



CHHATRPTI SHAHU OF KOLHAPUR AND UNTOUCHABILITY

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ABSTRACTS:

This present paper highlights the various aspects of the Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur and his various reforms related to eradication of untouchability in his princely state. A true champion of social democracy advocated the principle of equality, liberty and justice to all people.

Key Words: - *Untouchability, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, Eradication, Social Reforms*

INTRODUCTION:

Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur was one of those on whom, the idea of humanity had laid dawn quite early in his career as a ruler of a princely state of Kolhapur. He was well educated at various center of education where, then, would be princely rulers were trained. His teacher 'Sir. Stuart Frazer,' under whom, his studied as a student, was man of liberal ideas. And the training under him, oriented Shahu Maharaj in liberal ideas of the west as well as the east of his contemporary period. India of his time was very much dominated by the practices which were then called as 'Brahmanism' both in social as well as religious practices. As a man, trained in liberal ideas he felt agonies over the suffering of people specially the poor and backward classes in his state in legally, economic, social, and religious slavery of these people particularly, untouchables. After observing their pathetic conditions. He revolted immediately after he took over the reins of his state on April 12, 1894 and he inaugurated the reservation policy on July 26, 1902 according to which the reservation in state services where proclaimed by law for the back

ward classes called as 'Non-Brahmins' in which untouchables got in equally an important share. By this, he engrafted an age of reform in Indian history which can be called as the age of special treatment for these poor neglected who needed help by state enacted law. Whenever, it was possible he appointed people of back ward classes particularly untouchables. He believes that reservation of post would encourage the backward classes for education and their education would fetch them offices. In the year 1919, 'Shahu Maharaj' by his order closed all the separate school meant for the lower castes and threw all public school open for the untouchables. Thus, removing the civil disabilities hitherto imposed on the untouchables in the schools.

But more important that this was his personal behavior and practices against the back ward class was highly epoch making and revolutionary. He helps Mr.Gangaram Kamble, who opened hotel in a crowded market area of Kolhapur. He himself uses to go there for tea and refresh along with his state Para phernalia. He frequently visited the huts of untouchables and use to eat food prepared by them in their hut. He openly helps them individually and organizing them in particularly in his state and in the entire country in general that was working against the cast system. He helped open schools for untouchables and helped financially build hostel for them and made to spread education among the masses in general and poor untouchables in particular. He employed the untouchables in his household services. He appointed untouchable coach men and elephant driver, which was considered a privilege to serve as an elephant driver. He gave these untouchables swords of honor and allowed them to appear in state function, like the soldier and sardar of the warrior classes.

Shahu Maharaj began to take very keen interest in the state administration and welfare activities of his people right from the day he was installed to full powers of the Kolhapur state in 1894. Shahu Maharaj, during his reign of 28 years, he revolutionary devoted to the welfare of his people. Therefore, this period marked a new era of social, cultural and economic

reforms for which Shahu Maharaj is remembered as one of the greatest rulers in Maharashtra.

Here, it is very significant to mention that Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, laid the foundation of social democracy based on social equality. Thus he made his Kolhapur state the base of social reforms in Maharashtra.

Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj introduced various reforms related to the backward classes emancipation and makes them free from slavery, bonded labour, ignorance, poverty and untouchability. Further, giving equal opportunity and justice to all sections of society and particularly weaker sections of the society – the backward classes (untouchables)

It is remarkable that Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj could carry out competitive administration, economic and social reforms. Moreover, various laws related to the upliftment of the backward classes were enacted. Special laws were passed for the abolition of bounded labour and Mahar, Kulkarni and other hereditary watan. He appointed from the untouchables 'Talathis' who became an important village officer. Free Boarding Houses for them at Sontali and the Station bungalow. The enrolment of several untouchable members as pleaders in the state. The abolition of untouchability on water tanks, wells, dharamshalas, hospitals, school and other public places. 50 percent reservation was made in government service for backward classes.

In the line of Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj encouraged education for the backward classes in the Hindu society. It was Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur who launched and directed the public welfare project and social reforms that created a social awakening and urge for development in the backward classes. Here, it is very important to note that an era of social renaissance began which paved the way for a modern Maharashtra on the line of democratic values. If Maharashtra is regarded, today as one of the most advanced and progress state in the country, it owes a deep debt of gratitude to the great Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur.

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, stood as a champion of social democracy and the value of political democracy. The reforms introduced and effectively

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implemented by Chhatrapati Shahu in his princely state, have been appeared in the present constitution of India. Thus it is revealed that Chhatrapati Shahu as 'The pillar of social democracy.'¹ He as the ruler of the state advocated the principle of equality, liberty and justice to all. Thus this paper presented as a mark of profound respect to his statesmanship and vision. He made the significant contribution in the field of education. The aim was to educate the masses, because minimum education or literacy was the pre-condition for understanding the importance of social equality and social democracy. For that in 1908, he founded an education society with the object of spreading education among the untouchable classes of the Kolhapur state.

Untouchability was prohibited in his state by legal enactments. This was done in order to break the barriers among the various communities ultimately leading to social cohesion. A united society based on no caste, creed or religion would hopefully strengthen the social democracy. Here, it is very significant to mention that why did Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj turned to be the reformer and social revolutionary using his administration for the welfare activities of his people in general and the backward classes in particular. The question arises why he took keen interest in uplifting or liberating the backward classes.

Before we take a short resume of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj's contribution for the emancipation of the backward classes [1894-1922], we would like to focus on to one incident in the early life of Shahu Maharaj, which fired him thinking on Hindu Social hierarchy of varna and Caste systems it was this.

"A pauper subordinate of the royal priest in the retinue of the Maharaja called him Shudra on his face and denied to chant the mantras as per Vedic tradition while the Maharaja was taking his bath at the Panchganga Ghat in Kolhapur"²

From this incident it has been revealed that Chhatrapati Shahu, a Maratha ruler, and a Maratha by caste was insulted by his priest calling him 'Shudra'. This insulting speech of the priest touched the Shahu Maharaj

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which became the seed cause of the non-Brahmin movement in the Deccan. As the matter of fact, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj for the first time in the history of Kolhapur upheld the cause of the masses especially backward classes.

It is therefore very important to state that a similar incident in the early life of Mahatma Phule had also led him to be a radical social reformer and the founder of The Satya Shodhak Samaj.

Besides, Shahu Maharaj carried on the torch lit by Mahatma Phule in the field of social reforms and education.

Those days where radical social reform was anthem that time Shahu Maharaj preached and practice casteless society as the only solution for all the ills of the country. He presided over many functions organized both by untouchables and non-Brahmins all over the country and openly supported there cause against the monopoly caste preached by Brahminism. He also politically supported for the reservation of seats both to non- Brahmins and untouchables of the promotions of reforms by Montague and Chelmsford. Normally the princely rulers heisted in participating in political policy because British did not like that but Chhatrapati Shahu did not bother that because his idea was for the liberation of untouchables and non Brahmins without political power.

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