

Philosophy of Science and Religion/Spirituality

BIOGRAPHY CHOSEN : RAJARSHI CHHATRAPATI SHAHU MAHARAJ
NAME OF THE STUDENT : DEVANSHU SURANA
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History

Shahu (also known as **Chhatrapati Rajarshi Shahu**) (26 June 1874 – 6 May 1922) of the Bhonsle dynasty of Marathas was a Raja (reign. 1894 – 1900) and the first Maharaja (1900–1922) of the Indian princely state of Kolhapur. Rajarshi Shahu was considered a true democrat and social reformer. Shahu Maharaj was an able ruler who was associated with many progressive policies during his rule. From his coronation in 1894 till his demise in 1922, he worked for the cause of the lower caste subjects in his state. Primary education to all regardless of caste and creed was one of his most significant priorities.

His works and Contributions to the Society

Chhatrapati Shahu occupied the throne of Kolhapur for 28 years, from 1894 to 1922; during this period he initiated numerous social reforms in his empire. He is credited with doing much to improve conditions for the lower castes. He also ensured suitable employment for students thus educated, thereby creating one of the earliest affirmative action (50% reservation to weaker sections) programs in history. Many of these measures came in to effect in the year 1902. He started Shahu Chhatrapati Weaving and Spinning Mill in 1906 to provide employment. Rajaram college was built by Shahu Maharaj, and later was named after him. His emphasis was on education, his aim being to make learning available to the masses. He introduced a number of educational programs to promote education among his subjects. He established hostels for different ethnicities and religions, including Panchals, Devadnya, Nabhik, Shimpi, Dhor-Chambhar communities as well as for Muslims, Jains and Christians. He established the Miss Clarke Boarding School for the socially quarantined segments of the community. Shahu introduced several scholarships for poor meritorious students from backward castes. He also initiated compulsory free primary education for all in his state. He established Vedic Schools which enabled students from all castes and classes to learn the scriptures, thus propagating Sanskrit education among all. He also founded special schools for village heads or 'patils' to make them better administrators.

Sahu was a strong advocate of equality among all strata of society and refused to give the Brahmins any special status. He removed Brahmins from the post of Royal Religious advisers when they refused to perform religious rites for non-Brahmins. He appointed a young Maratha scholar in the post and bestowed him the title of 'Kshatra Jagadguru' (the world teacher of the Kshatriyas). This incident together with Shahu's encouragement of the non-Brahmins to read and recite the Vedas led to the Vedokta controversy in Maharashtra. This dispute brought a storm of protest from the elite strata of society and vicious opposition to his rule. He established the Deccan Rayat Association in Nipani during 1916. The association sought to secure political rights for non-Brahmins and invite their equal participation in politics. Shahu was influenced by the works of Jyotiba Phule, and long patronized the Satya Shodhak Samaj, formed by Phule.

Accomplishments



Shahu made great efforts to abolish the concept of caste segregation and untouchability. He introduced (perhaps the first known) reservation system in government jobs for untouchable castes. His Royal Decree ordered his subjects to treat every member of society as equal, and granting the untouchables equal access to public utilities like wells and ponds, as well as establishments like schools and hospitals. He legalised inter-caste marriage and made great efforts to improve the situation of the dalits. He discontinued the hereditary transfer of titles and tenures of revenue collectors.

He also worked towards betterment of the condition of women in his empire. He established schools to educate women, and also spoke vociferously on the topic of women's education. He legalised widow remarriage in 1917 and made efforts towards stopping child marriage. In 1920, Shahu introduced a law banning the Devadasi *pratha* (the practice of offering girls to God), which essentially led to sexual exploitation of girls at the hands of the clergy.

Shahu introduced a number of projects which enabled his subjects to sustain themselves in their chosen professions. The Shahu Chhatrapati Spinning and Weaving Mill, dedicated marketplaces and co-operative societies for farmers were established to free his subjects from predacious middlemen in trading. He made credits available to farmers looking to buy equipment to modernise agricultural practices, and even established the King Edward Agricultural Institute to instruct farmers in increasing crop yield and related techniques. He initiated the Radhanagari Dam on 18 February 1907; the project was completed in 1935 and made Kolhapur self-sufficient in water.

He was a great patron of art and culture, encouraging music and the fine arts. He supported writers and researchers in their endeavours. He installed gymnasiums and wrestling pitches and highlighted the importance of health consciousness among the youth.

