

CHAPTER - V

SHAHU'S CRUSADE AGAINST UNTOUCHABILITY

The depressed classes of India in general and of Maharashtra in particular owe a deep debt of gratitude to the late Rajarashi Shahu Maharaj for the work that he did for them. Not only did he fight fiercely on their behalf to free them from the yokes of slavery, ignorance and poverty to which they were subjected for thousands of years by the higher castes, but he also laid the foundation on which their future leader Dr. B. R. - Ambedkar could stand and carry on the unfinished task with undaunted courage.¹

The pioneering reforms that he introduced and implemented for upliftment of untouchables fifty years before have all now been found a place in the constitution of free India. During his administration from 1894 to 1922 he introduced reforms for the welfare of his subjects but one task to which he specially devoted his energies was the removal of the social inequalities and disabilities imposed upon the untouchables who formed country's 1/5th of the total population.

Right from the beginning his realisation appears to be that there was a necessity of setting on the right track to the whole social machine, which for ages, had strayed along lines harmful to national growth. To do this he had to embark on a strenuous campaign against the evils, the traditional hierarchy of caste.

According to Prof. A. B. Latthe : " Among the varied and beneficent activities of his Highness the place of honour must unquestionably be given to his stupendous ameliorative work for the depressed or untouchable classes in the Deccan and more particularly in his own territory. And that for two reasons. In the first place it was one of the most effective and far-reaching of the social activities of his life. And secondly, the removal of the inhuman and disgraceful ban of untouchability pronounced against millions of human beings by the Hindu community is the acid test of patriotism which very few people in India are still prepared to stand. The work which his Highness accomplished in this respect was, and even now is, one which requires the highest moral courage on the part of the reformer and His Highness proved to the hilt that he possessed that courage to a very high degree indeed."²

NOTIFICATION OF 26th JULY, 1902 :

When Shahu Chhatrapati took the administration in his hand in 1894, majority of State Officers were Brahmins. Other backward classes remained aloof from education and consequently from State services. Thus, from the beginning Shahu realised the necessity of settling on the right track the whole social machine which for ages had strayed along lines harmful to national growth. To do this he had to embark on a strenuous campaign against the evils of the traditional hierarchy of caste. He set about his work systematically. His first step to this effect was the reservation of 50% of posts for backward classes.

In the year 1902 High Highness was invited to England to attend the coronation of His Majesty King Edward VII. During this sojourn in England, he issued the order from England to the effect that 50% posts of the State service should be reserved for the Backward Class candidates. This was indeed a landmark in his career as a social reformer. The original order dated 26th July, 1902 stated.³

... 79/-

Endeavours have been made in recent years in the Kolhapur State to foster and encourage the education of all classes of the subjects but so far, His Highness regrets to have to record that those endeavours have not in the case of the more backward classes met with the success that was hoped for. His Highness has, he immediately ordered that, from the date of this order 50% of the vacancies that may occur shall be filled by recruits from among the backward classes. In all offices in which the proportion of Officers at the backward classes at present less than 50% the next appointment shall be given to a member of those classes. A quarterly return of all appointments made after the issue of this order shall be submitted by all heads of Departments. For the purpose of these orders the backward classes shall be understood to mean all castes other than Brahmins, Prabhu, Shenavi, Parsees and other advanced classes."

His formula appears to be that the reservation of post would encourage the backward classes for education and their education would fetch them the offices.

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF
EDUCATION AMONGST THE UNTOUCHABLE CLASSES :

The problems of untouchables were very dear to heart of Maharaja. In the month of February, 1908 he founded an educational society with the object of spreading education among the untouchable⁴ classes of the Kolhapur State. Rao Bahadur Sabnis was the President and Shri. G. K. Kadam, and A. B. Olkar, B.A. - were its Secretaries. They had at that time secured an annual subscription of Rs. 300/- and the society expected a substantial help from His Highness Shahu Chhatrapati. Major Wodehouse, then Political Agent, also took a deep interest in the society and became a First Class - Member of it.

