

DR. AMBEDKAR AND RAJARSHI CHHATRAPATI SHAHU MAHARAJ

Dr. (Mrs.) Anjali R. Andrew

Dept. of History

Hislop College,

Nagpur

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, belonging to the untouchable caste of Mahar is one of the pillars in the national stage of India, who dedicated this life to abolish the practice of caste system in the country. He helped to imbibe the spirit of self-respect among the untouchable caste of the country. He was born on 14th April, 1891 and was the 14th and youngest sibling of Ramji & Bhimabai Sapkal. His father served as a Subedar in the Indian army. Because of his father's service in the army, he was exposed to a cosmopolitan, modern, literate and progressive environment (Sadhu, 2007).

For him, the outside civil world was full of humiliation because of his caste, and was not allowed to touch the drinking water pot at school and when thirsty, the school peon poured water from top in their mouth. This humiliation and others were later described in his essays entitled "No Peon, No Water". It was during the humiliation and inhuman treatment received while travelling in a cart from Satara to Koregaon in a cart, that changed him, and made him think about the scourge of untouchability - and the division of caste system in the (Moon, 1993).

At Satara, he completed his primary and elementary schooling and matriculated in 1908 from Elphinstone High School and graduated in Economics and Political Science from Elphinstone College in the year 1912. Sahyaji Rao III, the Gaekwad ruler of Baroda bestowed a monthly scholarship of Rs. 25/- to Bhimrao, which he used to study for his master's degree at Columbia University, New York in 1915. He specialized in Economics and also wrote a thesis entitled "National Dividend of India - A Historic and Analytical Study". Hungry for knowledge he joined the Bar course at Gray's Inn, concomitantly also registered for Ph.D. at the London School of Economics. He had to leave studies and return to India because his scholarship had ended. He joined the Sydenham College, Bombay as a teacher of Political Economics, but went back to complete his higher studies in 1920. After obtaining M.Sc. and D. Sc. degrees in Economics, he also studied Economics for a short period at the Bonn University, Germany.

The period between 1917 to 1922 was historic in the lives of Dr. Ambedkar and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj (Rajarshi Shahu) the Raja of Kolhapur. These two laid the foundation of the first Mahar Conference in 1920. On 26th June 1874, a boy was born in the family of the Kagal Village Chief Jaisingrao Ghatge. His wife Radhabai belonged to the royal family of Muhod. The boy was named Yeshwantrao, who at the age of ten, was adopted by Anandibai, the widow queen of the State of Kolhapur. This boy completed his education at



Rajkumar College, Rajkot and in 1894 ascended the throne of the Kolhapur State and was titled- Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj.

In the following decade Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj took steps that were not only revolutionary, unimaginable and against the then dictate of the then social norms and amidst great resistance from the Brahmin class. On 26 July 1902, he implemented the first instance of caste-based reservation in modern India, by reserving 50% seats for Dalits and the Backwards (lower caste) in all the educational establishments and government professions in his state (Siddharth, 2018). He was only 28-year-old then.

Shahuji Maharaj created history, since this was the first occasion of quota system issued by the ruler which was 48 years before the country the reservation policy, which incidentally was drafted by Dr. Ambedkar. According to the famous historian Jaysingrao Pawar, this was the first manifesto, codified by Shahuji Maharaj of affirmative action in the country. Because of paucity of qualified candidates among the non-Brahmins in the state, he proposed and implemented free and obligatory education for every child of his state and sanctioned the buildings of new hostels and schools for the non- Brahmin students. Thus, he implemented his reforms not only in letter but also in spirit (Ghadyalpatil, 2018).

The First Mahar Conference-

It was held at Manegaon (near Kolahapur, Maharashtra state) on 21 and 22 March 1920. Dr. Ambedkar was the President and Shahu Maharaj was the chief guest. It was a revolutionary event for the lower caste and untouchables. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj exhorted the outcastes, "The reason behind the pathetic condition that we are living in is because of our inability to elect the right leaders. Some of the vested interests from our own community sweet talk illiterate people into accepting leaders that are not in our welfare. What use are such leaders? How can anybody accept such leaders in western or any other country?" He then assured the outcaste gathering, "Now you do not need to go about searching for leader," and then continued, "I started the mission will be shouldered by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. This young man will now be your leader, of which I am certain, and know that a day will come, when he will not just be your leader but will lead the entire country." This was the optimism expressed by Chhatrapati Shahu in this historic conference.

Dr. Ambedkar never fell short of Chhatrapati Shahu's expectations. Dr. Ambedkar, in the same conference, spelled out his own prescription to emancipate the untouchables. He said, "The kind of work carried out by Shahu Maharaj to ensure the progress of the untouchables in his state is extremely laudable. He has helped students like me many times in many respects. I wish he continue to help us uninterruptedly." Expressing his gratitude thus Dr. Ambedkar continued, "I accept the responsibility bestowed by Maharaj, in your presence on me. I assure I will fight till finish to complete this task. I will not stop till the goal is achieved" was the confident assurance from Babasaheb to Chhatrapati Shahu. He did not just stop at this promise but went ahead and chalked a program. Dr. Babasaheb analyzed "Because of the birth related abstract concepts of ability and purity many of the less able



Brahmins have also prospered about which there were many examples. Non-Brahmins have to deal with birth induced less ability and purity. Lack of education has put constraints on their progress. Even then some avenues to earn education and money are still open to them. Today they may not have education and money but they are going to get it tomorrow. However, the condition of our outcaste brethren is beyond redemption because of the inability and impurity. These have been hammered into our brain for long that we started to believe it. In the process we have lost self-motivation and self-respect the two main strengths necessary for carrying out our own progress. He then continued further, “Innate qualities and favorable conditions are two prerequisites for any progress. The outcastes are not without talent and nobody denies this. But they are not on the road to progress and for this the unfavorable circumstances are responsible. To correct this situation some measures have been suggested to be adopted. But for that we need to acquire political strength. Without caste representation political strength is not going to come to us. For that we need to continue with our struggle and we need to gain education. In this historical conference, Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in passing 15 very important resolutions. These are all of fundamental importance and proved to be milestones in the revolutionary movement initiated by Babasaheb (Gautam & Gawali, 2018; Ghadyalpatil, 2018)..

From 1920 to 1956, Dr. Ambedkar launched many movements to fight for the rights of the Dalits and depressed people. He worked for the betterment of the lot of the untouchables. He was instrumental in setting up many institutions and people's movements. For all this, rightly pointed out by Gautam & Gawali (2018), the foundation was the Mangaon Conference and the 15 resolution that were passed in this conference. This is the historical truth which cannot be denied. His entire movement rests on the fundamental foundation on the thinking that went into successfully organizing this conference

Mandai (2003) fittingly concluded that Dr. Ambedkar stood distinct and unique by his tremendous efforts in order to bring a radical change in the socio-economic and cultural awareness, status and self-dignity of the out-caste. Himself being a victim and sufferer of inter-caste hatred and exploitation since childhood, his understanding about the groaning of the Untouchables under the wheel of the caste system and Brahmanical Hinduism throughout the ages, had grown so immense that he struggled for nothing less than equality, liberty and fraternity to be established not only in the body politics of India, but in all spheres of Indian life.



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