

## **CHHATRAPATI SHAHU MAHARAJ: REVIEW OF THE WORKS OF EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL, AND INTELLECTUAL AWARENESS OF UNTOUCHABLES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Mahatma Phuley meticulously devised the path of emancipation of the untouchables by opening schools for them. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj continued this work of Mahatma Phuley. He pre-eminently rubbed elbows for the abolition of untouchability in Kolhapur province by establishing schools and hostels for the untouchables in his province. He had appointed Mahar community's people (an Untouchable Caste) on the positions of charters of lawyership and Talathi (Local Revenue Officer) and broken the shackles of social and economic slavery. He issued many resolutions and effectively executed it for the reformations among the lives of untouchables. He facilitated education for the untouchables to make them self-reliant. He also opened hostels at various places. He came forward to treat them equally. Moreover, he participated in various meetings and conferences to spread ideological awareness among them. This remarkable work gave impetus to the movements of untouchables. Untouchable community regarded him as Godly figure due to his deeds. So, present research article endeavours to bring forth the noteworthy works of Shahu Maharaja regarding educational, social, and ideological awareness of the untouchables from research perspective.*

**Keywords:** Shahu Maharaja, Abolition of Untouchability, Hostels, Schools, Dr. Ambedkar, Social Equality.

### **Research Methodology**

Historical research methodology has been used for the present research and available literature has been scientifically examined and evaluated in the light of concerned topic.

### **Hypothesis**

Shahu Maharaja endeavoured to make untouchable self-reliant and establish social equality.

### **Introduction**

Many barons ended up their lives to sustain their existence during British rule. Indian politics is going through the same situation. But, it has some exceptions. Kolhapur's Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj is the foremost name among them. Shahu Maharaj executed the movement for the dignified life of untouchables till last breath of life. He provided educational facilities like mainstream people to the untouchables. He was concerned about the educational, social and ideological awareness of the untouchables as they were reliant on others. In short, present research shed light on these remarkable deeds of Shahu Maharaja.

Present research article is divided into three parts. First part deals with Shahu Maharaja's works for the educational development of

untouchables. Second part sheds light on his endeavours for flourishing social equality. Third part includes Shahu Maharaja's works for the ideological awareness among untouchables. Finally, the evaluation of all these aspects is provided in it.

### **Educational Works**

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja paved the way for the development of untouchables by opening schools and hostels for them. While doing so, he strove hard to eradicate prejudices from untouchable community and insisted to provide equal opportunities in education. He adopted the policy of upliftment of the backward communities through education in his province. Many hostels were established for the students of various communities in Kolhapur. In 1908, he also opened hostels for untouchables by involving his colleagues namely Bhaskarrao Jadhao, Mahadeo Dongare, Bagal, Shinde etc. He established an organization namely 'Education Proliferating Board' (Vidya Prasarak Mandal) for this work (Pawar 72-73). These people strove hard to find out the children of untouchables for hostel as well as endeavoured to enhance their educational status equal to the mainstream people's children (Pawar). But, it was tough task to convince untouchables for education as they were apathetic about the education. So,

Shahu Maharaj worked hard to overcome these issues. Only five schools were existed for untouchables in his province at the time of his coronation and the number of students was 168. The number of schools for untouchables became 16 and the number of students was 416 during 1907-1908. The number of schools for the untouchables gradually increased due to the endless efforts of Maharaja. In 1912, the number of schools for the untouchables became 27 and the number of students was 636 during these four years(Pawar).He wholeheartedly supported for opening the schools for untouchables. He was personally observing the financial provisions of these schemes. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja and Bhaurao Patil devised a unique scheme of fund collection for the proliferation of education among educationally backward communities in Satara district. He was very interested in wrestling and many wrestlers were there under his patronage. He took the cost of 4-5 pairs of wrestlers and handed them over to an assigned committee. People were too interested in wrestling in Kolhapur province.He executed the scheme of selling tickets of wrestling matches in various villages and spent income on the proliferation of education(Prabodhan Monthly Magazine (Marathi) 64).

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja started building hostels for untouchables and appointing new teachers to proliferate and promote education among untouchables in his province (Warkhede 34).In 1907, he established a branch of Depressed Classes Mission in Kolhapur. 'Miss Clark Student Hostel' was established under this mission. Moreover, he opened a free hostel and mess for 50 untouchable students in his palace. Sometime, he personally taught to students (Shinde 243). He continued this work endlessly in his province. He also generously donated for those organizations which were dedicated for the upliftment of untouchables. He presided over All India Backward Classes Conference of 1920 in Nagpur. He munificently donated five thousand rupees to Chokhamela Boarding (N. R. Shende 41). He generously donated many times for various noble works.