The immediate object of the society being to help some of the promising boys of those classes to complete their secondary and higher education in the local Rajaram High School and College. They founded a special class to coach up some boys in their vernacular studies.⁵ Students were attending the class. One of the secondary objects of the society was to raise these to a higher level of social life. Special prizes were awarded to clean boys in the coaching class and for such

scholarships had been awarded to pupils of the -
untouchable classes at Kolhapur.

Again, a course of lectures had been arranged by this society to foster a desire for education among these classes and small but numerous prizes were proposed to be awarded to deserving students belonging to these classes studying in the Primary Schools in the State.

The Administrative Report of 1907-08 states His Highness is a great believer in the policy of levelling up and his steady efforts to lift up the educationally backward classes by giving them a helping hand have so far been successful. The founding of the above institutes has given an impetus to the education of the comparatively illiterate communities and the Maharaja had been further encouraging them by offering them suitable appointments in the State.⁶

MISS VIOLET CLARKE

AND SHAHU CHHATRAPATI :

Maharaja had regard and respect for all those who like him supported the cause of the underdogs. Miss Clarke, the daughter of George Clarke, the Governor of Bombay, was such a one who had sympathy for -

untouchables. She had rendered great service for the emancipation of the depressed classes in Bombay Presidency. Shahu's mission was the same. Shahu had great regard for Miss Clarke. She was arranging concert and collecting money for her mission.

Maharaja came in active contact with her when she visited Kolhapur with her father in March, 1906 to attend the Marriage of Maharaja's daughter. The correspondence between the Maharaja and Miss Clarke throws some light on her effort to aid the depressed classes.

MISS VIOLET CLARKE DEPRESSED

CLASSES BOYS' HOSTEL (1908) :

Shahu remembered her gratefully as the supporter of the cause for which he was agitating. A hostel for boys from depressed classes was opened in 1908 and it was named as Miss Violet Clarke Hostel with the permission of Sir George Clarke. Maharaja granted a well ventilated building with a large compound useful as a play-ground near the Mahar Talav with a monthly permanent grant of Rs. 25/- for scholarship etc. for the boarding. There were 6 students residing in the hostel of whom only two were boarders in 1908-09.⁷

In response to the urge of the society all boys of the depressed classes learning in the Rajaram High School were exempted from paying their fees from 1908 onwards.

The year 1919 was landmark in the Shahu's anti-untouchability movement. He by his order closed all all separate schools meant for the low castes and threw all Public Schools open for the untouchables. The order that he issued on 30/9/1919 states.

From the ensuing Dasara of this year 1919 all the separate schools for untouchables in the Karveer State excluding Jahagiri would be closed forever and any boy from this community should be admitted in the Government Schools like other boys from higher community. As the practice of untouchability is not to be observed in schools, all boys from all castes and religions should sit and learn together.⁸

In the year 1919 there were 16 schools maintained specially for the benefit of the students of the depressed classes and Shahu closed all those forever. He threw all general schools open to the untouchable students. This proved to be one of the most effective steps of Shahu in removing the civil disabilities hitherto imposed on the untouchables in the schools.⁹

He was keen on extending all facilities for education of the lower classes. By order of 1911 he exempted them completely from the school fees.¹⁰ He granted in 1919 10 scholarships of Rs. 8/- each per month for B.C. students who were admitted to the Talathi class.¹¹

To encourage untouchables to education, he also deposited promissory notes of Rs. 10,000/- in the State Treasury in memory of late Shri Shajaji Maharaja. And the interest on this amount would come to Rs. 500/- and from this interest 8 scholarships of Rs. 5/- each per month were started for untouchable boys.¹²

HIS MEASURES AGAINST UNTOUCHABILITY :

Maharaja was a champion of social justice and equal opportunities for all. He believed in protecting the weak against the strong. The aim of his measures was to raise the lower castes from their object position in society by employing them and fitting them for hitherto closed avenues of life. For lack of educated men among them he had to content himself by employing them in his household services. He appointed untouchable Coachmen. The Coachmen placed on the Coach-boy's of

