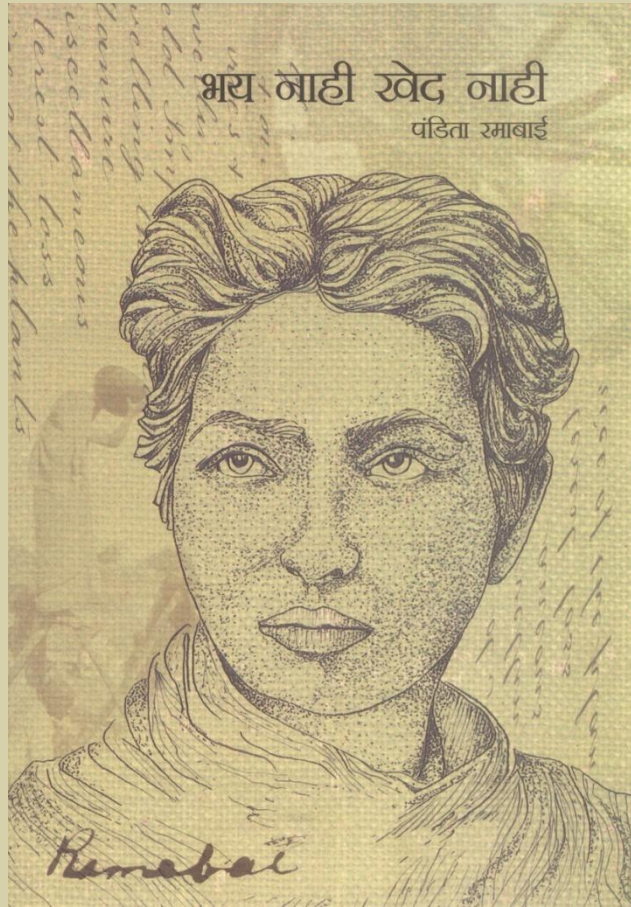


Bhay Nahi, Khed Nahi



The book is on Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), a nineteenth-century pioneer of women's education from Maharashtra. Although much has been written on Pandita Ramabai, the book goes further, exploring her life through the prism of education, her own educational journey as well as the impact of her work on women's education. Ramabai never went to school but learnt to read and write at home. She was given the title Pandita because she could read and write Sanskrit, a remarkable achievement as women then were not allowed such knowledge. She set up the Mukti Mission in Khedgaon near Pune in 1898, still active today, where widows and poor women were encouraged not only to be independent, but were taught a variety of skills from carpentry to running a printing press that are not taught to girls even today.

The book project team undertook extensive research of primary and secondary sources for the book. The team visited Mukti Mission, where archival material on Ramabai's life is available, to access a wealth of material including documents, letters and photographs. The visual material makes the content more accessible.

An Excerpt from 'Bhay Nahi, Khed Nahi':

"When Anant first heard Varanasi Bai read out Sanskrit verses, a dozen questions sprung in his mind. A female voice reciting a Sanskrit verse? How is this possible? This is completely unseen and unheard of. The scriptures totally forbid it. After all, Sanskrit is the language of the Gods and women and Shudras should be kept far away from this

pure knowledge. So what is all this then? Isn't this sacrilege? However, a respected guru of the scriptures is teaching this woman himself. If this was indeed sacrilegious, Pandit Ramachandra Shastri would have never done it. Soon, Anant himself began to think that women, like men should also have the right to learn the scriptures. While this might go against tradition, it doesn't go against the scriptures. These contentious thoughts kept swirling around in Anant Dongre's mind. However, his dilemma about what is appropriate and what is not quickly dissipated, as he decided to teach his own wife Sanskrit.

Anant Dongre, my father, was a Konkan Chitpavan Brahmin. He was born in 1796 in a village called Malherambi nestled in the Western Ghats.

... When I was about 7... We spent those days constantly on the move. We had no set income or wealth, just some holy texts and scriptures. Additionally, there were a few clothes and a couple of vessels that we carried with us from place to place. However, there was never a longing for comforts or luxuries of any kind. There was only a sincere devotion to God. Cleanliness, worship along with studying were part of our daily lives. In this, my mother was most diligent about her studies.

When I was about 8 years old, my mother decided it was time my education started. An auspicious date and time was looked up for me to begin my education. At the auspicious hour, my parents did a puja worshipping all the family deities and Saraswati; later making me do the same. After I was blessed by the Gods, my mother taught me my first lesson. This continued till I was 15 years old...

Breaking tradition, teaching his wife and daughter, this was a progressive step. Mother would complete her daily chores quickly so that she could teach me... Whatever raw corn could be found also had to be cooked. Even with such a busy schedule, mother was always poised and graceful, never losing her melodious voice. She would wake me up lovingly, singing bird songs to me before I started studies. It was from my mother's lips that I first received knowledge. She was a highly educated woman; she knew Ramayan, Mahabharat and Gita-Purana by heart and never needed books when she was teaching me. She passed on everything she learnt from my father to me. In the early years of a children's education, it was mostly the Bhagvan Puran and the Gita that were taught because it was believed that everything a child should know is present in the Bhagvan Puran. Mother prepared me so well that I could pursue my studies on my own. Her guidance lit my path to education."