

## Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III

Gifted by nature with a remarkable power of brain and a very strong will; deprived by circumstances of education of any kind up to his 12<sup>th</sup> year; lifted, entirely beyond expectation from the life of a peasant boy to a throne and great riches; thereafter subjected to a course of intensive culture which would have given most boys a profound distaste for study, but which left him with a sense of his deficiencies and a determination to make them good; invested with full powers, within the limits imposed by his position as a native ruler in India, at the age of eighteen, and called upon, without the aid of anyone on whom he might look as a friend and companion, to exercise those powers- His Highness Maharaj Sayajirao III was marked out for a human experiment of the highest interest.



Maharaj Sayajirao has preached education as the sovereign remedy for India. The Maharaja gave long and anxious thought to the problem. One thing was clear to him. Under a voluntary system the thin stream of education might meander through the masses till the crack of doom, without very much result. Impatience could not afford to sit with hands folded and wait for the millennium. It was for the State to take the lead : 'People by themselves would do very little in the cause of public education.'

The Maharaja was the father of his people, and a father's duty included the mental as well as the physical welfare of his children. But there was only one way by which this ideal could be attained, and that was by compulsion. The Baroda Gazetteer claims that, long before the rest of India had done more than think of the free and compulsory existence, might in very deed be dependent on the pittance -which their children could earn.

Speaking of his aspiration towards reform, Maharaj Sayajirao maintains that it was innate in him rather than implanted by his teachers. This does not mean that he failed to appreciate the labours of those who guided him during his minority. No reformer can be entirely uninfluenced by the teachings of others. The Gaekwad, however, can justly claim that he did not want an outside stimulus to urge him in the direction of reform.

Seldom has his inquisitive tendency been more displayed than on the occasion of his visit to Europe in 1923, when he was already sixty years of age. In that summer he spent a month in Berlin. He inspected research and educational institutions, dyeworks, wireless set factories, etc. In the same year he manifested a great interest in the subject of agricultural banks, cabling to his ministers in Baroda to ask whether a Land Mortgage Bank could not be established there on the lines of the Credit Foncier and the Egyptian Agricultural Bank.

On his American visit of 1905, American ideas of education were his chief study, and he secured the services of an expert educationalist, Dr. Cuthbert Hall, to inspect the Baroda schools and suggest reforms. Circulating libraries attracted much attention from him, with a result which was notable later.

In the year 1891, His Highness took the first practical step towards the foundation of the system of state-aided popular education in the country districts. He ordered that in every village where there should be found sixteen children ready for elementary instruction, a school should be opened; and the village schoolmasters in general were, for the future, to be reckoned among the servants of the village, with a monthly salary paid by the Revenue Department. To the direct question, put to him during his voyage to India in November, 1925, which did he consider was the greatest success among the reforms introduced by him into Baroda, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad replied without hesitation, "Free and compulsory education."

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III's most enduring contributions was his support for individuals who would go on to shape modern India. Among them was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, whom Sayajirao Gaekwad personally sponsored for higher education abroad. Recognizing Ambedkar's brilliance and the barriers he faced as a member of a marginalized community, the Maharaja extended financial assistance that enabled him to study at Columbia University and later at the London School of Economics. This act of foresight and generosity not only transformed Ambedkar's life but also profoundly influenced the course of India's social and constitutional history.

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III's legacy is thus not only in the institutions he built but, in the lives, he touched—through reforms, through education, and through his belief that knowledge was the true path to dignity and progress. His vision continues to resonate as a reminder that leadership is measured not by power alone, but by the ability to uplift others.

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#### Reference:

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