



CONTRIBUTIONS OF SHAHU MAHARAJA FOR EDUCATION OF WEAKER SECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Earlier weaker sections especially present scheduled castes and tribes were deprived from education and the Brahmins were dominated in education and employment during the British period. Realizing such inequality, Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur State has initiated many of the schemes and measures to increase education of weaker sections. Such welfare schemes include scholarships, starting up new schools, reservations to weaker sections in education and employment, etc. The paper described the contributions of Shahu Maharaja for education of weaker sections.

KEYWORDS: *scheduled castes and tribes , education of weaker sections.*

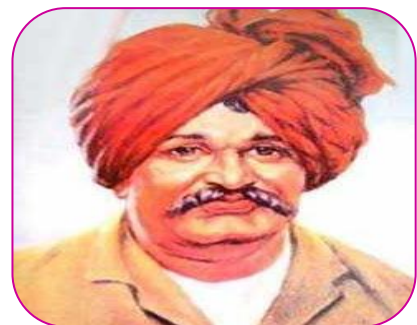
INTRODUCTION

Shahu Chhatrapati was the Maharaja or the king of the Indian princely state of Kolhapur. Also known by the name of RajarshiShahu, he was known to be a great social reformer of his time. King Shahu was an invaluable gem in the history of Kolhapur. King Shahu was related to all progressive activities which contribute to the good of society in various spheres such as business, administration, Dalit emancipation, women's education and so on. The peak years of his contribution for welfare to society were from 1894 to 1922. His main contribution was to education for which he took the initiative from revolutionary reformer Mahatma Jyotirao Phule. He gave importance to primary education since this is the base to an individual's progress. Kolhapur is the mother of hostels and schools and he was responsible for this great concept.

Shahu IV (also known as RajarshiShahu) was the first Maharaja of the Indian princely state of Kolhapur between 1894 and 1922. His full official name was: Colonel His Highness Kshatriya-KulawatasanaSinhasanadhiswar, ShrimantRajarshi Sir Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj Sahib Bahadur. He was also known as RajarshiShahuji Chhatrapati and Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj. Shahu was born on 26th June 1874 as YeshwantraoGhatge, eldest son of AppasahebGhatge, Chief of Kagal (Senior) by his wife Radhabai, a daughter of the Raja of Mudhol [Karnataka]. He was named as 'Yashwant Rao' by birth. His younger brother 'Bapusaheb' was born on 3rd January 1876.

During this time, ruler of Kolhapur, Rajaram Chhatrapati went to Florence and passed away. Consequently, Narayan, ruler from Savardekar-Bhonsle family began his rule as Shivaji Chhatrapati-IV. The relationship between the ruler and Diwan Mahadev Vasudev Barve was not proper and intentionally, the ruler was declared as unable to rule the state due to ill health and Shivaji Chhatrapati-IV was dethroned by the British. Later, the Government nominated AppasahebGhatge as regent of the Kolhapur state. On 25th December 1883, Shivaji Maharaja-IV died in Ahmednagar due to cruel acts of the British¹.

Shahu was adopted by Anandibai, widow of Raja Shivaji-IV, on 17th March 1884. Several generations of inter-marriage had ensured that Shahu's family was connected intimately with the ruling dynasty of Kolhapur, which is apparently what rendered him a suitable



candidate for adoption, despite his not being a male-line member of the Bhonsle dynasty. A council of regency was appointed by the British Government of India to oversee affairs of state during Shahu's minority and during that time he was tutored in administrative affairs by Sir Stuart Fraser. Shahu was invested with ruling powers upon coming of age in 1894. There is one college named Rajaram College built by Shahu Maharaja.

He searched for the intelligent and educated youth from the Backward Classes and Dalits for placing them to higher and administrative positions during his rule. But, none of the persons were available from these communities in Kolhapur, as these classes were deprived from education. Even though these people are majority (Bahujans), these people are deprived from all facilities in the society. Hence, Shahu Maharaja thought that the education of Dalits and lower classes is one of the major measures, which should be taken to improve their socio-economic status.

CONTRIBUTION OF SHAHU MAHARAJA FOR EDUCATION OF WEAKER SECTIONS:

In February 1908, Shahu founded an education society with the object of spreading education among the untouchable classes of the Kolhapur State. Rao Bahadur Sabnis was the President and Shri G. K. Kadam and A. B. Olkar, B.A. were its Secretaries. They had, at that time, secured an annual subscription of Rs. 300 and the Society expected a substantial help from His Highness Shahu Chhatrapati, Major Wodehouse, then Political Agent, also took a deep interest in the Society and became a first class member of it².

As a result of Shahu's encouragement, the number of schools for the untouchables rose to 27 in 1912-13 and the number of students rose to 850. Though Shahu had allowed in the beginning separate schools for the untouchables, he soon realized that it would be a better strategy to have common schools for all castes, in order to drive away untouchability from the State. He stopped separate schools for the untouchables and issued a Government order on Sept 30, 1917 that the students of all castes should study together in Government schools and that the practice of untouchability was not to be observed³.

Miss Violet Clarke, the daughter of George Clarke, the Governor of Bombay, was such a one, who had sympathy for untouchables. She had rendered great service for the emancipation of the depressed classes in Bombay Presidency. Shahu's mission was the same. Shahu had great regard for Miss Clarke. She was arranging a concert and collecting money for her mission. Maharaja came in active contact with her when she visited Kolhapur with her father in March 1908, to attend the marriage of Maharaja's daughter. The correspondence between the Maharaja and Miss Clarke throws some light on her effort to aid the depressed classes. She wrote the following letter to Maharaja on 14th August, 1908:

"I am getting up a concert in aid of the depressed classes (Hindu). I want to get some of the representative big names to put on the list of Patrons. My father and the Maharaja Gaikwar have consented to be Patrons and I should be so pleased if you would let me add your name also? This may encourage some of the Indians to come to the concert"⁴.

