

CHAPTER-II

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Rajarshi Shahu was a great social reformer who wanted to uplift the down-trodden classes and castes of the society. He had experienced the consequences of the Brahmin dominance in many fields such as social, economic and political and he wanted to establish to society based on democratic principles - equality, justice and fraternity. According to him the main hindrances in the development of just society were deep rooted caste system, untouchability, dominance of Brahmins in the field of education and administration and the wrong conception of religion. He not only suggested a programme of social development but also brought it into practice.

I) SHAHU MAHARAJ VEDOKTA AND REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY :

Though from the very beginning of his 28 years of his rule, Shahu decided to work for the upliftment of the poor people by emancipating them from the dominance of caste system. The incident of vedokta gave great spurt to his liberating activities.

The vedokta controversy arose out of an incident which took place on the banks of the Panchaganga river in October 1900. The priest who had to officiate at the holy bath of Shahu had not purified himself first by taking bath. He justified his action on the grounds that a bath was not necessary for administering the puranic rites; besides Shudras were not entitled for vedic rites. Shahu was greatly insulted by this reply and found that the priests performed all ceremonies in the palace according to the puranic rites and not according to vedic rites. Therefore, Shahu ordered the priests to perform all ceremonies according to vedic rites. He warned them that those who failed to carry out the order would be suspended from service. He deprived Rajopadhya of his Inam lands when he avoided carrying out the order in May 1902. Similarly, the land of the Jagadguru Shankaracharya who had sided with the Rajopadhya was confiscated. The Rajopadhya appealed to the Government of Bombay, who rejected his appeal, and later to the 'Government of India' which confirmed the Bombay Government's decision.¹ The Satyashodhak movement became popular and non-Brahmin movement entered into a new phase in which it tried to end the Brahmanical influence over all walks of life. The early Satyashodhaks like Jadhav, Dongare, Bagal and Latthe began

thinking of organising a movement "To shake off the dominance of the Brahmins once and for all."²

Shahu helped to establish the branch of Satyashodhak Samaj in Kolhapur in 1911,³ to weaken the priestly authority of the Brahmins and to create a climate to adopt radical measures, he decided to support all radical organization like Satyashodhak Samaj and Arya Samaj.

II) RELEGIOUS IDEAS OF SHRI SHAHU :

Shahu Maharaj was not an atheist and he believed in existence of God and the efficacy of vedic religion. Like all the leaders of his age he was in search of true religion that would pave the path of the emancipation. He was opposed to the false Brahmanical religion which was rooted in justice inequality and untruth. Though Shahu was opposed to Brahmanical religion he was a great supporter of Arya Samaj which was established by Swami Dayanand. He was of the opinion that Aryadharma was the best in the world, it gave an opportunity to all the depressed classes to enjoy equal religious rights. He was of the view that it every body followed the truth of Aryadharma. He could become a great man because Aryadharma based on the true wisdom of vedas was a great religion. Vedas preached action and this time was a of great action and enterprise.⁴

Shahu did not approve any intermediary between God and man argued that true religion was a means to achieve liberation. The second important aspect of religion was that it was rooted in the service of man. Helping others was true virtue and oppressing others was true sin. All religions almost say the same thing. He exhorted people to see God in people and held that God was satisfied when we helped the oppressed people.

The Shahu's religious ideas were based on true Aryadhama as expounded by Swami Dayanand. Arya Samaj of the Swami advocated of social reforms and maintained that they could be supported by evidences from vedas. Shri Shahu thought that so the service of the oppressed was the true mark of dhama.

III) SHAHU'S OPPOSITION TO CASTE SYSTEM :

Rajarshi Shahu was basically against the caste system. The mission of his life was to work for the amelioration of down-trodden classes. He opposed the caste system in general and Brahminism in particular. He argued that the caste system in India was the means of the exploitation. He was sure that with the help of British education caste system would be weakened. Shahu waged relentless struggle against the caste system. His main objective was to

liberate the Shudras from ignorance and slavery, the education of the masses and the breaking down of the barriers between man and man created by the caste.

In the famous Mangaon⁵ Parishad held on 20th March, 1920 Shahu Maharaj said that, "with India's exception there is no cast system in any other country of the world. It is the matter of deep regret that we met out worse treatment to our brothers and sisters than 'cats and dogs'."