Shahu Maharaja's efforts regarding the proliferation of education in untouchable

community reflect in his various issued orders. He issued most important order on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1911. As per stated in this order, all types of education were made free for the untouchables in his province (Pawar 74). Special scholarships were given to the meritorious students from untouchables from the court. He approved two thousand and five hundred rupees by issuing an order on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1919 to promote education among untouchables and offered books, slates, and pencils to them(Pawar 74).As per stated in his an order, 'Education department of province should treat everyone equally without any discrimination among untouchables and mainstream people like American Mission, Saint Xavier, Wilson College and Mission and Arya Society's schools, colleges, and residential schools in Banglore, Panchgani, Railway and government personnel. Government aided schools should respectfully treat untouchable students and enrol them in the schools' (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi) 122).He conveyed this order to various branches of the organization. Shahu Maharaj was very serious about the education untouchables and it is clarified in an order. As per this order, government buildings are not for private works. It should be used for the sake of government. Everyone should be treated equally without any discrimination between untouchables and mainstream people. If untouchables pay the taxes levied on them, why should they be treated so badly? (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi)). He hoped that the private and government organizations which avail grant under education department in the form of buildings and free ground, they should treat untouchables with more affection and respect as compared to upper-caste people. Mainstream people have many ways to educate themselves. But, untouchables don't have such mediums to achieve it. If the principals or teachers fail to treat untouchables equally, they will be punished. As well as, the grant of private institution will be revoked in that case (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi)). As per another order issued by Shahu Maharaj, if any individuals from School department contravene this order, they should send their resignation letter within six weeks. He will not get pension. As well as, the court will revoke the

grant and other aids if the aided organization contravene to it (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi)). Moreover, he expected that every teacher should help untouchable students whenever they come to school though he is very tired due to work (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi)). Thus, Shahu Maharaja was an avant-garde whose movement developed interest among backward classes and made them aware about their human rights (Khairmode 260-261). Shahu Maharaja's educational works made untouchables aware about their condition and increased the proportion of untouchables' education in his province.

### **Elimination of Social Inequality**

Shahu Maharaja everlastingly endeavoured to build new society based on equality by violating traditional caste system in Hindu society. He was motivated by the thoughts of annihilation of caste, abolition of untouchability, destroying the artificial walls between superior and inferior, upper and lower classes (Kharat 14). Shahu Maharaja issued an order stating no one will desecrate untouchables. Labourers of village, police assistant and local revenue personnel will be held responsible for it if this happen in the province (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi) 122). He opened all public places for untouchables in the province. He bestowed equal rights to untouchables by opening public taps, wells, lakes, inns, hospitals, schools, and offices for them (Gore and Limaye 21). He remarked about untouchables, "I believe that true national service lies in breaking the shackles of inhuman oppression which completely enslaved untouchables. Lower caste people can't do it though they endlessly strive hard for it. Upper caste people should abandon the rights which they have been enjoying since ancient times in inheritance (Bagal 9-10). He issued an order stating that the children of untouchables should be enrolled in government schools like others and all the independent schools which were opened for them should be closed. As well as, the children of various castes and religions should be seated collectively without observing any desecration (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi) 122). His motive behind providing religious education to

untouchables was to establish equality in the society. So, he organized thread ceremony (Upanayan ritual) for untouchable students before initiating their religious education. Shahu Maharaja was the first ever well-known King in the history who gave Veda's *santha* by organizing thread ceremony for the untouchables and brought them up equal to the so-called superior status of Brahmins (Pawar 75). The work executed by Shahu Maharaja in his province inevitably affected and shattered the very roots of Brahmanism. So, few Brahmins from Pune complained about Shahu Maharaja to British and tried to politically suppress him. At that time, he stated, "I don't care if I am dethroned while serving for the backward classes. He warned to the antagonists and contemporary British that I will everlastingly strive hard until the last breath of my life to eradicate the miseries of persecuted communities (Garud Weekly 2). He organized the movement of social equality. This movement had given constitutive form to the abolition of untouchability (Bansode 2). Shahu Maharaja prominently stressed on developing social equality by restraining detrimental customs and traditions prevalent in Hindu society.

### **Ideological Awareness**

Shahu Maharaja endeavoured to provide equal opportunities of education and employment to untouchables in his province. Whole untouchable community was indebted forever for this historical work. The best example of this work was Mahar barons of Karveer of Bastwadpeta Raibaug area had submitted an application regarding Maharheirdom on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1921. While mentioning the works of Shahu Maharaj regarding the upliftment of untouchables, they stated, "The generous King has tried many ways for our upliftment and reformation. You opened boarding, schools, provided employment to many people, some entered in the profession of lawyer, and the King treat us like his own children with equal affection sidelining any type of discrimination. So, our community worships you like the God and will be indebted forever for this remarkable work" (Bahishkrit Bharat Fortnightly (Marathi) 11). It indicates that untouchables were bowed down to the works