As an ardent supporter of the cause Shahu reciprocated it in his following letter dated 12th September 1908:

"My dear Miss Clarke,

I enclose herewith cheque, Rs. 200, on the Bombay Bank in aid of the concert for the depressed classes which you have kindly organised. I hope it may prove a perfect success as the cause deserves. I am sure the poor helpless people will keenly appreciate your kindness and ever remain grateful to you. The committee here also very much appreciates the movement"⁵.

Unfortunately, for the depressed classes, Miss Clarke did not live long. She died in 1908 leaving her mission incomplete. Shahu remembered her gratefully as the supporter of the cause for which he was agitating. A hostel for boys from depressed classes was opened in 1908 and it was named Miss Clarke Hostel with the permission of S K George Clarke. Maharaja granted a well ventilated building, with a large

compound useful as playground near the Mahar Talav, with a monthly permanent grant of Rs. 25 for scholarship etc for boarding. There were six students residing in the hostel of whom only two were boarders in 1908-09. In response to the urge of the Society, all boys of the depressed classes learning in the Rajaram High School were exempted from paying their fees from 1908 onwards. The number of students residing in this Hostel in 1911-12 was 16, and Maharaja increased the annual grant by Rs. 25 in the year.

During those days, the curriculum of forward classes schools and schools of Dalits were not same. After completing fourth standard, the Dalit students were not getting eligibility to get admitted to fifth standard. Hence, it became impossible to majority of the Dalit children to go for High School (5th Standard). Shahu Maharaja observed the same and organized for special eligibility (remedial) classes to Dalit students through SripatraoSindhe. SripatraoSindhe wholeheartedly accepted the service proposal of Shahu Maharaja in serving the Dalit students. Bhaskar Rao Jadhav writes that “With the encouragement of Maharaja, a Mandal was established to spread education among the Dalits. Of course, there were untouchable communities such as Holeyas, Chamars have their own schools and teachers are also of the same communities. Still, the Dalit students were facing difficulty to pass fourth standard. The Dalit students were deprived from English education and difficult to learn Marathi also. As such, the expert teaching of SripatraoSindhe made Dalit students to get expertise in English and many of the students even got first number to their classes”⁶.

In 1906, there was night school for Chamars and Holeyas in Kolhapur and on 28th September 1906, Maharaja ordered to regularize the same⁷. On 4th October 1907 an order was passed to set up school for girls belonged to Samagar (Cobbler) and Dohar castes. Further, Rs. 96 per annum was reserved for the expenses of that school in the annual budget⁸. On 24th November 1911 another order was passed to provide free education to all the untouchables in Kolhapur State⁹. Along with the same, special scholarships were be sanctioned to the intelligent students from the Palace. On 7th April 1919, considering the poverty of Dalit students, Maharaja sanctioned amount of Rs. 2500 for distribution of free Slate, Books and Pencils to Dalit students¹⁰. Similarly, Shahu Maharaja sanctioned Rs.8 per month as special scholarships to the untouchable students of ‘Talathi class’¹¹.

Meanwhile, Prince Shivaji, younger son of Shahu Maharaja met with an accident and passed away. In his memory, in 1920, to motivate the education among untouchables, Maharaja arranged for Rs. 10000 Promissory Notes and on the interest, amount earned, Rs. 5 per month scholarships for eight students is reserved for untouchable students. It is noted that such scholarships was reserved for untouchable girl students. If there are no untouchable girl students in the State, such scholarships were be awarded to such students from outside the States¹². Liberal donations to schools of untouchables and Dalits and hostels located at the other states such as Nagpur, Nasik, etc were also made by Shahu Maharaja¹³.

As stated by Bhaskar Rao Jadhav, “Shahu Maharaja started religious education to untouchable children. For this purpose, they took help of Swamiji of Arya Samaj. As such, the swamiji purified these children by providing Deeksha. Further, they educated these children with Vedic education. In this way, self-confidence and equality was grown into the minds of untouchable children so that their assumptions on untouchability were disappeared from their minds. Consequently, it became a process for progress for the overall development. After which, these children used to combine their studies with other children in High Schools and finally, the practice of untouchability disappeared at High Schools”¹⁴.

Shahu also paid special attention to the Secondary and Higher education of the untouchables. He started three hostels for them at Rajputwadi camp, Station Bungalow and Rukadi camp from his private funds. Besides four more hostels, Miss Clerk hostel, Aryasamaj Gurukul, IndumatiRanisaheb Hostel at Kolhapur and Backward Class hostel at Pandharpur, were run at state expenses. Thus in all seven hostels were run for the untouchables. He also donated Rs. 5000 each to two Backward Class hostels at Nasik and Nagpur. Shahu ordered that untouchable students were not to be charged any fees in schools and colleges. Shahu also granted special scholarships to the untouchables¹⁵.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

In India at the early ages, Gautama Buddha and Basaveshwar were began revolution to emphasize equality and humanity and their efforts were to maintain social equality among all classes including weaker sections and women. Later, education is base for equality as worked out by Mahatma Phule. Realizing the importance of equality, humanity, social justice and rights against discrimination were most important as thought out by Shahu Maharaja. In this respect, all the thinkers have similar opinions and later Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has also emphasized the same. In modern India, during the British period, the efforts of Shahu Maharaja to empower weaker sections and women are very much appreciated. He has realized the truth that, without education and employment, it is impossible to emancipate weaker sections and women. For this purpose, he has built schools and colleges for weaker sections and even provided scholarships, reservations in education and employment, etc. Hence, the weaker sections should remember Shahu Maharaja for his work of empowerment of weaker sections through education and employment.

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