



1196, Sadashiv Peth, Limayewadi Road, pune - 411030.
contact- 020-29526979/ 9699644930 E-Mail- ssf@ssfoffice.co.in

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj

India society experienced the emergence of social reformers in large scale. These social reformers opposed and fought against the social evils prevalent in the society back then. If we go by today's understanding of Indian states. Bengal and Maharashtra were the leading two states when it came to addressing social issue. In Maharashtra it all started with Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule. Jyotiba and Savitri became the source of inspiration for the successive social reformers in Maharashtra and India. Among the long list of these social reformers there was one social reformer called Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, who was also a king of Kolhapur princely state. The aura of the work done by him is such that today he is known as social reformer rather than a king.



Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was born on 26 July 1874. He was born as Yashwantrao Ghatge. His father's name was Appasaheb Ghatage and his mother's name was Radhabai. Appasaheb Ghatge was the regent of Kolhapur princely state and his mother was the daughter of royal family of Mudhol, in today's Karnataka. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj lost his father when he was just 12-year-old. In the year 1884 he was adopted by Anandibai who was the widow of the Chhatrapati Shivaji IV of Kolhapur. When he ascended the throne, he was renamed as the Shahu Maharaj.

Caste discrimination and hatred towards each other on the basis of caste was at its peak when Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj ascended the throne. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was determined to bring reforms in this domain. There was one particular incident which provided an impetus

to Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj to work rigorously in this field. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj used to take a bath in Panchaganga river. While taking bath a brahmin called Narayan Bhat was reciting mantras from puranas instead of Vedas. It was Rajaram Shastri Bhagwat who noticed this thing and informed Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj about this. When Narayan was questioned regarding this matter, he answered that Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj belonged to Shudra class and reciting Vedic mantras for Shudras is prohibited. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was deeply moved to see such discrimination in his own princely state. He immediately brought changes in this system and started appointing non brahmin priests in his state. He appointed a priest from Maratha community and renamed as Kshatra Jagadguru. It invited tremendous criticism from the certain section of the society. This event is known as Vedokta controversy. Even the leader like Bal Gangadhar Tilak opposed this move of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj.

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was a visionary leader. From 1894 to 1922, he did uncountable social reforms in his empire. His goal was to make education available to the masses. He introduced several educational programs to promote education in his region. The condition of the society at that time was such that no one was ready to live and study together due to untouchability. He was the first one to announce the fifty percent reservation in all the government offices in the princely state of Kolhapur. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj declared scholarships for suitable students belonging to backward class.

When he was asked about his reason for starting the reservation, he said “If you have some Horses who are fit and some Horses who are weak, then don't you give them separate kinds of diets? Only when all Horses are fit, then the race would be equal. Until then we will have to feed them based on their requirements.”

He built hostels at various places and supported them with royal treasury. He established a 'Maratha Students Institute' on 18 April, 1901 and helped it with funds for the construction of school infrastructure. Simultaneously, he established hostels for the students from different communities during his rule. For example, in 1901-04 he built a Jain Hostel, in 1906 a Mohammedan hostel, in 1908 a Miss Clarke Hostel for untouchables, in 1917 a Veer Shaiva hostel for Lingayat community, in 1921 a Sant Namdeo hostel. Along with that he built separate hostels for different ethnicities like 'Panchals,' 'Devadnya,' 'Nabhik,' 'Shimpi,' and 'Dhor-Chambhar'. He supported these hostels with regular grants for sustained education of the students from all backward communities.

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj also worked towards the betterment of the women in his empire. He established schools to educate women and spoke vocally about women's education. He introduced a law banning the Devadasi system. He legalized widow remarriages in 1917 and made efforts toward stopping child marriages.

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was really impressed with the work of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was introduced to Dr. Ambedkar in year 1917. He was greatly impressed his revolutionary ideas regarding untouchability. The two met several times during 1917-1921 and discussed possible ways to eradicate the negatives of caste segregation. He

even donated Rs.2,500 to Dr. Ambedkar when he started his newspaper 'Mooknayak' on January 31, 1921, and contributed more lately for the exact cause. Their association lasted till Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj's death in 1922.

In a *Bahishkrit Varg Conference* at Mangaon, on March 21-22, 1920, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj declared Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar as 'the saviour' of Bahujan Samaj. "*You (Bahujan Samaj) have found your saviour in Ambedkar. I am confident that he will break your shackles. Not only that, a time will come when, so whispers my conscience, Ambedkar will shine as a front-rank leader of all India fame & appeal,*" he said.

He introduced several projects that made people self-sufficient in their chosen professions. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Spinning and Weaving Mill, the establishment of co-operative societies for farmers introduced by him to free his people from intermediaries in trading. He made credits available to farmers looking to buy equipment to improve agricultural practices. He even started the King Edward Agricultural Institute to teach farmers how to increase crop yield and related technologies. He started the Radha Nagari Dam project on February 18, 1907, which was completed in 1935. This dam stood as a testament to Chhatrapati Shahu's vision toward the welfare of his subjects and made Kolhapur self-sufficient in water.

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was king of a princely state. he could have enjoyed the lavish lifestyle. But the fact that he decided to bring the reform in the deteriorating society of that period sets him apart from the other kings of other princely states of that period. His selfless dedication and his determination to go against the flow is source of inspiration upcoming generations.

Rushikesh Bhalerao (rushikeshbhalerao575@gmail.com)

- 1) <https://aissms.org/rajarshri-shahu-maharaj-a-visionary-and-social-reformist/>
- 2) <https://www.shahumaharaj.com/home.html>
- 3) <https://velivada.com/2022/06/26/chhatrapati-rajarshi-shahu-maharaj-the-king-who-revolted-against-the-brahminical-supremacy/>
- 4) <https://www.culturalindia.net/reformers/shahu-chhatrapati.html>
- 5) <https://www.earlytimes.in/newsdet.aspx?q=126816>
- 6) <https://www.india.com/lifestyle/chhatrapati-shahu-maharaj-5-things-to-know-about-the-great-king-and-reformer-4768683/>