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**A STUDY ON CONTRIBUTION OF CHHATRAPATI
SHAHU MAHARAJ IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
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A Study on Contribution of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj in the Development of Maratha Empire

Manju Malik

D.P.E. Govt. Sr. Sec. School

Abstract – According to Carlael, Biographies of the Great men are half a History. The Character and work of great men have immense importance in the scientific study of History, because History gets richer from the contribution of such great men. They give new dimensions to the society with their shrewdness and ambitions, while creating and leaving a new landmark in History. Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj heads the list of such great men. He was the person, who changed the existing notions with his benevolent and righteous attribution towards the Maratha Empire. While studying the rise and development of his personality, we have to study the Saint Tradition of Maharashtra, Shahaji Raje, and the overall historical period from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to Maharani Tarabai. Chatrapati Shahu stands as the brightest star in the darkness of the unfavourable situations prevailed in the medieval era.

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INTRODUCTION

"History is a science and it has to be studied critically with curiously on the basis of the available resources" proposes E. H. Kar. For creating History, man has to combat with the negative situations. Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj has paved a way to combat such negative situations and left an impression on the annals of the History. This thesis is the attempt to evaluate his attribution. After the death of Chatrapati Shivaji in 1680 AD and Aurangzeb in 1707, the period of around 27 years was full of struggle and turmoil for the Marathas. The death of Shivaji had tremendous impact on the Maratha Empire whereas, the Mughal attacks on the Maratha Empire increased considerably during such situation. The Marathas fought several wars with the Mughals which had literally become the wars for their existence and dignity.

The available historical facts propose the vigour and bravery of the Marathas during the war period, which covers almost 27 years of this historical period. The span of struggle of Maratha in which they fought bravely has been rightly named as the 'Freedom Struggle of the Marathas'.

In this context the words of Sir Jadunath Sarkar seems to be relevant to this era. He says, "The struggle has naturally incorporated self-confidence, adventure, simplicity, lucidness and social unity amongst Marathas". Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj is surely included in the list of great persons which, Maharashtra has produced. His political career flourished between 1708 AD and 1748 AD. In the entire Maratha History, he was the only person to have ruled for such a long period. He was released by the Mughals from captivity with the cruel intention of encouraging the struggle for succession in the

Maratha Empire. However, Chatrapati Shahu did not allow these intentions to take shape in reality. More importantly, he had never encouraged the division of Marathas and united them under his able leadership. Although, a proud Hindu, he never opposed the Muslim religion and adopted a secular policy in his state. He had immense respect for the holy men like Brehmendraswamy and Kachreshwar Baba. He considered Brahmeshwar Swamy as his Guru.

He continued the development of the Maratha Empire, established by Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. He had faced several hardships, right from his childhood. He was under the captivity of the Mughals. After his release, he was engulfed with the struggle with his own beloved ones for power, enmity with the Maratha Sardars and sadness in personal life was the unfortunate tale his life. Despite such difficult situations, he never lost his mental balance and ably shouldered the responsibilities of the Swarajya. With his tremendous contribution towards Swarajya, he not only left an impression on the history of Maharashtra but also on the history of the entire sub-continent. He has acquired a very prominent place in the Indian History possessing incredible qualities and abilities due to which he could serve the Maratha state wholeheartedly. He never actually fought with the Mughal Emperor, but established a real control over the Mughal Empire. While doing so, his main intension was to protect the interests of the Maratha Empire. He regularized the disturbed governance of the State and provided it stability.

Although, shrewdness and temperament needed for becoming a successful ruler, was never a part of his character, still he tactfully designed his policies by assigning the tasks to the eligible and efficient persons. Although, a tolerant person by nature, he

encouraged the aggressive policies of Bajirao Peshwa and extended the boundaries of the Maratha empire. As a ruler he did not hesitate to condemn the policies of Peshwa despite his increasing dominance. He was a link between Swarajya and the extended empire (Samrajya). Under such circumstances, when there was a need for an able leadership for the Marathas, he played the centralized role for the Maratha Mandal.

However, the vacuum generated with his death in the Maratha Empire was never filled in the later periods. His uniqueness can be evaluated from his shrewdness, which he utilized in his entire political career. He was a key person in avoiding the power struggle between the Peshwas and the Maratha Sardars. There were differences between them, but with his able statesmanship, he never allowed the struggle to go to the extreme stage, which helped the Maratha Empire expand far and wide. With his tolerant character and organizational skills, he managed to unite the strong Maratha Sardars to accomplish several unaccomplished tasks from them. He was able to gather company of quality men around him due to his friendly gestures which made him referred to be as 'Punya Shlok' (Holy soul).

