

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj: His Contribution for the Eradication of Untouchability

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Maharashtra is known for its precursive thought of Phule-Shahu-Ambedkar, and Maharashtra's disposition and creation of the state itself is based on the thoughts on these great social reformers. They were the social reformers who devoted their entire life to establish social equality by destroying social disparities like caste-based, religion-based, gender-based, and class-based inequalities in the society. Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj is named as the champion of the social revolution. He significantly worked to establish social equality and creating a new society in Maharashtra. Maharaj undertook very significant task of directing the work of Mahatma Phule who is forerunner of social revolution whereas Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar advocated and worked towards its goal. Shahu Maharaj not only advocated the idea of equality but consistently tried to give social justice to the people through progressive actions, revolutionary decisions, and laws. He believed that the non-Brahmin Bahjans Society, to bring Dalits, the downtrodden and then underprivileged in the main stream and their all inclusive development is the real upliftment of the country.

Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj was the royal king and pioneer of the society for the common people that conceptualized rational thinking and eradicated the priesthood. He was aware of the sufferings of the common people where he was a part of people's life. So he remained sociable and a sensitive king.

The present research paper studies the contribution of Rajarshri Shahu Maharaj for the upliftment of untouchables.

Objective of the Research:

To study the contribution of Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati about the eradication of untouchability.

Research Method:

The present research has been done with descriptive method.

Sources of research:

Present research is based on the secondary source and for that books, articles and various reports etc. are used.

Content Analysis:

Among the various social contributions of Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, the most significant contribution is reservation policy. Shahu Maharaj's important objective behind implementation of the reservation policy was to establish social equality caste-based inequality was rooted deeply in the society. At that time he was aware that social equality will not be created without empowering the Dalit community, the neglected, deprived and marginalized sections in social terms. That is why on 26th July 1902, a historic decision was taken for the upliftment of the underprivileged and the Dalits and revolutionary manifesto was issued in which it is stated that at present in Kolhapur province, the efforts are taken to provide education to all castes and to encourage them. But the condition of Dalit people does not seem to have improved. For this reason one hundred and fifty vacant seats in the province will be reserved for backward class people i.e. the decision of reservation policy was taken to promote the education of the backward class people and then offer them those opportunities of

social equality and then the manifesto was issued for the purpose of making it available.

This very revolutionary step was taken for the upliftment of Dalits. In the contemporary period untouchability was practised in Indian Society. Social discrimination, superiority, inferiority was dominant. The monopoly of education was concentrated in the hands of a handful of people. It was impossible to get education, job and position of honour in the government to the non-Brahmin Bahujans whereas Dalits were kept away from everything. They were treated worse than animals. Shahu Maharaj started movements for the upliftment of the untouchables and took one revolutionary step after another so that untouchables can live a life respectfully and he did a valuable task of liberating the society trapped in mental-social slavery for centuries.

Along with the reservation manifesto, the manifestos regarding the eradication of untouchability were issued. As per this order, the practise of untouchability in revenue, justice, education, charitable hospitals and public places in the state was prohibited another very important thing is, he abolished patrimony system. Patrimony of all Mahars in Province was lapsed and those lands were nominated in the name of people. Those lands were transferred in their name and Maharaja decided to free them from the responsibility of patrimony forever in 1918. Also untouchable were appointed in the position of Talathi, police, education and postal departments. He made Gangaram Kamble to start the hotel with the name of Satyasudharak. Also Dattoba Pawar was appointed as the chairman of the municipal. It means that Shahu Maharaj provided an opportunity to an untouchable to work on such a big position for the first time. Provident fund scheme was implemented to provide financial assistance to employed untouchables for old age, sickness etc. Along with it, a very important and historic decision was that - Mahar, Mang, Ramoshi, Pardhi castes, were considered criminals in the Sansthan, and were forced for their daily attendance. As per the order passed on 27th July, 2018 the method of attendance was brought to an end.

Maharaja emancipated from slavery. Wherever the untouchables were trapped in oppressive bonds by the social system, he worked to stop these practices and created a glorious history of human liberation. Also he encouraged inter-caste marriage in Kolhapur Province. Bhavani Mandir, the temple that was situated in the palace, over there the entry was prohibited for the untouchables, but Maharaj made possible changes and then the entry was allocated for the untouchables. Children of highly educated Dalits were granted advocate charters Dalit children were given royal patronage.

According to Maharaja, untouchability is a stigma. Therefore, it is found that he took the favour of untouchables openly. Reformation of the country and emancipation of untouchability are two sides of the same coin. Also the word 'untouchable' is blasphemous.' You are not untouchable. You are the components of Hindi nationalism, more intelligent, more powerful, more selfless than those who consider you untouchable. I don't consider you untouchables. We are equal siblings. Shahu Maharaj was one who believed that their rights were equal. Apart from this, Rajshree Shahu Maharaj has made special efforts to bring the nomadic tribes into the stream of development. In this reference, Laxman Mane says, "Rajashri Shahu Maharaj loved the nomadic caste with the love like mother and affection like father." Such people had faith in Maharaj like believe in God. Apart from the untouchables, people of nomadic castes also had to live the life like marginalized at that time. Some of them

used to live in the forest. The British people had to declare these tribes as criminals. Such tribes should be treated with humanity and love. He took some decisions with action. People of Dombari, Fasepardhi, Makadwala, Rajput, Bhamte castes were settled by providing them land for building houses. Their settlements were made. He encouraged their art, skills. The people of Korawi were employed in the menagerie. A stout boy named Ramu of Korawi was made a renowned wrestler. Overall, he helped these tribes to live as human beings by keeping them away from criminal tendencies.

Also, Shahu Maharaj was aware about the origin of inequality in the society lies in caste discrimination. For that, he made the efforts to eliminate caste discrimination. In the contemporary social situation, action plans were made to eradicate the caste system completely, rotibandi, betibandi, business ban etc. A law legalizing inter-caste marriage was enacted in the Kolhapur state and twenty-five inter-caste marriages were celebrated. In relation to business also, a manifesto was published in Kolhapur Gazette on 22 February 2018 to abolish the Balutedari system in the state. Shahu Maharaj eliminated the restrictions on business and freedom that were based only due to caste from social and religious slavery by liberating business, providing lands, and equality.

Conclusion:

Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj was a very sensitive king. The contemporary social conditions fostered extreme social inequality. In such situations, the task of bringing about reforms and creating social unity was very difficult indeed. But still he worked to bring the change in that situation and especially among the untouchables and nomads in an absolute planned manner. He gave priority to social equality while maintaining social commitment. By realizing that mainstreaming the disadvantaged, backward sections of the society is important to establish equality in the society, he made tireless efforts for their development.

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