In another speech delivered at Nasik in 1920 Shahu makes clear his views about caste system. He said, "I request the leaders of all castes not to look only after their own caste but to take care of all the castes as well caste system is obstacle in the progress of our country and therefore, destruction of the caste system is essential. The aim of caste conferences should be to abolish caste system." and not to strengthen them. He criticised the leaders who held a view that the caste system could be tolerated, if there was no caste hatred. But Shahu maintained that we could become one only by breaking the caste system.⁶

Shahu wanted to give equal treatment to the people of all castes. He was of the opinion that the citizens could not enjoy real freedom unless caste system was completely removed.⁷ Shahu pointed out evil efforts of

the caste system in his following speech, he said, "we continue to fight among ourselves because it is based upon caste system. Caste system breeds jealousy and divides the people. If we really want to have Swaraj we should try to throw away the unjust and cruel caste system."⁸ He further maintained that he would not succeed in his mission unless he was supported by the powerful castes such as Maraths and Brahmins. He was of the view that caste system was against the basic principles of humanity. He said, it will be a golden day when the caste system rooted in the feeling of birth based of superiority is broken and inhuman treatment, a hatred and jealousy towards our brothers came to an end.⁹

While making his presidential speech at Hubali in July 1920, Shahu listing unjust effects of the caste system said, "The progress of our country is retarded because traditional Brahmins suppose themselves to be superior to others and give them inhuman treatment. Due to this, we are divided. The British Government could become stable caste system created by Brahmins hated them to divide people also it is true that due to the liberal educational and social policies of the British Government. It has become possible for the people to throw away the Yoke of Brahmin dominance. If the British had not come to India

the people would have to live the life of cats and dogs. Therefore, we must thank the British people.¹⁰

In his another speech Shahu said, "I want to abolish caste and not a class."¹¹ Shahu was of the opinion that, equal educational facilities should be provided to all castes, all should have equal religious freedom, and to carry out social reforms the co-operation of Brahmins as well as non-Brahmins should be sought for bringing about social integration, the abolition of the caste system was essential.¹²

At Hubli on July 27, 1920 while concluding his presidential speech of Karnatak Non-Brahmin Social Conference he said, "my dear brothers unite, try hard and break the chains of mental and intellectual slavery. Be ready to die for freedom from the people who treat you like beasts."¹³ In his speech at Bhagapur Shahu advised, the Non-Brahmins not to believe in the false promises of Brahmins. He added, "one who depends upon others can do nothing, like Phuley Shahu felt that the Brahmins enjoyed special status in the society because they were the priests, who worked as agents between God and man to reduce the dominance of the Brahmins. Shahu pondered over the idea of creating a new priesthood for Marathas.¹⁴ According to Shahu the abolition of the institution of priest was

the first important programme to reduce Brahmin dominance in the society.¹⁵ He asked the people to follow Satya-shodhak rites in ceremonies like marriages. Shahu opposed the Brahmin hold over the administration. He wanted to recruit the educated youth from the different caste other than Brahmins.

Shahu not only opposed the caste system but, also suggested remedies to end the cruel, inhuman caste system, he suggested the following programme :

- i) A social status based on birth and property should be abolished.
- ii) The recruitment in the administration and Government services from a particular caste should be stopped.
- iii) Inter-caste marriages should be encouraged.
- iv) Equal opportunity should be provided to all and merits should be the sole criterion of recruitment. He held a view that it was necessary to condemn the books like smritis which had imposed many restrictions on the Shudras and anti-Shudras.

IV) SHAHU ON BRAHMINISM AND ITS EVILS :

Shahu made great efforts to eradicate the caste system and held an opinion that the caste system was the creation of the Brahmins and the Brahmins were exploiting non-Brahmins by using different techniques. Shahu held that their religious practices were based on exploitation.