While evaluating the work of Shahu Maharaj on the basis of his benevolence, historian G.S. Sardesai says "Shahu succeeded in achieving brilliant results through a mild persuasive policy by rigid justice and goodwill towards the Ryot". The Maratha Empire extended far and wide in the political tenure of Chhatrapati Shahu. His attributions to the Maratha Empire are the sanads (charters) of Swaraj, Chauthai and Sardeshmukhi control over Nizam, Warna Pact victory over Goa and inclusion of the territories like Gujrat, Malwa, Karnataka, Bundelkhand and Uttar Pradesh under Maratha dominance. While accomplishing these activities, he had to face stiff struggle for gaining the acclamation as Chhatrapati. After gaining the title of Chhatrapati, he established his capital at Satara. While referring all these events in his life, one can easily evaluate him as a shrewd political and able strategist of the Maratha Empire.

Chhatrapati Shahu has not only contributed politically, but also has immensely contributed in the social, Arts, religious and cultural fields. All these fields flourished with success under his patronage during the 18th century in Maharashtra. While studying the era prior to Chhatrapati Shahu, it can be easily evaluated that he has overcome the difficult situations due to his able leadership qualities. He took tremendous efforts for the welfare of the contemporary Maratha Empire, and adopted the tradition of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in real sense. He transformed the Swarajya in an extended empire (Samrajya). He can be considered as the last ruler in the lineage of Chhatrapati Dynasty who took the Maratha Empire to its highest elevation.

Chhatrapati Shahu, although has immense contribution in the building of the Maratha empire, no attempts were made so far, to shed light on his life.

This is the first research which has elaborated various aspects of the life of Chhatrapati Shahu. Shahu Maharaj is certainly a person who should be included in the list of such great personalities.

The researcher has attempted to study the contribution of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj in the development of the Maratha Empire and his contribution towards the futuristic society. While studying, it was also an aim of the researcher to shed light on various aspects of the life of Shahu Maharaj, as a builder of the vast Maratha Empire, his virtues and other socio-economico-political and cultural concerns. His early childhood was spent as a captive of Aurangzeb, but he led a struggled life after his release. Fighting a war of succession with his own near and dear ones, collecting a good number of able Samaritans, conducting severe military campaigns, gaining love and affection from masses for establishing and developing Swarajya, proving his mettle over the administration, all these activities brought him laurel and also maintained the glory of Chhatrapati Dynasty which not only remained restricted within the Maratha Country, but also spread in other parts.

In the contemporary conditions, Shahu Maharaj was compelled to adopt strong policies and manoeuvres to make his soldiers united in the crucial period. To shed light on the expansion and development of the Empire, this study of immense importance has been undertaken. Shahu Maharaj acquainted himself with the changing scenarios for transforming the Swarajya, established by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj into a vast Empire. He diverted all his attention towards North. Without hurting the pride of the Delhi Badshah, he sent his army to different regions to establish his dominance. He assigned the conquered territories to various Sardars and Peshwa to maintain its administration. This was possible only due to his abilities as an administrator, decision maker and silver-tongued attitude.

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj had strong desire to transform Maratha Swarajya into a vast Empire. He selflessly accomplished this task without caring for personal gains. Most of his childhood and even teen was spent as a captive of the Mughals and therefore had good knowledge of the political activities. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj had Sardars and Army of superior quality. Chhatrapati had men, who were men of vision, filled with intelligence, character, honesty and bravery.

Shahu Maharaj had a clear idea about the potentials of his men, resources and utilized them at the right places and at right opportunities. His entire life was spent in utilizing his god gifted virtues only for the sake of establishing a vast Empire. Shahu Maharaj had all the qualities needed for a able ruler including courage, implementing manoeuvring policies, intelligence, etc. On the strength of these virtues he was able to maintain control over his Sardars and personally could keep himself refrained from all the bad habits.

Therefore, it will not be an exaggerated if he is called a "Rashtrapurush".

While commencing study to write the Marathas history, a importance has been given to the political events and activities of that period. The social, economy and religious activities during this span has was taken into due consideration. Details about the historical events of Chhatrapati dynasty and peshavas are available with us, but we find that the personalities commencing commendable achievements during the concerned period have been put in fore. Very less attention has been paid to highlight the life of Chhatrapati Shahu, his attribution to the Maratha Empire and his decision making ability has remained ignored by the historians. These facts can be unveiled during the course of the study.

Chhatrapati Shahu, born to Chhatrapati Sambhaji and Yesubai had remained very unfortunate since his childhood. In his early childhood, his father Sambhaji was massacred. He and his mother Yesubai were under the captivity of the Mughals. They remained in the captivity until Shahu was a youth. He was victimised of the atrocious policies of Emperor Aurangzeb which left a deeper impact on his mind. Even after the release from the captivity, he led a struggled life to combat the internal clashes for gaining the power. His got stiff resistance from his kith and kin. Still, he confronted all these negative situations with courage and attained the position of a Chatrapati. After coming of this turmoil situations, he diverted all his attention expanding the Maratha Empire. This is indeed a meagre effort to take an account of the progressive life of such a 'Punyashlok' known in the history as Chatrapati Shahu. This able statesman not only transformed the Swarajya into an extensive Empire and also succeeded in giving the new recognition to the Maratha Empire in the social, political and cultural aspects.

