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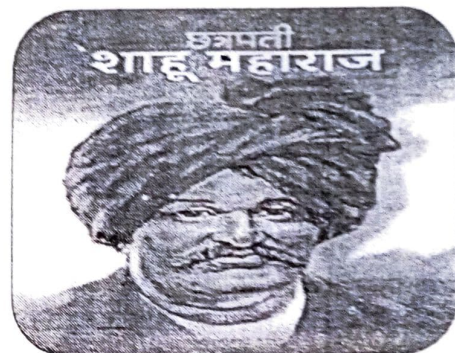


## CONTRIBUTION OF RAJARSHI CHHATRAPATI SHAHU MAHARAJ TO THE MODERNIZATION OF MAHARASHTRA

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### ABSTRACT :

*Mahatma Jyotirao Phule led the Satyashodhak movement against the caste system and social injustice and particularly against the monopoly of the Brahmins and wanted the radical changes based on equality. Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was convinced about the iniquities of the caste system and tried his best to reduce them by providing special facilities to the most suppressed sections of the society such as the women and dalits. The Vedokta episode in Kolhapur was symbolic of the opposition to domination of the Brahmins and so he attempted to make available the modern education and the government jobs to the shudras, dalits and women. He in his capacity of the ruler had contributed crucially to the social reforms in Maharashtra.*



**KEYWORDS :** *women and dalits , caste system and social injustice.*

### INTRODUCTION :

He realized the importance of education and secular jobs in the process of social change and in emancipation of women and dalits and so tried his best to help them. He extended his support to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and appealed the dalits to accept his leadership. Thus he has to be praised for his social and moral conviction and his insight into the problems of the dalits.

### **Vedokta Episode (1899):**

The incidence of *Vedokta* was a revolutionary and crucial episode not only for Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj but also for the whole Maharashtra as it changed the history of Maharashtra. It was the beginning of the process of socio-religious revolution in Maharashtra from 1900 to 1922, under the leadership of Shahu Maharaj. In 1899, when the rituals were going on in the morning, Maharaj has taken his holy bath but his royal priest, Narayan Bhataji was uttering mantras in Puranas and without taking bath. Maharaj asked him that why he was uttering the mantras from Puranas instead of Vedas, the egoist Brahmin priest answered arrogantly that *Vedokta* (mantras from the Vedas) were allowed only for Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Thus Brahmins denied recognizing Shahu Maharaj as Kshatriya. The orthodox Brahmins under leadership of Vijapurkar, historian Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade and BhausahabLele refused to sanction him the

Kshatriya status.<sup>1</sup> According to Brahmanical notion, Parshurama had killed all the Kshatriyas on the earth twenty one times and so now remaining only two varnas in Maharashtra- Brahmin and rest belong to Shudras. Tilak also sided with orthodox camp.

Shahu Maharaj revolted against the Brahmanical hegemony and entire caste system and thought that if the king having status of Chhatrapati would had to bear the slavery then what would had been the conditions of other non-Brahmins. Thus *Vedokta* episode proved to be the beginning of tussle between the Brahmin intelligentsia and non-Brahmins in Maharashtra.<sup>2</sup>

### Reservation Policy:

Shahu Maharaj realised that the maximum posts in his administration were occupied by the Brahmins and due to lack of education non-Brahmins were almost nowhere in the administration. So he decided to keep fifty percent of the administrative posts would be reserved for backward non-Brahmins and immediately implemented.<sup>3</sup> Shahu Maharaj had clearly understood the reality that as the shudras, women and dalits were denied the right to education they were not educated and so not capable of getting administrative posts. So he began to help them in their education.

### Contribution to Education:

Shahu Maharaj being highly qualified had realised the importance of the education in the process of social change. His view about the education was very clear as he said in a speech that there was a great loss of the nation due to lack of education among the non-Brahmins and dalits, and the priests had become numerous in the temples and their interference should be stopped by making schools as our temples, and the knowledge of true religion must be exposed.

