



Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu And Educational Revolution in Maharashtra

Dr. Sonawane Jagdish Chhaburao

Associate Professor in History,
Arts, Commerce and Science College Sonai
Tal-Newasa, Dist-Ahmednagar. 414603.
9423210260 sonawanejagdish31@gmail.com

The pre-colonial India was a caste-based society. It was characterized by caste-endogamy, rigid and closed hierarchical structure and domineeringly Brahmanical patriarchy. The upper castes exercised an absolute control over the Hindu society enjoying all privileges at the expenses of downtrodden. At the same time the lower castes, untouchables and women were exploited and enforced to serve for the upper castes and the Brahmans thus it maintained supremacy of very few. According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the caste system is not only the division of the labour but it is also a division of labourers.

In Maharashtra, the Brahmanical supremacy reached its zenith under the rule of the Peshvas (Brahmans). The British East India Company established British rule in Maharashtra by defeating Peshwa Bajirao II in 1818. Mount Stuart Elphinston took over as the first Governor of the Bombay Presidency. The British occupation of Maharashtra marked a new era in the history of Maharashtra. The far-reaching measures were introduced in the social, political and economic spheres by the British rulers in order to strengthen their colonial interests.

Education is regarded as an important instrument in a complete progress of a society. It has a potential of generating a spirit of enquiry and questioning to the accepted truths in the society and rebel against the injustice. As a result, it is considered as an important factor in the process of transformation of a society and

subsequently other aspects from one stage to another. The English Education, introduced by the British, proved an important strategic move in the history of Modern India. It must be seen as an important aspect of social history of India which was perhaps introduced under the dire necessity of new rulers to educate local people to conduct a day-to-day administration. In the view of Mount Stuart Elphinstone, who introduced modern English education in Maharashtra, existing caste system and the feudal structure was essential to maintain good relations between the rulers and the indigenous people. It is evident from the histories of various colonized societies that the colonizers, instead of destroying the earlier feudal structure, nurture the process of formation of new classes, which co-exist alongside the with former structure and be the mediators between and the ruled themselves. He adopted a policy of appeasement of the traditional caste-elite. He was aware that the Brahmans are unwilling to educate rest of the people due to fear of losing supreme position and dominance over the society. They attempted to keep lower castes and untouchables away from education and it was limited to the Brahmans, though purportedly it was made open to all. It was proposed to all irrespective of caste, class and gender. It was a gesture under the influence of liberal thoughts. Contrary to it Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil not only imparted education among the masses but started all-inclusive units in the form of schools.



The English Education introduced modern concepts liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, humanism, liberalism and scientific temperament to India, which opened arena for newly educated Indians. They began to ponder upon inequality, injustice, inhuman practices, intolerance, and superstitions prevalent in then society and decided to transformation the society on the modern ideology. Therefore, we see the revival of socio-religious reform movements in Maharashtra in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj :

Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur was the most important revolutionary social reformers in the nineteenth century Maharashtra. He was regarded as the benevolent king due to his devotion to the cause of the social revolution. After taking charge of the Kolhapur State, Shahu Maharaj realized that the bureaucracy of the Kolhapur state was Brahmin dominated; the Shudras, Dalits were out of government services only because of lack of education. He conceived that the lack of education makes a personal slave of the Brahmanical religion, loses dignity and so education must be delivered to everybody.¹ He realized the necessity of launching a strenuous campaign against the evils of the traditional caste hierarchy and the patriarchy. The educational backwardness of the Shudras and Dalits is evident from the Census Report of 1881, according to which literacy rate of the Brahmins in Kolhapur was 79.1 per cent, of the Marathas, 8.6 per cent. There were 368 Brahmin students out of total 441 students of Rajaram High School and 55 Brahmin students out of 61 students in the Rajaram College in Kolhapur.² This disparity alarmed Shahu Maharaj and he realized the need for educating Shudras and Dalits.

