deshmukh



believed in equality and rejected caste distinctions, personally collecting funds and food supplies for the hostel students.

#### **Shri Shivaji Vyayam Prasarak Mandal:**

In 1926, during the occasion of Dussehra, with the help of the Mohod brothers, Dr. Deshmukh established a health club for school students and the younger generation. The club aimed to promote discipline and good health among the youth.

#### **Shri Shivaji Education Trust :**

In 1932, Dr. Deshmukh founded the second-largest educational society in Vidarbha. In Khamgaon district, during the Akhil Bhartiya Maratha Shikshan Prasarak ceremony, and in the presence of 20,000 people including President Rajashree Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, this educational society was established. Over the years, it grew significantly, now consisting of 17 colleges, 73 schools, 23 hostels, 200 gymnasiums, and 17 social help centers.

#### **Women's Education and their Empowerment :**

Dr. Punjabrao Deshmukh strongly opposed patriarchal systems and casteism. In 1930, as a part of Vidarbha's MLA, he implemented various schemes across different sectors, one of which focused on women's education. He proposed that every college should appoint women as professors, which became law, giving women the opportunity and motivation to pursue higher education and prestigious jobs.

#### **Krushak Mahila Sanghathan :**

In 1952, as the Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Deshmukh established various committees to provide platforms for farmers, believing that farmers needed support to thrive. He created one such committee specifically for women's empowerment in agriculture. From December 11, 1959, to February 29, 1960, he organized a Krishi Pradarshan (Agricultural Exhibition), which attracted approximately 35,000 visitors. This platform allowed farmers to showcase their innovations, share ideas, and explore new business opportunities.

#### **President of Akhil Bhartiya Maratha Shikshan Parishad :**

In 1957, Dr. Deshmukh became the 30th President of the Akhil Bhartiya Maratha Shikshan Parishad. One of his major efforts was advocating for Marathi to be recognized as



a classical language. His efforts bore fruit in 2024 when Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi granted Marathi classical language status.

### **Education facilities for Farmers' Children:**

Dr. Deshmukh was committed to providing educational opportunities for the children of farmers. He ensured that a portion of seats in schools and colleges was reserved for them, offering free education and giving them priority in admissions. He also advocated for military training programs for the younger generation.

### **Conclusion :**

Through this information, it is clear that Dr. Punjabrao Deshmukh's vision and mission were deeply rooted in social reform, especially for rural areas, farmers, women, and children. He made education accessible to the underprivileged and created pathways for their success. His life's work in both politics and social service made him a true mirror of rural society and a beacon of knowledge.

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