Shahu Maharaj started a series of hostels and schools in his state and also in other parts of Maharashtra, because he knew that shudras and dalits were socio-economically backward and could not bear the expenses of the education. He established many hostels in Kolhapur and in different parts of Maharashtra for the education of the non-Brahmins. He had made Kolhapur the 'city of hostels' by establishing a series of hostels such as the Jain Hostel (1901), Victoria Maratha Hostel (1901), Lingayata Hostel (1907), Mahomedan hostel (1906), Namdeo Shimpi Hostel, Sonar Hostel (1921), and Miss Clark Hostel for Dalits (1908)<sup>4</sup> These hostels played crucial role in education and social change in the early years of nineteenth century Maharashtra. His hostels made it possible for many students from all over Maharashtra to come to Kolhapur and achieve their education and progress further in their lives.

Shahu Maharaj also paid attention towards the education of women as he considered education is equally important for women so as to bring up the children properly and encouraged the girls for education in many ways. He also declared the scholarships of Rs. 40 each, in the names of, 'Shri Radhabai Akkasaheb Maharaj Scholarship' and 'Shri Nandkunwar Maharani Bhavnagar Scholarship' for first two girls in the ranking of standard IV of Marathi medium schools in Kolhapur and *Bawda*. He exempted the fees of the girls in Rajaram College and also declared scholarships for them.<sup>5</sup> He had contributed greatly to increase the percentage of literate women due to his various efforts. He started a free school, 'Ahilyabai Girls' High School', for girls towards the eastern side of his Royal Palace and he also opened another school for girls in

<sup>1</sup> Jadhav Ramesh, (1996), Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, in Sakhalkar Eknath, Bhende Subhash (ed.), *Maharashtrachi Manchinhe*, Majestic Prakashan, Mumbai, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Sardar G. B., (1978), Rajarshi Shahu Maharajanchya Vicharanchi Disha, in Fadkule Nirmalkumar, (ed.), *Prabodhanatil Pavulkhuna*, Continental Prakashan, Pune, reprinted 1997, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Khane B. D., (2006), *Chhatrapati Shahu's Crusade against Untouchability*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Omvedt Gail (2011), *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Bhosale Narayan, (2008), *Maharashtratil Strivishayak Sudharnavadache Sattakaran*, The Taichi Prakashan, Pune, p. 240.

Kolhapur, 'Ma. Laxmibai Girls' High School'.<sup>6</sup> In 1911, Shahu Maharaj made the provision of Free Education to Dalit girls and boys and devotedly worked for the emancipation of the Dalit and women and he already started a hostel for them in 1908.<sup>7</sup> There were only 05 schools for the dalits, due to his attempts the number increased up to 27 in 1911-12 and from 1917 onwards he ran 7 hostels for them through his personal and royal expenditure.<sup>8</sup>

Shahu Maharaj was deliberately provided his attention to educate his masses taking into consideration that the education was the only key for their material progress. So to provide education of all his subjects, he enacted the Act of Compulsory and Free Education in 1917<sup>9</sup> and implemented it rigidly by fining the parents for absence of their children at the rate of One Rupee per month.<sup>10</sup> He thus opened the free education to all his subjects without any kind of discrimination and given the tremendous impetus to the process of social change in Maharashtra.

### Emancipation of the Dalits and Eradication of untouchability:

Shahu Maharaj had contributed a lot to eradicate the practice of untouchability with his personal behaviour and became an ideal in this process for the others and also compelled them to follow him. His view was very clear as he believed in equality, and all human being were the sons and daughters of the one God. He was greatly impressed by the revolutionary social work of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his Satyashodhak Movement. He was impressed by the teachings of the Satyashodhak Samaj and the Arya Samaj, both of which believed in equality and rejected the evil practice of the untouchability.<sup>11</sup> He was a man of action and being the benevolent king, he wholeheartedly helped the Dalits to come out of their miseries and eradication of the evil practice of untouchability.