His seminal contribution in social, political, educational, agricultural and cultural spheres earned him the title of Rajarshi, which was bestowed upon him by the Kurmi warrior community of Kanpur.

Summary

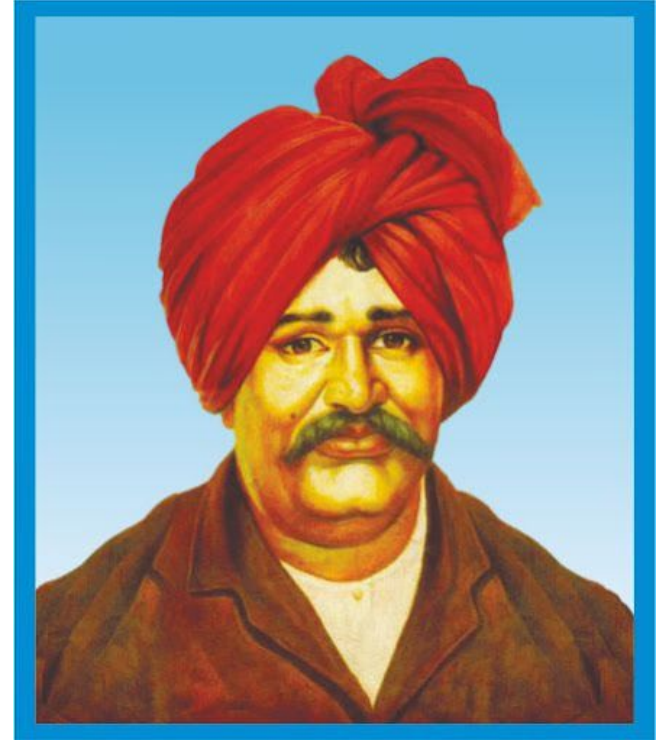


- Shahu Maharaj, during his rule, attempted to liberate the Non-Brahmin class from the grip of biased casteism. He enacted various laws against traditional standing and religion and offered significance to the current position of women in society. He committed himself to the social transformation idea of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule.
- Nevertheless, he thought that education could not serve as a tool for the evolution and progress of Non-Brahmins and Dalits. So, he legislated various laws to advance social equality, justice, and value in his rule. Shahu Maharaj resuscitated the 'Satyashodhak Samaj' of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. He was a passionate supporter of ideologies by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. He understood the importance of education in the life of Bahujan Samaj.
- Hence, legislated the Law of free and compulsory primary education. In the initial phase of the 19th century, the social status and economic wellbeing of women was not at all satisfactory in Kolhapur at the time of Shahu Maharaj, as portrayed in the review of education in Bombay state (1855 – 1965).

- He formulated and initiated the execution of education policy for the empowerment of women. As per the opinion of Shahu Maharaj, the state was undergoing losses due to a lack of education in Bahujan society, including women. The priests had a hold over the temples, and their impedance needs to be ceased by treating and making the schools as the temples. So that knowledge of real religion would get revealed. The stature of women in the society, i.e. in the prevailing caste system and Varna system was worst.
- They were abused and misused. Shahu Maharaj observed the situation and genuinely thought about improving the lives of the women in the dominant male society. He assessed the issues of women and concluded that education is not the only answer. He sensed the necessity of robust and enforceable laws to prevent the exploitation of the women in the current societal caste and varnas system. His commitment to creating particular laws for women's empowerment was incredible. They are significant today. The legislated laws by Shahu Maharaj are as follows:

1. **Free and Compulsory Primary Education to All Act, 1917** : All the people of the Kolhapur province must be able to read and write and thereby making their development the compulsory education committee is framing this Act of compulsory education. He endorsed an order on 8th September 1917 to make free and compulsory primary education to all in Kolhapur state.
2. **Inter-caste and Inter-religion Marriage Act, 1919** : During the period of Shahu Maharaj, inter-caste and inter-religion marriages were not acceptable to the society. The girl willing to make such marriage was highly criticized. Shahu Maharaj took the initiative and enacted the Law to give legal permission to the registration of such marriages. Of course, at the time of such marriages, the minimum required age of the bride should be above 14 years, and that of bridegroom be above 18 years. This Law enacted on 12th July 1919, in a period when there was a tradition of child marriages.

Pictures of Rajarshi Chhatrapti Shahu





THANK YOU!