



RAJARAM MAHARAJA OF KOLHAPUR AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT

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Shri Shahu Maharaja of Kolhapur was succeeded by Chhatrapati Rajaram Maharaja. A great responsibility fell on the shoulders of Shri Rajaram Maharaja, because the leadership of the non-Brahmin movement was now transferred to Shri Rajaram Maharaja. Just before Shri Shahu met his untimely death, the Madras non-Brahmin movement had already accepted the leadership of Shri Shahu. Besides, the introduction of Home Rule movement in India required dynamic leadership which the non-Brahmin movement had found in Shri Shahu. We must remember that the socio-political thought of the non-Brahmin movement has passed through various stages. In 1921, Shri Shahu was popular in both the Presidencies (Bombay and Madras) as a non-Brahmin leader. Shri Shahu's significance as a non-Brahmin leader is proved by the fact that he was criticised both in the Madras and Bombay presidencies. *The Citizen*, Madras, January 15, 1921, condemning Shri Shahu asked the President of the Conference of the Justice School of Politics to repudiate "the nauseating hymn of hate which the Maharaja of Kolhapur was preaching."¹ In the Bombay Presidency also Shri Shahu was criticised by Tilak for airing his views on the Brahman and non-Brahman question in Madras and elsewhere and for expressing intense hatred towards Brahmins. Tilak was connected with the Kolhapur affairs even when "the name of Bal Gangadhar Tilak had not yet acquired the awesome prestige and the mass veneration of the future Lokamanya."² In both these Presidencies, the Home Rule movement was gaining ground—in the Madras Presidency, under Mrs. Besant, its chief leader, and in the Bombay Presidency, under Tilak. Mrs. Besant's newspaper, *New India*, criticised the Justice Party so strongly that the Justice spokesmen replied by calling her an "Irish Brahmani". In the Bombay Presidency Tilak's newspapers such as *Kesari*, *Maratha*, *Rashtra Mat*, and *Kal* fell in line with the *New India* of Mrs. Annie Besant. Both Tilak and Mrs. Besant propagated Home Rule and tried to arouse the traditional religious sentiments of the people. To counteract the Tilak-Besant alliance, Shri Shahu tried to encourage *Vishwa Bandhu*, a Marathi paper, "which was opposed to Tilakite views, and because of which the paper had fallen down."³ The two non-Brahmin movements (the Justice and the Satya Shodhak) worked unitedly to confront the Home Rule movement and its tactics.

It was this heavy responsibility which was transferred from Shri Shahu to Shri Rajaram Maharaja when the latter ascended the throne. While studying the non-Brahmin movement, it is necessary to bear in mind that the role played by Shri Rajaram Maharaja was as important as that of Shri Shahu.

After Shri Shahu's demise, there appeared an article in *Dnyanprakash* on the 9th of June, 1922, which needs a mention here because it sheds some revealing light on the popularity of Shri Shahu and his activities as a leader of the non-Brahmin movement. Through this article, which was both an appreciation and a criticism of Shri Shahu's activities, the writer desired to influence the future policy of Shri Rajaram Maharaja especially towards the non-Brahmin movement.

This article points out that, when the installation ceremony took place, various addresses were presented in honour of Shri Rajaram Maharaja. Out of the total number of twelve addresses that were accorded, the writer points out, "only three were local, and the rest belonged to the districts outside Kolhapur."⁴ Further, the article calls upon the Maharaja "that these incidents"—the rush of the outsiders and outside bodies at the time of installation would indicate "that Chhatrapati Shahu had directed the course of his money especially to the outside area", and, these addresses had requested the Maharaja "to follow the policy of his father with regard to the care he took in the emancipation of the non-Brahmins in the British Districts."⁵

Shri Rajaram Maharaja was also well known in the Madras Presidency and was asked to continue the leadership of his great father Shri Shahu Maharaja. For example, "The South Indian Peoples' Association Ltd." wrote to Shri Rajaram Maharaja that "in the death of Your Highness' father, the non-Brahmins of this Presidency have lost a sincere friend and well-wisher. They hope and trust that Your Highness will continue to extend the same sympathy and assistance to their movement that Your Highness' father was never wearied of giving."⁶ Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, the leader of the non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency, wrote: "The late Maharajah whose acquaintance I had the rare privilege and honour of possessing, had set a high standard, and had brought the House of Kolhapur so prominently before the public eye, and had done so much in the social field to give hope and cheer to the depressed and backward classes, that, in the Madras Presidency, Kolhapur stands for all that is just and all that is equitable. Your Highness has pleased the hearts of all people by announcing that you are prepared to follow the footsteps of your great Father, and in your actions Your Highness has been steadily keeping that policy in view." Further, he states, "It gives all Your Highness' admirers and friends double satisfaction that the British Government has recognised the great good that Your Highness is doing to the country."⁷ The letter clearly indicates that Shri Rajaram Maharaja was already busy pursuing his illustrious father's policies and programmes.

