



People's Education Society's

Dr. Ambedkar College of Commerce & Economics

(Opp. Wadala Bus Depot, Mumbai - 400 031)



Chhatrapati Shahu and Women's Question

compiled and edited by
Lalitha Dhara

The People's Education Society
was founded by

Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
in 1945.

It runs eleven schools, fifteen colleges
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This booklet has been brought out with the blessings
of the current
Governing Body Members.

October 2011

I believe I am serving humanity as a whole by
serving the poorest classes
-Ch. Shahu



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*compiled and edited by
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Lalitha Dhara

*with the support and cooperation of
Principal Dr. S. R. Kamble*

*for
Women Development Cell, Dr. Ambedkar College unit*



God Almighty
Let the people in my country be wise
Let their hearts be lit by knowledge
Let us all live together in fraternity
Let us share each other's sorrows and joys
Let us all develop physically, spiritually and socially
Let us make this world a heaven on earth

Ch. Shahu

Ch. Shahu ended his speech with these words when he was invited to preside over the 13th All India Conference of Kurmi Kshatriyas held in Kanpur on 19th April, 1919. He was awarded the title of "Rajarshi" in this conference.

I believe I am serving the humanity as a whole by
serving the backward classes

- Ch. Shahu

RAJARSHI SHAHU CHHATRAPATI



(26.6.1874 - 6.5.1922)

I believe I am serving the humanity as a whole by
serving the backward classes
- Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

RAJARSHI SHAHU

*This book is dedicated to
the great emancipators of women*

Mahatma Jotiba Phule

Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule

Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj

Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

and

*to women everywhere,
struggling for emancipation*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deepest respects to

Tathagata Bhagwan Gautam Buddha, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati, Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

I consider myself fortunate to be teaching in an institution founded by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. If I were teaching elsewhere, perhaps the thought of bringing out this booklet would not have occurred to me...

Principal Dr. Siddharth Kamble trusted me enough to promptly sanction the book when I approached him with a proposal. He also gave me complete freedom to shape it as I thought fit. I am extremely grateful to him.

Prof. Mrs. Latifa Kadu, a dear friend, has always stood by me in whatever I do, whether in the college or outside. I am ever thankful to her for her blanket support.

My office colleagues, R. D. Karnik and Vaishali Gaikwad helped me with computer-related work. Their cheerful disposition and unconditional support kept up my spirits. I cannot thank them enough.

The majority of the text in this booklet, with the exception of two articles, is taken from the scholarly work, Rajarshi Shahu Commemoration Volume, edited by Dr. Jaysingrao Pawar. The members of the Shahu Research Centre, Kolhapur headed by Dr. J. Pawar and comprising Dr. M.N. Mane, Mr. Vijayrao Shinde, Mr. Sachin Ghorpade, Mr. Amit Mane welcomed me and extended all possible support and cooperation, during the four days of my stay there. Mr. Vijayrao Shinde's affection will stay with me for ever. Together, they made it an unforgettable experience for me. How does one even begin to thank them? But for Dr. Pawar's immense generosity and the warm support of the entire team of Shahu Research Centre, Kolhapur, this work would not have been possible.

If only all research centres were as forthcoming...

I am particularly grateful to Mr. Gawde of Amar Printers who displayed keen interest and commitment in the project.

I cannot end without placing on record my indebtedness to my friend; Dr. Uday Mehta -retd. vice-principal of Mithibai college & HOD, Sociology; for inspiring me with his own writings and praxis and for encouraging me throughout.

Lalitha Dhara

October, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Chhatrapati Shahu is, at best, known as the benevolent ruler of erstwhile Kolhapur state. Few are aware of the nature or extent of his benevolence. Fewer still know that Ch. Shahu succeeded, in his short reign of twenty eight years, in introducing revolutionary social and legal reforms that had far-reaching consequences for the marginalized and the dispossessed. It will come as an absolute surprise to most readers that Ch. Shahu enacted many laws, issued several notifications and passed orders that were gender-sensitive and women-friendly.

His work earned him the title of Rajarshi by his many admirers. He was also described as 'The pillar of social democracy' by none other than Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

This booklet attempts to capture his gender sensitivity, placing it in the context of his overall sensitivity towards the weak and the oppressed.

The book begins with a brief overview of Chhatrapati Shahu - his thoughts and his work, following which it is divided into two parts.

The first part titled, 'Ch. Shahu and general sensitivity' draws out his sensitivity towards the poorest and the weakest of his subjects and documents the social, legal reforms introduced by Shahu for the liberation of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. This part includes four important measures he took towards that end.

The first was in the realm of education. It details the introduction and implementation of free and compulsory education for all children. It also looks at the special efforts undertaken for the education of the 'untouchables' and women. This is documented in Chapter 1 titled 'Ch. Shahu and Education' along with relevant Acts, orders and notifications in the appendix at the end of the chapter (Appendix 1A to 1M). The most significant of his laws is the 'Education Act' (Appendix 1A). It was a radical move to universalize the right to education. Its purpose was equally laudable. According to Shahu, the act of getting an education was the first step towards emancipation from the clutches of caste.