Shahu Maharaj, being well educated on western lines, realized the importance of equality, liberty and fraternity which was a distant dream

in the Indian context. He knows the fact that the Brahmins occupied a large number in the administrative posts and have unlimited control over administration. As elsewhere in western India, the establishment of a Western educational system and a modernized administration had brought Brahmins to the forefront as the most educated class.³

The main reason behind Brahmin-non-Brahmin conflict was the Vedokta controversy in 1899, when Shahu Maharaj became a strong opponent to the Brahmins. This evidence convinced Shahu Maharaj that non-Brahmins must be in power to control the Brahmanical supremacy. Then he immediately ordered 50% Reservation to the members of "backward communities" in the administration on 26th July 1902.⁴ This was the beginning of the system of Reservation in India and Shahu Maharaj thus became the pioneer of it.

Shahu Maharaj had realized the importance of education in the process of emancipation of the downtrodden. His view about the education is reflected in his speech delivered in *Aryadharma Parishad*, he said,

"There was a great loss of the nation due to lack of education among the non-Brahmins and dalits... the priests became numerous in the temples and their interference should be stopped by making our schools as our temples, the knowledge of true religion must be exposed."⁵

Shahu Maharaj established many hostels in Kolhapur and he gave financial support to other hostels in different parts of Maharashtra for the education of the non-Brahmins. Some of his hostels are Jain Hostel (1901), Victoria Maratha Hostel (1901), Lingayat Hostel (1907), Mahomedan hostel (1906), Namdeo Shimpi Hostel, Sonar Hostel (1921), and Miss Clark Hostel for Dalits (1908) were founded to impart education among non-Brahmins.⁶ These hostels played a 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.

Understanding the necessity for education, Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj established a Training College for Women to meet the need of woman teachers.⁷ It was made compulsory for students that after completion of their education, they had to teach the girls in the schools. Shahu Maharaj sent *Krushnabai Kelavkar*, a brilliant student to Grant Medical College for medical education. In 1902, he appointed her as an Assistant Medical Officer at 'Albert Edward Medical Hospital'. He again granted a scholarship to her for specialization in Gynecology to London. After completing the course, she rejoined her duty in 1903.⁸

Shahu Maharaj looked at women's education as a necessity to bring gender equality, so he tried to encourage women's education. When the girls passed from the schools meant for boys, he granted an amount of Rs. 512/- to the teachers.⁹ He also encouraged the girls of Shudras and Dalits for education. For this purpose, he established a school for girls from *Chambhar, Dhor* and sanctioned Rs 96 for the purpose.¹⁰ He desired the emancipation of women through education and for this purpose insisted on good moral education. Once in a discussion with Tofkhane and Bhaskarrao Jadhav, he said that 'if women should get a proper education, which make them understand the difference between good and bad; if they would get it from the teachers of good moral, they would never go on the wrong ways'.¹¹ Thus he cared and insisted on the quality of education.

Shahu Maharaj opened many schools for the spread of education among women and Dalits. The Brahmin intelligentsia started a movement for education for Brahmin women, while Satyashodhak movement under the leadership of Mahatma Phule started the movement for

women, Shudras and Dalits. The Christian missionaries had been working for women's education. In the nineteenth century, the non-Brahmin movement under the leadership of Shahu Maharaj also devotedly worked for the education of women. He considered education important for women to bring up the children properly and encouraged the girls for education in many ways. He exempted the fees of the girls in Rajaram College and also declared scholarships for them.¹² 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*.¹³ He ordered to help women's education in his state and provided boarding, mess and educational facilities for girls. On account of his efforts, the percentage of women's literacy rose from 0.10 to 0.35 in the Kolhapur state.¹⁴ He had contributed greatly to increase the percentage of literate women due to his various efforts. He opened 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 Kolhapur, '*Ma. Laxmibai Girls' High School*'.¹⁵ 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 1908.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