It is further to be noted that under the leadership of Shri Rajaram Maharaja of Kolhapur the non-Brahmins of both Bombay and Madras Presidencies conducted various conferences and confederations of the non-Brahmin movement in India. (Justice and Satya Shodhak Samaj).

Conferences and Confederations of non-Brahmin movement in India (Justice and Satya Shodhak) :

The following is the extract of his inaugural address as the President of the All India non-Brahmin Social Conference, held at Amravati, on the 27th of December, 1925. The Rajah of Pangal attended this meeting of the All India non-Brahmin Social Conference which was attended by 145 prominent leaders of Madras and of Bombay. Shri Rajaram presiding over the conference stated :

“ In ancient India it was the Kshatriya who not only fought and ruled but who led all social and religious reforms. Those traditions of my Kshatriya Order were later on suppressed by the ambitions of the priestly class until my ancestor, the Great Shivaji Maharaja, revived them in the seventeenth century. *The prominent part which my late father took in public movements outside his State was due to the feeling in him that, to be true to the traditions, he was bound to serve the people in every sphere of life*”.⁸ (italics mine)

Further, Shri Rajaram Maharaja asserted that “ Cooperation, cordial and all-sided, between the leaders of these classes and the Government is, to my mind, the surest road along which progress lies. I hope you, non-Brahmins, will fully realise the advantages of such good-will and fellowship between the rulers and the ruled.”⁹

Rajaram Maharaja spared no efforts in supporting the non-Brahmin cause. In this same speech he narrated how “ when.....legislation was proposed for redressing one of the pressing grievances of the non-Brahmins in the Deccan (on the unjust exactions of the hereditary priests through Law Courts) the non-Brahmins of this Province had no spokesman of their own in the Central Legislature and those who professed to represent them only misrepresented their views.”¹⁰

Further, immediately after this All India Session was over, the Second All India non-Brahmin Congress was held at the same place (i.e., Amravati) on December 27, 1925. This session was presided over by the Rajah of Panagal. During this session, at the outset, the President began his address by referring to the loss sustained by the Congress by the deaths of Sir P. T. Chetty (Chettiar), a close associate of Shri Shahu, and Dewan Bahadur Vijiaraghavalu. In his presidential address the Rajah of Panagal clarified that “ the non-Brahmin movement, so small at its inception was it... but today it has become an All India movement, when its activities have spread from Bombay to Madras, from the Vindhya mountains to Cape-Comorin, its very extent and the lightning rapidity with which its principles have pervaded the country, will be the best justification of the movement. The future that our great leader (Shri Shahu) predicted for us in his Presidential Address at Hubli in 1920 is come; the time when the movement of love for all and of hatred for none, the movement which seeks to afford equal opportunities for all, which makes every one, whatever his class or community or creed may be, feel that he is a common citizen of the land enjoying equal rights and liberties and exercising such privileges – the time when such a movement of all consuming love shall spread through the whole country carrying its message of hope and peace has arrived at last.”¹¹

Just as the Madras leaders attended the conference in the Bombay Presidency, the leaders of the Bombay Presidency attended the non-Brahmin Confederation in Madras. For instance, "The Ninth non-Brahmin Confederation' conducted in the Victoria Hall, Madras, was presided over by Hon. Mr. B. V. Jadhav, Minister of Education, Bombay. Mr. M. Krishnan Nair, while proposing Hon. Mr. B. V. Jadhav to the chair, points "that the great non-Brahmin movement was started 13 years ago from which time it had been gathering volume and strength. It is becoming an all India movement, due to the advice, the energy and activity of leaders like Mr. Jadhav."¹²

It is to be noted that owing to the non-Brahmin movement assisting itself under the leadership of Rajaram Maharaj, people like Shri. B. V. Jadhav could attain high positions and propagate the non-Brahmin cause.

Shri Shahu Maharaja, through his close association with Madras non-Brahmin leadership, had created a ground for a great unity to come. But this movement suffered a great deal with the passing away of the two foremost leaders, Dr. T. M. Nair in 1919 and Shri Shahu Maharaja in 1922. Another blow to this movement came with the irreparable loss caused by the death of Sir P. Theagraja Chettiar on 29 June, 1925. "Sir P. T. Chettiar was the grand-old-man of Madras and the Nestor of the Justice Party".¹³ Shri Rajaram Maharaja had to shoulder this big responsibility and, as already pointed out, he was already acknowledged as a non-Brahmin leader. Shri Rajaram Maharaja spared no pains in organizing various conferences, confederations, educational conferences etc. He supported legislation "upon matters like the Joshi Bill, the Illegitimate Succession Bill, the Civil Marriage Bill - all of them introduced by distinguished non-Brahmin members of the Legislature".¹⁴