Shahu in a speech made in 11th Aryadharm Conference held at Navasari in Gujarat on 14-12-1918 criticised the different practices of the Brahmins to exploit the non-Brahmins. In his speech he said, "The real vedicdharma was perverted by the Brahmins by creating caste system and priesthood. The Brahmins have kept the Hindu society ignorant, Hindu culture has been made parochial and the Brahmins are spreading unreligious beliefs and practices among the Hindus."¹⁶ He added "The Brahmins have named their Brahminism as 'Sanatan' dharm very clearly. The cunning Brahmins have deliberately made additions in puranas and Smritis for their own benefits. To lead a luxurious life they have advocated pursuit of immoral even in Mahabharat it is clear that these sacred religious books. It is necessary to condemn these books."¹⁷ Shahu said, that "The Brahmins always tried to divide the society among many sections and maintained their hold and, therefore, it was essential to spread the principles of Aryadharm. The spread

of education was required to make the people realise the real nature of the dharma. He supported the bill of Patel which had encouraged inter-caste marriages. He was of the opinion that inter-caste marriage was the effective way of removing the caste system. He vehemently criticised the Brahmins for opposing that bill.¹⁸

In the Social Conference of the Non-Brahmins held at Hubali on 27th July, 1920 Shahu said, there are many institutions the benefits of which are pocketed by the Brahmins only though the financial help to them is given by all. He requested the participants of the Conference to take the education system in their hands and make progress.¹⁹ Shahu strongly criticised the Brahmin press which was criticising and defaming him in all respects. He declared that, he was willing face all hardships and calamities to uplift the down-trodden. He was of the view that the strangle-hold of the Brahmin dominated bureaucracy needed to be destroyed.²⁰ According to him service of the down-trodden was the essence of dharma. In short, it can be concluded that Shahu, worked for the cause of uplift of the depressed classes and sought to reduce the Brahminical dominance. He passed different laws to that effect. He condemned sacred books like Manu smriti and advocated the cause of pursuit of real dharma which in essence lies in

service of the poor. Shahu established different hostels to different castes. He was creating consciousness in the minds of the people. Thus for him education and self-development were the two means through which the backward castes could the end caste system.

V) SHAHU ON REMOVAL OF
UNTOUCHABILITY :

Shahu's efforts to remove untouchability were the part of his opposition to caste system. It was his firm belief that untouchability was irrational, cruel and inhuman. He pointed out that the Brahmins hated not only Marathas but also all the people of different castes. According to him the minimum basic human rights were denied to the depressed classes.²¹ He advocated the cause of emancipation of untouchables from the bondage and slavery. He was of the view that the spread of education among these communities, as well as their struggle to end the dominance of caste system would improve the miserable condition of untouchables.

Shahu's speech at Nagpur on 30th May, 1930 makes his views clear regarding untouchability. While addressing the 'Akhil Bharatiy Bahishkrut Samaj Parishad' he said, "I condemn the word 'untouchables'. It is not proper to use the word untouchables for anybody. We all are inseperable

and integral part of the nation. We are brothers and our rights are equal. All Indians are Hindi people irrespective of their different caste religious and varnas. Though religion is an important matter from the individual's point of view. It should not come in the way of the national integration.²² He added, "I do not like to use the word untouchables for you. I know many of you are more intelligent brave and dedicated than the people who consider you untouchables'. You should fight for your rights and should understand the machination of the higher castes played against you."²³

While addressing the third All India Conference of untouchables at Dehli on 16-2-1922 Shahu said, "You have to make your development on your own. Keep Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar as an ideal before you and achieve your rights by peaceful means. He further pointed out, "It is a matter of great satisfaction that you have followed peaceful and constitutional ways-up to now to achieve your objectives. If you strive hard God will bless you in your mission."²⁴ He advised the participants of the conference that they should give-up their traditional occupations and joint army and administration. He told them that the awareness that had been created among them was the result of British education.²⁵ He asked them to be very vigilant about their social and political rights and to seek, co-operation of the Government.

He concluded his speech with the words, "I am your servant and I request you to seek my help whenever necessary."²⁶

Shahu wrote a letter to the Dalit Leader Shri Gavai on 1-2-1920 and asked him to lead his community instead of giving leadership in the hands of a man who belonged to other castes. Shahu made it clear that the leader of the caste could understand the problems of his fellowmen and try sincerely to solve them."²⁷