State carriages on all occasions even during his daughter's marriage came publicly in association with the upper caste men who had to tolerate their presence and touch on all occasions. In India since past it was considered a privilege to serve as an elephant driver. His Highness employed some untouchables in this - popularly exalted position. The right to have swords in their belts on public ceremonial occasions was a badge of Kshatriyaship. His Highness gave some of them these swords of honour and allowed them to appear in State functions like the soldiers and sardars of the warrior class.¹³

Maharaja took various administrative measures with the object of removing the bar of untouchability. The first step was the appointment of the untouchables as Talathis,¹⁴ the new stipendiary village ministers who were hitherto members of the heaven born, Brahmin community. The untouchable Talathis thus appointed became important officers of village. The men who always stood outside the village chavadi were at once lifted up to the side of the headman holding charge of the Revenue Daftar. The change was as sudden as it was dramatic. Preference was given to fit men of the depressed classes over everybody else. They were allowed hence to be promoted according to merits to every -

departments of the State. Some of them were appointed clerks in offices in February, 1919.

The Medical Institutions in the State were ordered to treat the depressed class patients on terms of perfect equality with others. Any Officer, Dresser or Nurse who objected to this was asked to resign his or her post. On January 15th, 1919 the educational department was directed to treat these classes on a similar footing of perfect equality with others.¹⁵

His Highness extended to them special representation in the Kolhapur Municipality which was now reconstituted on a communal basis in 1920-21, and a young man of the Chamar caste soon became the Chairman of the Board. The chief among other measures adopted were - (1) The abolition of untouchability on water-pipes, tanks, wells, in Dharmashalas, Hospitals, Schools and other Public Places, (2) Free Boarding Houses for them at Sontali and the Station Bungalow. (3) Abolition of separate schools for the untouchables. The enrolment of several untouchable members as pleaders in the State.¹⁶

To end the discriminative treatment to the untouchables in the State Departments, Maharaja issued

prompt orders to all the authorities directing them to follow his instructions in this respect rigorously. His order of 15th January, 1919 was thus.

All Officers in the State, Revenue, Judicial or General Department must treat the untouchables who have entered the State service with kindness and equality. If any State Officer has any objection to treat the untouchable according to the above order, he will have to give notice of resignation within six weeks from the receipt of this order and resign his post. He will be entitled to no pension. His Highness expects every subject of his should be treated like a human being and not like a beast. His Highness wishes and hopes that they will follow in the Railway Authorities and Government Officers.¹⁷

In order to do away with the practice of untouchability at least at Public Places like Public Wells, Rivers, Sides, Temples etc., he passed an order on 6th Sept., 1919 to the effect that.

Untouchability is not to be observed in places such as Public Buildings, Sanatoriums, Rest Houses, Government Boarding Houses, Public Wells and River Sides. Just as Dr. Vail and Dr. Wanless of American Mission treat every one equality in their Public Buildings and

at Public Wells, we should also discard default to do so the village officers (Patil and Talathi) will be held responsible.¹⁸

SHAHU'S THOUGHTS ON UNTOUCHABILITY :

It is well known that Shri Shahu's activities of social upliftment did not confine to his State alone. He attended a number of Conferences and Meetings both of untouchable and of non-Brahmins. His addresses in these meetings and conferences speak of his own view on caste in general and untouchability in particular. At the Third All Indian Conference of the untouchables at Delhi on 16/2/1922 he expressed,

You are also to be congratulated upon that you are all collected here to make a united effort for your progress in a peaceful way. It is really suggestive of the new spirit that has been created in you. If you continue incessantly this agitation of the new spirit, this effort of self progress, this tough fight for freeing yourself from the socially degrading position, I feel quite sure that God will crown your efforts with success. I pray you not to stick to your hereditary professions alone you must make an emphatic struggle to

educate yourselves and enter into the army and the various other offices of several departments of Government. Not only that but you should follow the merchants, you should attain proficiency in all these lines and push yourselves forward.¹⁹

" The ban of untouchability, he proceeded, has been flung on you ever since ages is losing ground and I am sure a day will soon dawn when the ban will only be a by-gone word. You must learn to keenly watch your rights. Whenever you find your social rights are invaded you must have to remain firm and guard your rights not in a spirit of fighting and hatred but in a spirit of wisdom and love.²⁰

How much of this all has been attained in today's India is also a matter of probe. But how appropriate he was to think that India of no caste will be India of progress.

