

**RULER AND SOCIAL THINKER,
CHHATRAPATI SHAHUJI MAHARAJ**

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Abstract :

Shahu maharaj is credited with doing much to further the lot of the lower castes, and indeed this assessment is warranted. He did much to make education and employment available to all: he not only subsidized education in his state, eventually providing free education to all, but also opened several hostels in Kolhapur for students hailing from many different non-brahmin communities, thereby facilitating the education of the rural and low-caste indigent. He also ensured suitable employment for students thus educated, thereby creating one of the earliest Affirmative action programs in history. Many of these measures were effected in the year 1902. Shahu's other initiatives included restricting Child marriage in his state and the encouragement of intercaste marriage and widow remarriage. He long patronized the Satya Shodhak Samaj but later moved towards the Arya Samaj. Under the influence of these social-reform movements, Shahu arranged for several non-brahmin youths to be trained to function as priests, in defiance of timeless convention which reserved the priesthood for those of the brahmin caste. However, he faced opposition from many including Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak , the very famous patriot of that time. After Shahu Maharaj's death, this reform died its natural death.

Key Words : Ruler, Social Thinker.

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. This website is a small initiative to spread the greatness of the visionary king.

After 100 years, when not a single thought of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj has become anachronistic, his vision & strategies are still as fresh as the blooming flower in the midst of nature. During a short life span and his tenure as a Chhatrapati, he has marked his works in the history of our nation

He vehemently opposed caste discrimination and took many steps to abolish untouchability. He introduced reservation for the untouchables in government jobs. He issued a royal decree in his Princely State to treat all humans equal and to give equal access to the untouchables to public utilities like common wells, schools, hospitals and common buildings. His commitment to abolish untouchability was such that he was even ready to give up his throne for the service of the dalit or lower class people. He legalised inter caste marriages and discontinued the hereditary tenures (Watan) of revenue collectors (Kulkarni), infamous for exploiting the masses, as also the Mahar tenures that enslaved the Mahars (a lower caste). In 1917 he legalised remarriages and widow remarriages in his Princely State. He also introduced a law banning the practice of Devdasi (a tradition where a girl is offered to God).

Rajarshi Shahu is considered one of the leaders of the anti-Brahmin movement. He strived for giving the masses and lower class communities equal participation in political power. In 1916, he established the Deccan Rayat Association in Nipani with the objective of securing political rights for the non-Brahmins. He toured Maharashtra extensively and held public meetings to promote the cause of the anti-Brahmin movement. The struggle over the right to recite the Vedas occurred in Rajarshi Shahu's time. This struggle created a storm in the social life of Maharashtra, and gave birth to the Satyashodhak (truth finding) movement.

The Indian postal department has issued a stamp dedicated to Shahu. On the first-issue citation, the government of India hails Shahu as "A social revolutionary, a true democrat, a visionary, a patron of the theatre, music and sports and a prince of the masses. Chhatrapati Shahu was a many-splendoured personality who thought and acted far ahead of his times."

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The great ruler and social thinker, Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj died on 6 May, 1922. It was believed that reforms started by him also faded away as there was nobody to lead the movement.

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