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar wrote to Shahu Maharaj in his letter dated 4th September, 1921. "Maharaj we are permanently in need of your leadership because you are the father of the movement which is trying to establish social democracy in India."²⁸ From the above speech of Shahu Maharaj it becomes quite clear that he was against the practice of untouchability. during rule of 28 years, he passed many laws and orders in the cause of removing untouchability. In August 1919 Shahu Maharaj issued an order abolishing untouchability in the State Non-compliance of the order was made punishable under law. If any State employee had any objection to the law, the order stated, he was required to resign his job and was not entitled to pension or any other benefits. In keeping with the spirit of the reform, separate schools which existed for the depressed castes students were abolished and the law was made applicable to all public places,²⁹ such as Rest houses, public wells, etc. In order to

spread education among them arrangements were made to provide free boarding and lodging for girls of the untouchables castes. Earlier Shahu Maharaj had begun appointing Mahars and Talatis (Village Accountants). In 1919 ten scholarships of the value of eight rupees and lasting for three months were awarded to Dalit students. Talatis from the depressed castes were appointed in order to encourage them to take-up courses in Talatiship.

Shahu moved freely among the untouchables and took water and tea from their hands. He called the untouchables Suryavanshi. Hence to observe and practice untouchability was made a penal offence and the primary education was made compulsory. He banned the Hajeri system and abolished Mahar watans. He granted the untouchables the right to carry swords on the Darbar occasions, employed there as chachmen, Mahouts etc. by granting them Sanads. He reserved some seats for the untouchables.

It can be concluded that he made important contribution to the solution of the problems of untouchability. It was he who created leaders from amongst the untouchable classes, he awakened the depressed class to their miserable conditions. He started different institutions to promote the interest of untouchables.

VI) SHAHU ON THE ROLE OF EDUCATION
AND IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION :

As Shahu wanted to establish the society on the principles of equality, justice and fraternity he thought there was no other way than education to achieve that goal. He was of the opinion that education was the source of power, knowledge and prosperity. Though Shahu was an expert administrator and social reformer, he had some definite ideas of his own on education. To him, education was the most important and prominent means of upliftment of the depressed classes. Shahu's ideas on education became clear through his speeches on different occasions.

When the Governor of Bombay Sir George Lyod visited Kolhapur by the end of 1919³⁰ Shahu availed himself of the occasion for expounding his educational policy and for reviewing its results. Shahu said, "In this respect my principle has been to take care of the weak among the subjects more than the strong. Their condition has appealed to me personally and it has been the one aim of my administration to do my level best to cure the evil. With this end in view I have been labouring hard for the last 25 years. I have been offering them special facilities to learn."³¹ He explained in detail why different castes should have their own hostels. Explaining the importance of boarding, he said, "in the hostels boys are looked after

by Superintendents of their own castes. Also they can study in the hostel free from unhealthy influences of their homes."³²

Pointing out that the separate hostels were necessary he said, "Different communities want different sorts of institutions. At present, the money collected from all classes goes to support institutions for the benefit only of the intellectual classes. But I am for encouraging first such institutions as will be useful to all, and with this object, I have recently introduced the measure of free and compulsory education. That is essential for progress in every branch, industrial and commercial etc. Instead of applying their energy to institutions for secondary and higher education, educational bodies should, I think, work hard for the spread of free primary education compulsory but to make it free is not so very difficult."³³

From the Shahu's above speech it becomes quite clear that he wanted to uplift the down-trodden by the means of education. He wanted to recruit educated non-Brahmins in his administration to reduce the dominance of the Brahmins.

Shahu's another very important speech at the opening ceremony of the Jain hostel new building throws a flood of light on his views on education and the importance of hostels for the spread of education as well as to remove untouchability

and to maintain social unity among the society. According to Shahu for the emancipation of the educationally backward classes it was necessary to establish separate hostels, on this occasion Shahu said, "The result of the British Rule is the commencement of the emancipation of the backward classes from the intellectual and social thralldom to which they had been subjected from time immemorial."³⁴ He added, "In this small city it is very gratifying to see the sister institutions of the Marathas and the Jains established side by side and I trust that with mutual love and co-operation they will advance hand in hand in the path of progress."³⁵ Shahu added, "From here we might send forth not only promising doctors, lawyers, engineers and statesmen but talented merchants and skillful agriculturists also who will carry forward to coming ages the hitherto interrupted annuals of ancient times with fresh vigour."³⁶

In short, it can be concluded that Shahu sowed the seeds of educational revolution in his State for the uplift of the non-Brahmins. He did not expect to reap a crop of clerks. He had a vision of a scientific and technological revolution which was to usher a new era not in his own State only but also in the whole country.