To crown all, there is a Boarding of the untouchables with a regular programme for removing untouchability. Some deserving members of the - untouchables were granted Sanade to practice as Vakils. Under him Kolhapur took a lead in abolishing artificial distinction between man and man, and also took a lead in equalising the status of men and women in our society.²¹

My main object in giving (Sanads) these Diplomas was to open the legal occupation to the untouchables community which by force of custom was hitherto closed against them and thus to infuse them with a sense of self confidence.²²

Except the Royal Family members and Office work no other should extract forced labour (Veth-Varal) from Mahar, Mangs etc. for their personal purposes. Even the Higher Officials such as State Diwan, State Regent or Administrators are not allowed to make use of forced labour from these backward people for any purpose other than official work. If any Patil unduly took the service of Veth Varal from any Mahar, against this order his watan would be attached. If anybody forced any Manga to the work of twisting a rope or any Nada free of any wage, he would be subject to severe punishment.

By his order of June 25, 1918 he declared that the ryots had no rights to impose their services on Mahars and that the rent free lands that Mahar held may be treated as rayatava or assessed lands. On March 3, 1919 a further step was taken on 28th March, 1919 by an order declaring that ryots need not pay the Mahars any

Baluta as the later were thence forth free from liability to compulsory service.²³

This was his act of abolition of Mahar Watan, we must note that the Mahars of post Shahu age agitated, constantly for the abolition of their watan, which had been the cause of their age old slavery under Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. They succeeded in their attempt in the year 1960, when the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly under pressure from the Mahars adopted the Bill of Abolishing Mahar Vatan.

HIS PERSONAL EXAMPLE :

Shri Shahu was not a man of ivory tower preaching ideals only from platform. What he preached that he practised and by his personal behaviour set an example for others to follow. Maharaja was the scion of the House of revered Chhatrapati. He moved about throughout the length and breadth of the Maharashtra openly, professedly and boldly eating and drinking at the hands of the untouchables who were always close by his side. The Brahmins who always shouted against such act in the name of religion dared not to mutter a word of disapprobation or protest against this act. This was his greatest service to anti-untouchability work in modern India. At the Mangaon Conference, he invited Mr. Ambedkar to

dinner with him. He freely seated the untouchables at his table, standing in the open Conference of the Depressed India at Nagpur, surrounded by Brahmins and Marathas, he called for tea and took it from the hands of untouchables. The day after he laid the foundation of the Maratha Hostel at Nasik, he also laid the foundation of the Maratha Hostel for Depressed Classes there and in the course of the meeting he took tea from the hands of the untouchables and in the full gaze of the public assembled there. He did this and similar acts on purpose. In the course of a hunting expedition, he happened to go to Tasgaon (Satara District) at midday. The first place he always went to was the segregated quarters of the Mahars. Seeing motor car and in it the great Chhatrapati the towns folk assembled round his car in their hundreds. Ignoring all the rest, he often called out for water from one of the Mahars and drank it before the eyes of all the crowd and then he went to the Palace of Patwardhan.²⁴

He intentionally helped an untouchable named Gangaram Kamble to open a Hotel in the Main Road of Kolhapur which he did Maharaja with his Court - Paraphernalia often visited the hotel for taking tea. This was his attempt to convince his countrymen that the practice of touchability was wrong.²⁵

He thus set wherever he went undoubtedly produced a desired effect both on touchables and untouchables.

Untouchables looked upon him as a demigod.

The ban of untouchability, he proceeded, has been flung over you since ages is losing ground and I am sure a day will soon dawn when the ban will only be a bygone word. You must learn.

