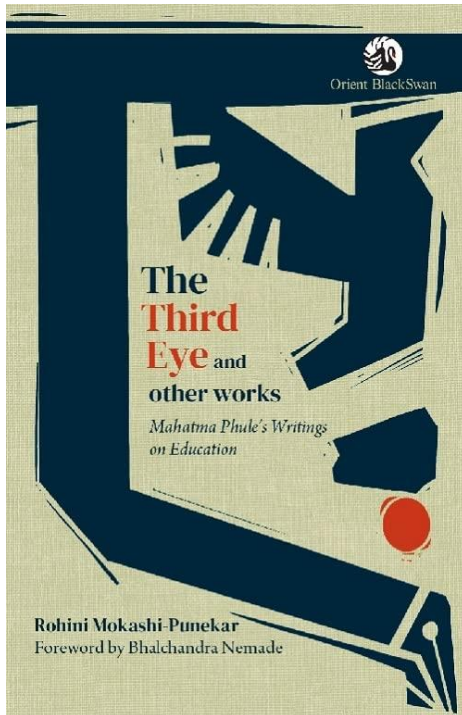




Book Review

The Third Eye and Other Works: Mahatma Phule's Writings on Education by Rohini Mokashi-Punekar

Orient Blackswan, 2023, New Delhi, Rs.855, ISBN-978-93-5442-380-2.



Reviewed by

Kumuda Chandra Panigrahi✉

Assistant Professor of Sociology, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal

The *Third Eye and Other Works: Mahatma Phule's Writings on Education* by Rohini Mokashi-Punekar begins with a forward, written by Bhalchandra Nemade, which claims that Phule was a rebel who fought against Brahminical hegemony and their self-made Hindu social order. This book is divided into seven sections, although there are no chapter numbers or an introduction or

First Published: 23 September, 2023.

Copyright: © 2023 by the *author/s*. License Aesthetix Media Services, India. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Citation: Panigrahi, Kumuda Chandra. 2023. *The Third Eye and Other Works: Mahatma Phule's Writings on Education* by Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. *Rupkatha Journal* 15:3. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n3.r02>

conclusion, as are typically found in academic texts. The book offers a critical examination of Phule's original writings and social reform activism in order to comprehend the current educational system and social structure from India's subaltern class perspective. Historically ingrained social and educational inequality is still persistent in India, which hinders the state's educational growth of women and lower castes. This book gives a historical analysis of the dilemma of pervasive educational inequality and its effect on society. Punekar (2023) has been chosen as a case study amongst all historical figures in Indian history and discovered that due to his unconventional ideas, real-world actions, first-hand knowledge, and efforts to achieve comprehensive education for all, which makes him unique. The author has presented a critical analysis of the socio-political situation of 'Shudratishudra', women, and Muslims based on an analysis of Phule's original writings. The analysis reveals Brahminical exploitation of these groups as well as how British Administrative policies enabled the Brahmin elites to maintain their hegemony. The book has shed light on the struggles and hardships endured in order to construct his ideal society, known as 'Balistan' (p.4-11), which is free from oppression and exploitation but founded on science, reason, equality, and freedom.

In the first section of the book "Phule in His Times: A Brief Notes on His Life and Works," the *biography* of Phule is discussed at length. It has offered a detailed portrait of his upbringing, education, and exposure to Western science, as well as reformist ideas and significant figures that moulded and shaped his thoughts. Additionally, it provided a historical account of radical initiatives, including the establishment of schools for women, lower castes, working people, and widow remarriage, stopping infanticide for which he endured untold hardships (p.5-11). This section further offers 'Tritiya Ratna', a play by Phule that exposes the Brahmins' ideological hegemony, religious fanaticism, caste inequality, and the deprivation of education for women and people from lower castes. In order to acquire financing for publication, Phule had submitted his play, 'Tritiya Ratna', to the Dakshina Committee for consideration for the Dakshina Prize (p.7); but, as the author believed, the play was denied the prize owing to Brahminical politics. This prevented it from being published at the time, until 124 years later, in 1979. The essential ideas of Phule's writings, such as Tritiya Ratna, Gulamgir, Vidyakhatyateel Bhaman Pantoji, and his plea and memorial address to the Indian Education Commission, have been lucidly explained in the text. To promote counter-hegemony against Brahminical rule and lead the cultural fight by constructing an alternative domain of culture, the public sphere, he reinterpreted and recreated history by rejecting the Brahminical understanding of Indian history, as discussed by the author.