of Shahu Maharaja. But, he unceasingly endeavoured to spread ideological awareness among untouchables. He said about the tradition of untouchability that, 'Dweej people were considering themselves superior by birth and inferior to Shudras (untouchables) when Vedic religion deteriorated after Mahabharata. So, the most of the population of India was deprived of education, religion, and prosperity. But, the atrocities meted out to untouchables stopped during Buddha's era. Thereafter, fanatic Hinduism was flourished based on Vedas which culminated into the growing casteism in the society. Its branches also flourished at large scale. Nowadays, the casteism and atrocities meted out to untouchables is considered as the commandment in Hinduism'(Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi) 122-123).Shahu Maharaja felt that mainstream people should come forward to overcome this problem. As well as, lower caste people should strive hard to uplift themselves and enhance their status, and upper caste people should also collectively work with lower caste people. It will help to annihilate casteism systematically and amicably(Mooknayak Fortnightly (Marathi) 5).As well as, Shahu Maharaja suggested that inter-caste relationship should be established to eradicate casteism from the society. Legal barriers should be resolved to increase inter-caste marriage which will be beneficial to overcome this issue. Legal provisions should be made for it(3-4).Shahu Maharaja chaired All India Backward Classes Conference in May 1920.He clarified in the conference that 'development of the nation depends upon the proportion of the abolition of casteism" (3-4).

In All India Backward Classes Conference at Delhi, Rajashree Shahu Maharaja said, "Emergence of British Empire lead towards the awareness and renaissance in our life. We shouldn't forget it. As well as, nation's political future depends upon the character of the citizen of respective nations. So, everyone should endeavour to improve his own character. Everyone should prove their capabilities to use given rights through their behaviour" (Bahishkrit Bharat Fortnightly (Marathi) 4).He never propagated himself as the leader of untouchables though he

significantly contributed in this work. He always worked merely as a servant of untouchables. Shahu Maharaja expressed his views in All India Backward Classes Conference in Nagpur saying, "If any calamity wrought upon you, I will hand over my empire to the prince to render the service for you" (Bahishkrit Bharat Fortnightly (Marathi) 3). Shahu Maharaj always felt that the path of the emancipation of untouchables will be more substantial if the leadership of the movement of untouchables emerge out of untouchable community. He wanted to suggest the same message from a letter written to Gawai. In this letter, he said, "You should not give the leadership of your community's movement to others. The credible and suitable leader should be appointed from own community. Otherwise, other community's leaders will play with your and movement's future" (N. R. Shende 39). So, he publically declared Dr.Ambedkar as the leader of untouchables in the Mangaon conference which was chaired by him. Thereafter, untouchable community resolutely stood with Dr.Ambedkar resulting into gradual decrease in the fame of other leaders. A movement for the emancipation of humans organized under the leadership of Dr.Ambedkar.

### Conclusion

Shahu Maharaja ceaselessly extended Mahatma Phuley's Truth-Seeker (Satyashodhak) movement. He used his power to constitutively eliminate inequality from the society.The prominent role of an avant-garde is to bring metamorphic changes among the lives of people, lead them towards progress by making aware them about humanity. ChhatrapatiShahuMaharaj was an iconoclast as far as this perspective is concerned (Garud Weekly, (Marathi) 1).The era when Shahu Maharaja raised the issue of the abolition of untouchability was not as congenial and progressive as it is today.It is meticulously illustrated in the death article of Shahu Maharaja in Kesari newsletter.Author of Kesari said, "No one can surpass the expertise and intellectual capability of Shahu Maharaja in epistemology, politics, and sociology in today's era. People are witnessing the output of his massive and hard work" (Prabodhan

Fortnightly 117). Thakare, a campaigner and social reformer, had endeavoured to show how different community's people looked at the work of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja with wide-ranging perspectives. In this regards, he said, "He was a foe for Chitpawan community's people. He was a rebel in religious sphere for Deshasth community. He was a lovely friend to Mumbai and Indian Government, father to Non-Brahmins while an angel of God for untouchables" (Prabodhan Fortnightly (Marathi) 116). It clarifies different perspectives of the people towards Shahu Maharaja's works. In a tribute to Shahu Maharaja after his demise on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1922, it was written in 'Bahishkrut Bharat', "He was our Abraham Lincoln who has proven that if

you bore the seeds of love, it will never give you the fruits of hatred; he is our laurel; he has wiped out the blot of untouchability imprinted on the minds of Hindus. He was our God..." (Bahishkrit Bharat Fortnightly (Marathi) 3). Dr. Ambedkar remarked, "Shahu Maharaja endlessly strove hard to abolish social inequality and devastated the stronghold of Brahmins" (Moon 307). Thus, present study clarified that Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj always took care of the development of untouchables. He strove hard for their educational, social, and ideological awareness of the untouchables. Shahu Maharaja's this massive work is inspirational for the forthcoming generation.

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