DR.AMBEDKAR AND SHAHU MAHARAJ (1920) :

Shahu's fame as a champion of the untouchables cause had spread far and wide. Almost all prominent places in Maharashtra were given a stimulus in regard to the removal of untouchability. In several of their conferences untouchables eulogised his reforms. Shahu was organising them to fight for their own welfare and to choose their own leadership of the caste Hindus.

Sometime in 1919 Shahu had met Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. His young spirited and devoted associate Dattoba Pawar, a chamar, had made friends with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and introduced him to shahu chhatrapati.²⁶

During this period 1918-20 Dr. Ambedkar came into contact with Shahu Maharaj and correspondence and meetings were held between Shahu Maharaj and Mr.Ambedkar. At

their first meeting, there was considerable discussion about the forthcoming montague reforms. The Late Shri Khairmode has every brilliantly narrated the story of this meeting. He writes Dr. Ambedkar expressed desired to start a newspaper to voice the grievances and demands of the untouchables publically. But he was helpless for want of money. Shri Shahu went to his help and gave him Rs.2,500/- to start 'Mook Nayak'., meaning leader of the dumb, the first news paper of the untouchables Shri Shahu had regard for Dr.Ambedkar for he had shown to the world that learned men were not born among the Brahmins along.²⁷

On March 21st and 22nd, 1920 the enthusiastic Patil of the village of Mangaon in the Kagal Jahagir of the Kolhapur State organised the first conference of the Deccan untouchables under the presidentship of Mr. Ambedkar, the first Graduate of the Mahar Community.²⁸

This is the heinous from of slavery that we have imposed in this twentieth century. This practice of Hajeri sometimes prevented them from seeing their sick relations with the consequence that several died without their being seen by their relatives.

Referring to the forced labour to which the Maharas were too often subjected and of which he heard complaints, His Highness explained in the conference. But I could not do away with the practice of wealth (forced labour) for these people are hankering after watan, which consists of noting more than a bit of land, or a basket full of corn which in addition to its being itself insufficient for maintenance tempts them to confine themselves to their village with the result that they have no other alternative than to steal for their belly, I therefore, request all Balutedars and watandars, such as Mahar, not to strick upto their small watans and Balute. I specially request the Mahars to divine the whole land into pieces of ten families, like patils and sanadi shieldars and then alone you will be free from slavery. I shall be glad to give them new sanads. Other mahars will be at liberty to go out of the village and pursue some other occupation so that all of them would be saved from half starvation.²⁹

On April, 15, 1920 Shahu Maharaja went to Nasik and laid the foundation stone of the Udajirao Maratha boarding there.³⁰ Next day i.e. 16th April, 1920 he also laid the foundation stone of a Hostel for the Depressed classes there and paid a handsome donation of Rs.5,000/- on hearing of Maharaja's help to Depressed class hostel at Nasik, Dr. Ambedkar wrote to Maharaja the following letter on 30-6-1920.

On behalf of the Somavanshiya Nirashrit Shikshan Fund of Nasik I beg to thank your Highness most heartily for the kind donation of Rs.5,000/- to the said fund. The speeches which you Highness has delivered at Nasik and Nagpur (30-5-1920) have immensely stirred the depressed classes from their long slumber and a number of young men have come forward to take education which as your Highness said at Nasik is the only means that can enable the depressed classed to survive in the struggle for existence.

Since your Highness, owing to the confidence placed in me for which I am deeply grateful had declared to pay the donation through me. May I request your Highness to favour me with the amount as early as possible ?

Conveying to your Highness the deepseated sentiment of respectful gratitude of the depressed classes. I beg to remain you Highness most humble petitioner.³¹

In the end of his letter he advised Shahu that the N.B. movement must give up its alliance with Lord Sydenham and his party who were conservative and unpopular in England.

