

**Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj : Social and Educational Reforms**  
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**Abstract :**

Shahu Maharaj wanted to promote the Depressed Classes in the education sector, and the administrative process of his state. Hence, he started the idea of free education (Bagade, 1982). Through education, he wanted to include the lower caste community in the administration. In his period, the untouchables were not aware of the long-term benefit of education. Hence, Chh. Shahu decided to provide education as compulsory merit good to them all. He was very familiar with the concentrated power of the forward communities in administration and bureaucracy. So he realised it was essential to spread knowledge in all society before transferring power to the lower castes. Hence he made education compulsory for all. He advised that free and compulsory primary education is the only invigorating tonic that will enable the lower classes to throw off the burdens of the past

**Introduction :**

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur; the most popular Maratha King with a revolutionary vision. He was a social reformer to work for rural and low-caste indigent by providing them free education along with hostel facility in Kolhapur state. Even in today's era, his foresight can be seen everywhere while considering development of Kolhapur, Maharashtra and India as well. Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj was a social reformer and a visionary who was driven towards the development of his people and the betterment of the socially deprived sectors. He strongly believed in equality amongst all members of the society. In his rule, he initiated many revolutionary schemes in the caste discriminating system to promote equality. He also initiated compulsory free primary education in all his states.

There are reasons why Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati is considered a classic social revolutionary in the reformist tradition of Maharashtra. Ruler of one of the two seats (the other being Satara) of the Maratha empire founded by Chhatrapati Shivaji, he consciously exposed himself to outside influences and especially the modern European ideals of democracy, fraternity and individual liberty. Back home, he interacted with prominent rationalists and reformists like Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar. Educated at Rajkot's Rajkumar College, Shahu Chhatrapati travelled extensively in Europe and India, absorbed all that he could, and implemented many of those things in Kolhapur

That he was much ahead of his time is evidenced by the astounding trajectory and range of the revolutionary and reformist laws/decrees/manifestos he issued. Like the quota manifesto, many of these legislations predated, by several decades, similar laws that the Maharashtra

legislature or Parliament passed. Like the Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1917, the Legal Sanction to Inter-caste and Inter-religion Marriage Act of 1919, the Law for Prevention of Cruelty against Women, 1919, and the Manifesto against Observance of Untouchability, 1919.

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj believed that no country could make progress without education. The best politicians, great warriors are not born in an illiterate country (Keer, 1976). So it is essential to give free and compulsory education to the people. He identified the importance of education to the masses, and the need to make it free and compulsory. Education is essential for survival and national progress: therefore, to compel parents to send their children to school, Chh. Shahu Maharaj issued a declaration that it is the responsibility of all parents to send their children to school when they attain schooling age. If they delayed it, Mamledar used to fine each parent Rs.1 per month. Chh. Shahu Maharaj instituted scholarship programs for students from the backward sections of society, since 1911. To bear the educational expenditure, he taxed officers, doctors, and businessmen whose incomes were more than Rs. 100. They used to pay 2% of their incomes for the educational cess. He is said to have built as many as 21 hostels in Kolhapur for various castes and communities, several of which survive and have contributed immensely to the cause of education among the backward classes .

These measures greatly changed the social and administrative profile of the princely state. In 1917, when the Act making primary education free and compulsory was passed, Kolhapur had only 27 schools with 1,296 students. By the time he died in 1922, Shahu Chhatrapati had helped build 420 schools which admitted more than 22,000 students. When he took over the reins of the state, the Rajaram High School and College had only 7.6 % students from the non-Brahmin castes. By 1922, this figure was 37.7%. In the general administration, the percentage of employees from non-Brahmin castes went up from 5.63% to 62.11% in 1922. The backward classes accounted for 71.71% of the staff in the private administration, up from a mere 13.21% in 1894.

Chh. Shahu Maharaj knew that without providing education to all equality in society wasn't possible. Traditional society had many superstitions, ideas, and beliefs which adversely affected the principle of equality in society. According to Shinde (1995), Chh. Shahu thought that education is a weapon that is very useful in the war of life. He also mentioned that in this age the struggle to survive was increasing and only the educated will survive. In his opinion, without proper nutrition, man becomes weak and without knowledge, man becomes backward (Latthe, 1924; 4. Kavalekar, 1979). Hence, education is the most important tool for solving many problems.

Being well educated on western lines, Shahu Maharaj realized the importance of equality, liberty and fraternity which was a dream to Indian context. He knows the fact that the Shahu Maharaj established many hostels in Kolhapur and even supported economically the other hostels in different parts of Maharashtra for the education of the non-Brahmans. Some of his hostels are Jain Hostel (1901), Victoria Maratha Hostel (1901), Lingayat Hostel (1907), Mahomedan hostel (1906), NamdeoShimpi Hostel, Sonar Hostel (1921), and Miss Clark Hostel for Dalits (1908) were founded to impart education among non-Brahmans.<sup>6</sup> These hostels played crucial role in education and social change in the early years of nineteenth century Maharashtra. His hostels made it possible for many students from all over Maharashtra to come to Kolhapur and achieve their education and progress further in their lives.