Shri Rajaram Maharaja, following the footsteps of his father, did much towards the upliftment of the non-Brahmins. Shri Rajaram Maharaja had very clear ideas towards his approach to the non-Brahmin movement. For instance, in his presidential address at the Amaravati session he replied in clear terms to the critics of the non-Brahmin movement as follows :

"You will be charged with sectarianism and exclusiveness on the ground that while you aim at national unity, you in fact separate the Brahmins from the rest of Hindu India. Why, critics might ask, do you close your doors to the Brahmins as the non-Brahmin movement apparently seeks to do?..... My answer is that the non-Brahmin movement does not foster, encourage or even defend the exclusive spirit of the caste system anywhere, not even in its relations with the Brahmins. What we wish to keep away from is the system which is synonymous with Brahminism, which divides artificially groups of men from other groups of men, styles one group as inferior and another as superior only on the ground of birth.... The end of the non-Brahmin movement is to end non-Brahmin castes and this will certainly mean the blotting out of the entire caste system so that Hindu community including the Brahmins shall be one, compact, organic whole..."

The non-Brahmin movement under Shri Rajaram Maharaja gathered great strength but it had to face major limitations: It was after 1925 that, as Paul Younge

puts it, "the British started becoming reluctant to share power with the non-Brahmins because of the rise of the Congress movement in the rest of India".¹⁵ In Bombay, the Satya Shodhak movement was much affected by 1927.

In this connection, there is a perceptive analysis in one of the recent issues of *Economic and Political Weekly*, which I am quoting at length :

"In Maharashtra since early 1920s many non-Brahmins were feeling nationalist in pulses, and in the middle of the decade the leadership of the movement passed to a group of young radicals who mounted severe attacks on Brahmins, but at the same time defined themselves as nationalists; they argued that the basic conflict was between the Indian masses and their British rulers; but that the Brahmin leaders of the national movement only betrayed the nationalist because through their elitism and continuing attachment to caste orthodoxy which served to divide the Indian people, they could dominate the masses. The leaders of the young non-Brahmin radicals, Keshavarao Jedhe and Dinkarrao Javalkar had, by 1926, obtained a statewide reputation. After 1927, Jedhe began to be increasingly attracted by the Indian National Congress as its Gandhian leadership appeared to offer a social reformist alternative that promised to undermine the old dominance of Maharashtrian orthodox Brahmins. It was this alliance between Jedhe and Gadgil which was given primary credit for leading non-Brahmins into Congress in 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement and after."¹⁶

In Madras, the non-Brahmin movement (Justice Party), as Prof. Irschick says, "after 1927 decided to allow its members to join the Congress",¹⁷ because of which a large number of non-Brahmins left the Justice Party for the "non-cooperation in the 1930s and the non-Brahminizing of the Congress."¹⁸ All this shows that, by 1927, because of the rise of the nationalist forces in India and the non-Brahminisation of the Congress, the non-Brahmin movement was left to find its own way. Since then the two movements (Justice and Satya Shodhak) moved on different lines and led to the emergence of Provincialism in Indian Politics. Besides this, the other severe limitation came when, as Dr. D. Keer says, "Dr. Ambedkar felt that he should prepare himself to launch his social movement for the uplift of the untouchables, and to achieve his objective he established an institution called the Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha."¹⁹ With all these processes at work — non-Brahminization of the Congress, the nationalist movement gaining strength and the coming into being of a separate school of Dr. Ambedkar — severe limitations were put on the non-Brahmin movement, and most of the non-Brahmin leaders (Satya Shodhaks) joined the Congress movement, and thus began the decline in the non-Brahmin movement. In the study of this movement history will have to take particular note of the share of Shri Rajaram Maharaja in the great task begun by his father Shri Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur.

The most important points that emerge from the foregoing analysis are :

- a) Shri Rajaram Maharaja led the non-Brahmin movement with exemplary distinction and purposiveness till 1927 and brought about harmony and unity between the two movements of the Bombay and Madras presidencies;

- b) The movement declined owing to the operation of national forces which resulted in the assimilation of the movement into the Indian National Congress, which is known as the non-Brahminisation of the Congress.

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3. Kolhapur Record Office, Shahu Files, Letter from Shri Shahu to Robertson.
4. Cf. *Dnyana Prakash* (Poona) 9th June, 1922.
5. *Ibid.*
6. K. R. O. Editor, *Justice* to Shri Rajaram, dated 30 May, 1922.
7. K. R. O. Ramaswami Mudaliar to Rajaram Maharaja from the Bridge House, London, dt. 25 January, 1924.
8. *The Hindu* (Madras), December 27, 1925.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *The Hindu* (Madras), Dec. 21, 1925.
13. *Justice Party Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, 'Welcome Address', by P. T. Rajan, p. XXIII.
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15. Paul Younger, "Tamil Nadu, the Quiet Septic," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Feb. 14, 1971, p. 43.
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