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# LOK RAJA RAJARSHI SHAHU MAHARAJ

## A Man That The Nation Hasn't Seen Before in Its Long And Brilliant History!

Time has seen one of the major revolutions and revolutionary in the history of Maharashtra in the nineteenth century. One of the most significant and radical social reformers in the nineteenth century Maharashtra was Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of the princely state of Kolhapur. He was regarded as a kind-hearted king because of his devotion to the cause of the social revolution. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj is also known as Rajarshi Shahu and was considered a faithful democrat and social reformer. He was the first Maharaja of the princely state of Kolhapur and was a vital gem in the history of Maharashtra.

During the pre-British rule the Caste system in which the Brahmins, under the Hindu creed, Controlled by various Hindu Dharma Shastras, commanded the whole society, being the uppermost class in the Varna System. Hence the castes other than the Brahmins known as Non-Brahmins, lived under the sky of incomprehension, illiteracy, poverty, and blind beliefs, correspondingly leading a backward life, by all means, social, economic as well as political.

Chhatrapati Shahu besides uplifting women education was aware of the unchanged conditions of squeezing women at home and in society. To change this circumstance, he made use of certain laws to protect her natural right. In the traditional community, the non-Brahmin class felt that only Brahmins and their children had the power and volume to get them educated. Hence despite being able to afford to educate their children, they dare not see to do so. When this was the situation with boys, in the Bahujan Samaj, none did ever think of educating a woman. Hence, the most important law was made under the Kingship of Chhatrapati Shahu age from a social justice point of view was related to 'Free and compulsory primary education with a view to educating the children of oppressed, backward, and the farmer classes. He decided that unless the education was made compulsory and free, the above-said class would never break the fence of Brahmin and allow their children to get literate. He knew, as the earlier reformer Mahatma Phule rightly emphasized the need of educating the non-Brahmin class for their overall development, empowerment, and identity, Chhatrapati Shahu felt that this kind of compulsion was important. Despite knowing that this journey would mean extra financial weight on the government revenue, he heroically enacted





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the act on free and compulsory education in 1917, since he realized that only establishing schools and opening the doors of education was not adequate, rather it was significant to force the children of towards education.

Not only for education Rajarshri Shahu Maharaj took defensible measures to ameliorate the circumstances of the farmers. During the drought of 1902, he conceded the hardship of the farmers & community and made honest try to solve the problems in the agricultural ventures. He introduced the “Mass Irrigation Policy” in the same year. For this policy, he appointed irrigation officers who investigated every village in his territory and arranged irrigation funds for the villages according to the seriousness of the drought circumstances. He also initiated the construction of the Radhanagari Dam on February 18, 1907, in the Kolhapur city to solve the problems of irrigation. The project was completed in 1935. The dam stands as proof of Chhatrapati Shahu's vision for the welfare of his subjects and made Kolhapur self-sufficient in water.

With the same cause, Shri Shrimant Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur started the All India Shri Shivaji Memorial Society, in 1917. The foundation stone of the All India Shri Shivaji Memorial was laid at the hands of his Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales in the year 1921. Today society conducts a wide spectrum of educational programs in professional fields like Engineering, Pharmacy, Hotel Management, Information Technology, ITI, Polytechnic, School of Management, Military School, Junior College, etc.

Shahu Maharaj contributed wholeheartedly to educating oppressed people, women, and Dalits so as to bring them into the flow of society. He made every possible try for the cause in his compass as a king of the Kolhapur State; not limited to it, but also extended his educational development throughout Maharashtra and the AISSM Society will also continue to follow the footprints of this ideal King.