He helped the Dalits in their education by even including dalit students in the general schools by order to annihilate the evil practice of the untouchability. He established the hostels for them as for others and provided capital for those willing to start their own business, some of the dalits were included in the administration, some of them were given the *sanads* charters to practice as an advocate.<sup>12</sup>

Shahu Maharaj himself never believed in the discrimination of untouchability and so helped Gangadhar Kamble, a Mahar to open a hotel in the midst of the city of Kolhapur and himself came there to have a cup of tea.<sup>13</sup> His officers and other staff had to drink a cup of tea there in the hotel of a dalit and thus he started the eradication of the evil practice of untouchability with his own example. In another incidence he himself drunk the water from a dalit woman and taught the people by the practice rather than by only preaching.<sup>14</sup> He always took care in his state that the dalits should not be treated with untouchability and so ordered to open all kinds of public places for them and include the Dalit students in the schools meant for touchable.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Salunkhe Hindurao, (1989), *Chhatrapati Shahu Smrutidarshan*, Maharashtra Granth Bhandar, Kolhapur, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Phadake Y. D., (2005), *Visavya Shataktil Maharashtra*, (Maharashtra in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), Vol. 2, K'Sagar Publication, Pune, Second Edition, p. 233.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>9</sup> Pansare Govind, (2003), *Rajarshi Shahu: Vasa Ani Warsa*, Lokwangamaya Gruha, Mumbai, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Sardar G. B., (1975), *Asprushyata Ani Shahu Maharaj*, (Untouchability and Shahu Maharaj), in Mangudkar M. P. (Ed), *Maharashtratil Samajprabodhan Ani Chhatrapati Shahu Maharajanche Karya*, Pune University, Pune, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> Pansare Govind, (2003), *Rajarshi Shahu: Vasa Ani Warsa*, Lokwangamaya Gruha, Mumbai, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Sardar G. B., opp. cited, p. 110.

He once publicly condemned those who opined that it would be better to have caste differences but the caste hatred should be removed, Shahu Maharaj's answer to such fellows was that the caste differences was the reason for the existence of the caste hatred and so the reason must be removed to end the caste hatred.<sup>16</sup> This speech shows his understanding of the practice of the untouchability and his will to annihilate it from the minds of the people.

It is well known that Shahu Maharaj was greatly impressed by the intellect and the devotion of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar towards the emancipation of the Dalits and social reforms and so he helped many times to Babasaheb in his life time. He had donated an amount of Rs. 700 to the newspaper, *MookNayak*, when it was facing the financial problems in 1921.<sup>17</sup>

At the Mangaon conference of the dalits, in 1920, he explained why he banned the old practice of *hajeri*, (Mahars had to come and do the work as told by high caste village officers every day). He said,

"I should like to take this opportunity to say why I freed the so called untouchables from *hajeri*. This practice of *hajeri*, gave scope to village officers and others to oppress these poor people..."<sup>18</sup>

It is evident that how keen and kind, he was towards the problems of the Dalits and how devotedly he worked for their emancipation. He looked at the problem of the dalits from the national point of view; he believed that it was the evil practice of the caste system and the untouchability that was the biggest obstacle in the overall progress of the nation. Therefore he appealed the high caste leaders to look into the issue without any prejudice and take necessary steps to bring the dalits out of their miseries. He expressed such brilliant and humanist views from many conferences of the dalits, where he purposely used to go and support their cause.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the coronation of Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj at the seat of the tiny state of Kolhapur has proved to be a great impetus to the development of the socio-religious reform movement and also in the history of the modern Maharashtra. He was really a champion of the Dalits and Women, and worked hard and devotedly for the emancipation of the downtrodden like them and fastened the process of modernization of Maharashtra.

<sup>16</sup> Pansare Govind, (2003), *Rajarshi Shahu: Vasa Ani Warsa*, Lokwangamaya Gruha, Mumbai, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Khane B. D., (2006), *Chhatrapati Shahu's Crusade against Untouchability*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Pansare Govind, (2003), *Rajarshi Shahu: Vasa Ani Warsa*, Lokwangamaya Gruha, Mumbai, p. 11.