History doesn't focus on the efforts undertaken by Chh. Shahu Maharaj for women's' education, but he had made significant endeavours for providing education to women, especially to those from backward communities. On 3rd March 1913, he announced RadhabaiAkkasaheb Maharaj Scholarships and Shri Nandkuvar Maharani, Bhavnagar, Scholarships for lady students in Kolhapur state. As Vakil and Natarajan, 1966, recorded in their writings, the backward community girls of the time hesitated in the taking up education in schools and colleges. Hence, to solve this problem Maharaj had appointed the lady servants belonging to backward communities to assure lady students. Chh. Shahu Maharaj also made efforts to provide English language education to girl students. From 1911 to 1914, a total of 8369 girls had received education through this system. With understanding the necessity of education, Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj established a Training College for Women to meet the need of woman teachers. It was made compulsory for students that after completion of their education, they had to teach the girls in the schools. Shahu Maharaj sent KrushnabaiKelavkar, a brilliant student to Grant Medical College for medical education. In 1902, he appointed her as an Assistant Medical Officer at 'Albert Edward Medical Hospital'. He again granted a scholarship to her for specialization in Gynecology to London. After successfully completing the course she rejoined her duty in 1903. Shahu Maharaj looked at women's education as a necessity to bring gender equality, so he tried to encourage women's education. When the girls passed from the schools meant for boys, he granted amount of Rs. 512 to the teachers. He also encouraged the girls of shudras and dalits for education. For this purpose he established a school for girls from Chambhar, Dhor and sanctioned Rs 96 for the purpose. He desired the emancipation of women through the education and for this purpose insisted on good moral education. Once in a discussion with Tofkhane and Bhaskarrao Jadhav, he said that 'if women should get a proper education, which make them understand the difference between good and bad; if they

would get it from the teachers of good moral, they would never go on the wrong ways'. Thus he cared and insisted on the quality of education. Shahu Maharaj opened many schools for the spread of education among women and dalits. The Brahmin intelligentsia started movement for education for Brahmin women, while Satyashodhak movement under the leadership of Mahatma Phule started the movement for women, shudras and dalits. The Christian missionaries were also working for women's education. In the nineteenth century, the non-Brahmin movement under the leadership of Shahu Maharaj also devotedly worked for education of women. He considered education important for women so as to bring up the children properly and encouraged the girls for education in many ways. He exempted the fees of the girls in Rajaram College and also declared scholarships for them. He also declared the scholarships of Rs. 40 each, in the names of, 'Shri Radhabai Akkasaheb Maharaj Scholarship' and 'Shri Nandkunwar Maharani Bhavnagar Scholarship' for first two girls in the ranking of standard IV of Marathi medium schools in Kolhapur and Bawda. He ordered to help the women's education in his state and provided boarding, mess and educational facilities for girls. On account of his efforts the percentage of women's literacy rose from 0.10 to 0.35 in the Kolhapur state. He had contributed greatly to increase the percentage of literate women due to his various efforts. He opened a free school, 'Ahilyabai Girls' High School', for girls towards the eastern side of his Royal Palace and he also opened another school for girls in Kolhapur, 'Ma. Laxmibai Girls' High School'. In 1911, Shahu Maharaj made the provision of Free Education to Dalit girls and boys and devotedly worked for the emancipation of the Dalit and women and he already started a hostel for them in 1908. There were only 05 schools for the dalits, due to his attempts the number increased up to 27 in 1911-12 and from 1917 onwards he ran 7 hostels for them through his personal and royal expenditure.

Shahu Maharaj never discriminated in the educational system on the basis of caste, gender etc. He not only cared about the education of non-Brahmin women, but equally cared about the education of the Brahmin women. He helped Dr. Anandibai Joshi by sending her amount to return India from America and decide to appoint her as 'Assistant Darbar Surjan'; but she died after reaching India. Shahu Maharaj was very keen to eradicate the evil practices like untouchability, which was prevalent in every aspect of social life, including education. Some of the teachers instructed strictly the students of Mahar, Mang, to seat out of the classes, in verandas under the traditional influence of untouchability. When Shahu Maharaj came to know this practice, he ordered to close special schools for Dalits and include them into regular schools and sit all students together. In another order, he issued that those educational institutes which were getting grants from Government should focus and treat Dalit students with love, because they were unable to

progress at their own unlike touchable; if there was anybody who dislike it should send resignation within six weeks, and off course, they would not grant the pension by the government. If any of the institutes had any objection, the government should stop the grants immediately.’ This incidence is the strong proof of his modern outlook towards the social practices. He was helping Dalits in many ways and he personally attempted to annihilate untouchability.

Shahu Maharaj had criticized the educated non-Brahmins for almost ignoring the cause of emancipation of dalits and of the education to nonBrahmins. Shahu Maharaj was so liberal to provide all kinds of help for the cause of education of the non-Brahmins, Dalits and women. So he wholeheartedly helped various institutes and persons not only in the Kolhapur State, but also from various parts of Maharashtra. V. B. Patil had founded the ‘Tararani University’ at Kolhapur in order to expand the women’s education with the help of Shahu Maharaj. Shahu Maharaj even bore the severe critique on the issue of women’s education from his family when he educated his daughter-in-law, IndumatiRanisaheb, after becoming widow at the early age of eleven. He decided to educate her so as to make her an able person. At that time, his family members including his wife criticized him on his decision. But after all he managed to educate her at Sonatali, a village near Kolhapur by appointing talented teachers, and she passed the examination of matriculation with second ranking. He even wanted to appoint her as the chief of the department of Education in the State, but due to her death it was not possible.

### **Conclusion**

Thus Shahu Maharaj contributed vehemently for the educating shudras, women and dalits so as to bring them in the mainstream of the society. He made every possible arrangement for the cause in his capacity as a king of the Kolhapur State; not limited to it, but also extended his educational movement throughout Maharashtra.

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