Shahu had issued an order to the effect that every village in the State should have a school conducted by a person of the caste to which the majority of the villagers belonged. He had asked to use temples and chawadis to house the school.

VII) SHAHU AND UPLIFTING OF
BACKWARD CLASSES IN INDIA :

The depressed classes of India in general and of Maharashtra in particular owed a deep debt of gratitude to the late Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj for ever because he thought freely in their behalf to free them from the yokes of slavery, ignorance and poverty to which they were subjected for thousand of years by the higher classes.

The following speech which Shahu delivered at the Third All India Depressed Classes Conference held at Delhi on the 15th, 16th, 17th February 1922, helps us understand his attitude towards the uplift of the untouchables. He congratulated the huge gathering of 30,000 people for their spirited effort and for their progress in a peaceful way. Shahu said, "I pray you not to stick to your hereditary professions alone. You should struggle to educate yourselves and enter in army and various other offices of several departments of Government." He added, "you must learn to keenly watch your rights whenever you find your social rights and natural rights as human beings are attacked

you have to remain firm and guard your rights not in a spirit of fighting and hatred but in spirit of wisdom and love."³⁷

Shahu not only delivered speeches on the uplift of the depressed classes but also led movement of the backward classes. After the death of Phuley, and others, the work of Satyashodhak Samaj had come to a grinding halt. It was Shahu who campioned the cause of the backward classes with fresh initiative. The Satyashodhak Mission become strong after its establishment in 1911 and on receiving State patronage.³⁸ Shahu's efforts for the uplift of the depressed castes and classes can be divided into two phase. The first phase can be from 1895 to 1910 and the second phase from 1910 to 1922. During the first phase, he took concrete steps in the field of education, for the depressed castes. Miss Clarke Hostel was opened in 1911 for the students belonging to the depressed castes. Shahu advocated a special policy to spread education among the backward castes i.e. he founded schools and boarding houses for the students of each caste in his State. He encouraged the influential men from the caste to spread the message of education and movement among their caste fellows. He believed that men 'from within' were more competent and reliable leaders than those 'from outside'. To lift the social status of the depressed castes, he undertook a

series of measures. He gave them jobs at the palace, he gave them sanads in order to permit them to practice in the courts.³⁹

The second phase from 1910-1922 was very important for the uplifting of the depressed classes point of view Shahu adopted some significant measures to abolish untouchability and the Balute and the Hajeri system. Shahu proclaimed an order No. 79 on 8-10-1919. The order was, "All independent schools for untouchables in Karveer State will be closed down and students of scheduled castes will be admitted a Government schools."

Shahu's order from Department of Education dated 15th January, 1919 states, "untouchables should be treated on equal footings with other castes."⁴⁰ The grant-in-aid of the schools will be cancelled if the orders were not properly carried out."

Shahu passed many orders regarding the uplift of the depressed castes. The important orders are steps adopted by Shahu were the abolition of the balute system. Shahu passed an order on 5th March, 1919 (Order No. 45, Gazzettee of Karveer Government). The order stated, "The balutedars are free to migrate with the mention of professional purpose. All watans were made ratyawar by this order. The violation of the order was a punishable

offence. By another order, Shahu abolished the Hajeri system under which the members of the castes (to which the system was applied) were often pressurised into rendering free service to the State officials and others. The system was abolished in 1918. In August 1919, he issued an order abolishing untouchability in the State. Non-compliance of the order was made punishable under law.

In short, it can be concluded that Shahu tried his level best to ameliorate the social, economic and political conditions of the depressed castes and classes by using his State power. In a real sense, he tried to emancipate the down-trodden from the bondage of the higher castes, particularly of Brahmins. The uplift of the depressed castes was the result of Shahu's firm belief in the opposition to caste system and untouchability and his advocacy of a secular educational policies.

To social thought of the Rajarshi Shahu was based on liberal principles of liberty, equality and justice and he sought to establish a society based on equality of opportunity and equality between man and man. He was irreconcilable enemy of caste system and wanted to end Brahmin dominance classes and the depressed classes could make progress by creating self-awareness among them about their



sorry state of affairs and by resorting to the means of education which was a key to unlock the doors of knowledge that were deliberately shut for centuries.

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