Shahu Maharaj had realized the necessity of education for all the people and so he made his mind for the education for his citizens and passed the Act of Compulsory and Free Education in 1917.¹⁸ He not only passed the Act of compulsory education but implemented it rigidly by fining



the parents for the absence of their children at the rate of One Rupee per month.¹⁹ He thus never discriminated in the educational system based on caste, gender etc. He not only cared about the education of non-Brahmin women but equally cared about the education of the Brahmin women. He helped Dr Anandibai Joshi by sending her amount to return India from America and decide to appoint her as 'Assistant Darbar Surjan', but she died after reaching India.²⁰

Shahu Maharaj was very keen to eradicate evil practices like untouchability, which was prevalent in every aspect of social life, including education. Some of the teachers instructed strictly the students of Mahar, Mang, to seat out of the classes, in verandas under the traditional influence of untouchability. When Shahu Maharaj came to know this practice, he ordered to close special schools for Dalits and include them into regular schools and sit all students together. In another order, he issued that those educational institutes which were getting grants from Government should focus and treat Dalit students with love because they were unable to progress at their own unlike touchable; if there was anybody who dislikes it should send resignation within six weeks, and of course, they would not grant the pension by the government. If any of the institutes had any objection, the government should stop the grants immediately.²¹ This incidence is the strong proof of his modern outlook towards social practices. He was very helping in many ways to the Dalits and he attempted to annihilate untouchability.

Shahu Maharaj had criticized the educated non-Brahmins for almost ignoring the cause of emancipation of Dalits and the education to non-Brahmins.²² He was so liberal to provide all kinds of help for the cause of education of the non-Brahmins, Dalits and women. So, he wholeheartedly helped various institutes and persons not only in the Kolhapur State but also

from various parts of Maharashtra. V. B. Patil had founded the 'Tararani University' at Kolhapur to expand the women's education with the help of Shahu Maharaj.²³

Shahu Maharaj even bores the severe critique on the issue of women's education from his family when he educated his daughter-in-law, Indumati Ranisaheb, after becoming a widow at the early age of eleven. He decided to educate her to make her an able person. At that time, his family members including his wife criticized him on his decision. But after all, he managed to educate her at *Sonatali*, a village near Kolhapur by appointing talented teachers, and she passed the examination of matriculation with second-ranking. He even wanted to appoint her as the chief of the Department of Education in the State, but due to her death, it was not possible.²⁴

Thus Shahu Maharaj contributed vehemently for the educating Shudras, women and Dalits to bring them in the mainstream of the society. He made every possible arrangement for the cause in his capacity as a king of the Kolhapur State; not limited to it, but also extended his educational movement throughout Maharashtra.

Footnotes :

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4. Khane B. D., 2006, *Chhatrapati Shahu's Crusade a gainst Untouchability*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, p.6.
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6. Omvedt Gail, (2011), *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, p.135.
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8. Ibid, p. 111.
9. Dhatavkar Bhaskar, (ed.), (1988), *Shahu Chhatrapatinche Nivdak Adesh*, Purabhilekh vibhag, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, p. 139.
10. Ibid, p.45.
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12. Bhosale Narayan, (2008), *Maharashtratil Strivishayak Sudharnavadache Sattakaran*, The Taichi Prakashan, Pune, p.240.
13. Ibid, p.240.
14. Suryawanshi G.S.,(1978),*Raja Shahu Ani Prabodhan*, Ranjit Prakashan, Ichalkaranji, p.240.
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19. Ibid, p.19.
20. Bhosale Narayan, (2008), *Maharashtratil Strivishayak Sudharnavadache Sattakaran*, The Taichi Prakashan, Pune, p.64.
21. Pansare Govind, (2003), *Rajarshi Shahu: Vasa Ani Warsa*, Lokwangamaya Gruha, Mumbai, p.20.
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23. Salunkhe Hindurao, (1989),*Chhatrapati Shahu Smrutidarshan*, Maharashtra Granth Bhandar, Kolhapur, p.7.
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