The second section of the book 'The Significance of Tritiya Ratna: Phule's Play of Ideas offers a *critical analysis* of his play. This section opens with a brief history of contemporary Indian theatre, followed by an analysis of contemporary Marathi theatrical practices and literature. According to the author, modern Indian drama developed as a result of the influence of Sanskrit and European drama, as well as a fusion of traditional and popular, secular and ceremonial, rural and urban dramatic forms and practices (p.15-16). A synopsis of the development and evolution of modern Indian drama, including theatre in Marathi, Bengali, Odia, Gujarati, and Hindi has been referred. However, Phule's Tritiya Ratna stood out from the rest of the drama because it featured startlingly bold social issues and it was a fierce threat to their hegemony. A radical text advocating social emancipation, Tritiya Ratna was a groundbreaking piece of modern Marathi literature. It was the first piece of literature in Indian history to critically examine the caste system, and how the

underprivileged are deprived of education (p.66-77). Phule visualises education as a tool that will enable the *Shudratishudra* to become aware of their suffering and enable them to achieve wealth, prosperity, and social dominance. He therefore sought to forge a sense of unity among all oppressed groups, including Muslims, *Shudratishudra*, and women (p.73).

The English-translated version of Phule's drama 'The Third Eye' is provided verbatim in the third section of the book. Within Phule's lifetime, this drama was not staged. The drama highlights the British government's policy gap as well as a pervasive system of caste exploitation and Brahminical dominance. Phule explained how British policy merely favoured Brahmins to monopolize opportunities and resources produced by the British government. According to the author, *Tritiya Ratna* is a political play that illuminates the connections between knowledge, power, and common experience in a Foucauldian perspective. Phule recognized the dynamic relationship between power, knowledge, and authority through caste and gender hierarchies ingrained in the Brahminical Hindu social system long before Foucault. This play might be seen as the first Bahujan manifesto for articulating one's identity, forging alliances, and transforming society in combating caste tyranny and gender injustice.

The fourth and fifth chapters are based on a poem by Phule titled 'Vidyakhatyateel Bhahman Pantoji' (English translation: "Brahmin Teachers in the Education Department"), which was written originally in Marathi. In Maharashtra, 'Powada performances' were frequent and widely preferred by the general populace. To create awareness among Shudratishudra about caste oppression, the value of education, and the alternative counter-history of the subaltern that was destroyed and misinterpreted by Brahminical forces, Phule used his poetry as tool of generating consciousness through the Powada.

In the sixth section, 'Situating Phule within the History of Education in India', a socio-historical description of how contemporary secular education developed in India during the colonial period is detailed. The author has positioned Phule's struggle for ensuring that women and members of lower castes have access to education in juxtaposition to British policy, missionary endeavours, also prominent Brahmin's contributions towards the same cause.

Gandhi and Tagore's alternative indigenous educational model has criticized the British educational paradigm and some of its flaws. In response, Phule's perception on education provides a staunch critique of these two educational giants, who in their model fail to take into account the educational issues that women and lower castes face. This section provides a critical evaluation of how early Indian elites used Western education to modernize their society and enhance their employment opportunities in British administration, yet continuing to adhere to their sacred religious texts and frequently defending their position. But no effort was made by them to ensure that the subaltern had fair access to school or other institutions. Further, the memorial address and the prelude to 'Gulamgiri' are presented in their entirety in the final two sections which address a number of issues in education, including practical and vocational education, the need for an appropriate curriculum, teacher training, scholarships, government-funded schools, teacher salaries, etc.

The original writings of Phule, along with their analysis of the book, are provided side-by-side in this book which makes it exemplary towards the wide readership. This book is relevant for academia and researchers working in the field of education, subaltern studies and socio-political

history of education in India. Additionally, social activists involved in the Bahujan/Dalit movements would find it informative and persuasive. It will be beneficial for development actors to learn more about the social structure of India and to contextualize the educational environment of the past with the present. This book offers an intersectional viewpoint on caste, gender and religion. Phule's petitions mentioned in the book are highly beneficial to policymakers in addressing the country's current educational gaps. By and large, this book is an interesting read.