The next measure was the famous Kolhapur Hostel Movement of Ch. Shahu. The concept, strategy, methodology and effects of this movement are documented in chapter 2 titled, 'Ch. Shahu and Hostel Movement'.

Removal of untouchability was a pressing concern for Shahu. Chapter 3 titled 'Ch. Shahu and Removal of Untouchability' details how the Maharaja conceptualized the problem, how he went about erasing this deep-rooted social malaise, how he passed several laws to do away with untouchability and had them implemented. The most radical among them was the move to reserve 50% vacancies for backward classes in government jobs, abolition of bonded labour, the ban against untouchability in administration, public places, schools etc. (Appendix 3A to 3M).

The evil practices of caste distinction and discrimination also caught his attention. He went about attacking its core practices in the areas of food, marriage, profession with all the skill of a seasoned magician. This is brought forth in chapter 4 titled, 'Ch. Shahu and Eradication of Caste Distinction'. The relevant orders, notifications are carried at the end (Appendix 4A to 4D).

The perception and praxis of Shahu clearly shows the deep influence of Mahatma Phule's thoughts, ideas, practices. Even though he never openly admitted to being a Satyashodhakite, his actions bore the stamp of Phuleism. Chapter 5 titled, 'Ch. Shahu and Mahatma Phule' discusses the Maharaja's engagement with Phule's ideas.

Ch. Shahu and Dr. Ambedkar were good friends. It was Shahu who heard about Ambedkar and sought him out. A friendship developed between them based on mutual respect and shared concerns. The understanding of Ch. Shahu would be partial if we do not touch upon his warm relationship with Dr. Ambedkar. Chapter 6 titled, 'Ch. Shahu and Dr. Ambedkar' does precisely this.

By the end of this section, Shahu comes across as a fine, sensitive soul; a rational, radical person and an example of a loving, caring king towards one and all including the 'lowliest' of his subjects – the so-called untouchables.

The second part titled, 'Ch. Shahu and gender sensitivity' captures the essence of his work related to gender equality - the important Acts formulated by him for the protection of women, his positive attitude to women's education and his personal equation with them.

Chapter 7 carries the first article in this section titled, 'Ch. Shahu and Gender Concerns' and gives an overview of the nature and range of his

gender-related work, particularly the four epoch making laws – Marriage Act, The Kolhapur Divorce Act, Prevention of Cruelty to Women Act and Law on Girls Dedicated to Religion. His 'Prevention of cruelty to women' Act is perhaps the first of its kind anywhere in the world. It includes all castes and classes of women in its orbit and defines instances of cruelty fairly exhaustively. Similarly the Act relating to girls dedicated to devadasi tradition was gender-sensitive. His notifications regarding women's sexual vulnerability during Holi festival and warnings issued to public to behave decently is admirable. His ruling that women be considered adults after they cross 18 years of age was a step ahead in time. All the relevant laws and orders are reproduced in the appendix at the end of the chapter (Appendix 7A to 7I).

Shahu had alienated the brahmin class with his revolutionary work of uplifting the depressed classes. His actions were perceived as a threat by his many caste and political enemies who wanted to pull him down. It was hardly surprising that they cast aspersions on his morality. To Shahu's credit, he responded very rationally to these charges. His response to the charges of moral turpitude is reproduced in Appendix 7J.

Chapter 8 titled, 'Ch. Shahu & Women's Education' details Shahu's attitude and concerns regarding women's education as also his relationship with some of the leading educated women of his time, not to mention his warm paternal relationship with his young widowed daughter-in-law. This is exemplified through the various letters written by him (Appendix 8A to 8D).

Chapter 9 titled, 'Ch. Shahu and Women's Question' is the crux of the booklet and brings out the feminist approach underlying Shahu's gender reforms. It offers a feminist critique of Shahu's gender-related work. A sympathetic reading of the second part of this booklet convinces us of his gender sensitivity and feminist perspective.

In Afterword, an attempt is made to explore what factors went into the making of Ch. Shahu, what were the major influences on him, what was his historic contribution and what were his historic limitations.

Through this booklet, I have tried to present a comprehensive picture of Ch. Shahu's mighty contribution to the cause of Indian women's liberation. I sincerely hope I have succeeded in my mission.

The Women Development Cell, Dr. Ambedkar college unit has embarked on a rather ambitious project of bringing out a series of booklets on 'Women's Question' in the Indian context to place at the disposal of teachers of Humanities, Gender and Foundation Courses at the undergraduate level so that our students may become well aware of our feminist heritage and history.

This is the third in the series. Hopefully, others will follow...

Signing off on this positive note,

Happy and fruitful reading!

Lalitha Dhara

NB : Despite my best efforts to make this booklet error-free, some mistakes must surely have crept in. My apologies for the same. I welcome your feedback, comments, suggestions on my work. You can send your feedback to my e mail address: lalid02@yahoo.com