In the same letter he also entreated Maharaja for supporting mook Nayak by saying that : It is needless

for me to say that I shall be ever ready to serve in the cause of fulfilment of your Highness legitimate aspirations just as well all depend upon your Highness' help and guidance in the prosecution of all the schemes calculated for our betterment. Knowing as I do the keen interest taken by your Highness in the depressed classes it would be ³² superfluous for me to emphasize the fact the Mook Nayak.

In the same letter he also entreated Maharaja for supporting mook nayak by saying that & It is needless for me to say that I shall be ever ready to serve in the cause of fulfilment of your Highness legitimate aspirations just as well all depend upon your Highness, help and guidance in the prosecution of all the schemes calculated for our betterment. Knowing as I do the keen interest taken by your Highness in the depressed classes. It would be superfluous for me to emphasize the fact the Mook Nayak. Will find your Highness support in its hour of stress so that it may keep on serving the cause for the promotion of which it was brought into being by your Highness generosity.³³

Dr.Ambedkar was in need of money. He wrote the following letter to Shahu from London on 4th September,1921. As directed by Mr.Dalavi I am placing my financial difficulties before you in the hope of getting some relief.

I have to pay £ 100 for my Law fees and need about another £ 100 return passage to India. In all therefore, I need about £ 200 to tide over my difficulties. I would be very much obliged if your Highness can see your way to help me with a loan of that amount I will repay it with interest when I return.³⁴

I hope your Highness is enjoying good health. We need you ever so much for you are the pillar of that great movement towards social democracy which is making its headway in India.³⁵

Shri Shahu then wrote to Dr. Ambedkar on 6-9-1921 from Poona the following : Please inform Mrs. Ambedkar that in the event of any financial difficulties she should without any hesitation write to me about it so that I would remove the financial difficulties by helping her as much as possible. As you are in foreign country and if any financial difficulties arise there, I shall help to get over it. I am making all the arrangements in case I am informed of it by you without any hesitation on your part. In national interest you have gone abroad and it is my drdent desire that you would return home with flying banner. Mr. Gopal is looking after the work of Mook Nayak nicely.³⁶

Shri Shahu immediately acted upon it. R.V. Subnis Diwan informed the Editor of Mook Nayak Bombay on 18th February, 1922 that : His Highness the Chhatrapati Maharaj of Kolhapur has been pleased to present Mrs. B.R.Ambedkar with Rs.750/- and I am desired to send the amount by cheque. Accordingly I enclose herewith cheque number B-1419640 dated today in favour of Mrs.B.R.Ambedkar I shall be obliged by your kindly handing it over to her and acknowledging receipt of the cheque.³⁷ Dr. Kuber who states in his book. Dr.B.R. Ambedkar : 'Vichar Manthan' that Mrs. Ambedkar did not receive any monetary help from Shri.Shahu is probably not aware of this correspondence. on 5-10-1921 Shahu Maharaja also ordered his Diwan to arrange the remittance of Rs.1,500/- to B.R.Ambedkar at his address in London.³⁸

The information gleaned from the above mentioned documents on the relations between Dr. Ambedkar and Shahu, clearly asserts that Maharaja through his graciousness and liberality extended his monetary help not only to Dr.Ambedkar and his Mook Nayak but also to Mrs. Ramabai Ambedkar in her house of need during Babasaheb's absense from this country. After studying the correspondence between Shri Shahu and Dr. Ambedkar and the problems for which Shahu and Ambedkar agitated in India during their

periods one would not be far wrong if he concludes that Shri Shahu was the precursor of Dr. Ambedkar.

CONCLUSION :

The Eastern Mail of Delhi dated 25th February, 1922 paid a high tribute to Shahu who attended all India Depressed Conference Delhi on 16-2-1922.

His Highness Sir Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaja of Kolhapur has beaten you Gandhi, That great champion of the Depressed classes, has won his laurels. He has fought a big fight. The Depressed classes 60 millions of them will bless him. His Highness addressed a huge gathering a multitude of over 30,000 human beings in Delhi. The untouchables were holding their Third All India conference in the Imperial City. The Chhatrapati exhorted them to follow independent and learned professions.

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