Chatrapati Shahu was in the close acquaintance with Emperor Aurangzeb during his captivity. He assimilated the administrative staunchness, and internal managerial system and policies of the Mughals. This helped Shahu Maharaj to develop himself as a ruler. Similarly, he also had a greater impact of his grandfather Shivaji Maharaj, father Sambhaji and mother Yesubai. Until now, we have seen that the historians have given the secondary place of Shaju Maharaj in history. He had been given the inferior status than Chatrapati Shivaji, Sambhaji, Rajaram Maharaj, Tarabai, Peshwa and others in the history. His leadership quality had been underestimated by the historians. He was ambitious, shrewed and an able administrator. He had always remained aloof from the materialistic pleasures or any bad qualities. He influenced the people like Aurangzeb, his ministers, Kanhoji Angre, Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath, Senapati Dhanaji Jadhav and others with his behaviour and conduct.

Despite all these, he received the secondary place in the history of India. His personality, policies and work has special significance in the medieval history. It is very important to continue the work left by the historians and to shed the light on various aspects of the life of Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj. Keeping this aim in mind, the research in this regard has been initiated.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

V. S. Bendre says – "Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj tithi was January 16, 1681. Prior to that, He was remarried to Yesubai, as per the tradition and at the same time, the Putra Kameshti Yagnya washeld. After this, he was blessed with a son. He was named as Shivaji. However, Aurangzeb continued to call him as 'Shahu'. Sardesai says – Yesubai had two sons. Shringarpur is near Samgameshwar where there is a Surve village. Here, she had gone to this village near Katria of Shikrya for delivery. Gangavali village is near Mangaon near Rangadhar. Dr. Shivde – "Yesubai gave brith to the third heir of the Marathashahi throne. Herwadkar says – "Shivaji Maharaj had gained rebirth assuming the name of 'Shiv'. This would be because he would have wanted to fulfil his ambition of the conquest of the Northern India. Shahu Maharaj was born on May 18, 1682 at Gangavali village situated at the footsteps of Raigadh. Majority of the historians have accepted this date as this was the period of turmoil and struggle in the Maratha Empire. The initial education of Shahu began under the able guidance of Jyotyaji Kesarkar and mother Yesubai.

Yesubai could have easility mounted her son Shahu on the throne and would have taken the control of the empire in her hands. However, Yesubai selflessly decided to look after the administration and declared Rajaram Maharaj the king of the empire. A new administrative system was adopted at Raigadh. Rajaram Maharaj was kept under house arrest at Aahabkhana in the fort. He was later released by Killedar of Raigadh Changoji Katkar and Yesoji Kank in Magh Amavasya and was coronated as the king. At the time of coronation of Rajaram Maharaj, Sambhaji was alive and was under the captivity of the Mughals.

Manaji More and Varkad who were earlier arrested by Sambhaji Maharaj were released and were reinstated at their previous services. Zulfikar Khan Bahadur was assigned the task to capture Rayari (Raigadh). Emperor Aurangzeb had issued ordered that whatever assistance would be needed for the expedition should be taken from the Prince Shahzada Azam. Zulfikar Khan surrounded Raigadh and established his camp at the footsteps of Raigadh. The fort had a natural security. It was 250 feet above the sea level. It had its boundaries as Torna in east, Kangora and Songadh in south, Gangala in North-

East and Nalagad in North – West and Osalagadh in North. Raigadh was secured from all the sides with these forts and was standing to safeguard the empire between them.

Itikad Khan (Zulfikar Khan) setup his camp, two Kos away from Ramsi. The fort proved strong enough than his expectations. There was no other fort in the entire Konkan stronger than this fort. There was only one entrance to the fort. Hence, it was impossible to digout a tunnel below the fort. Then Zulfikar Khan, Afaali Khan and others along with horsemen went very close to the fort and started firing guns on the fort. During this activity, Zulfikhar Khan lost several of his able men. Frustrated of huge losses, he burnt the Maratha localities at the foothills and returned from there. He setup his cap at Bujurg Badi Dargah, not far away from the fort. As soon as he reached the camp, Hambirrao of Satara attacked on the camp. Around 1500 Maratha soldiers fought bravely and laid down their lives. Similarly, around 900 Mughal soldiers were also killed. As Maratha army was less in number it left the battlefield. The teams established to cut the sources (Rasad) of the Mughal army also left.

RESEARCH STUDY:

Shahu Maharaj Showered the prestige with several epithets on the Marathas Sardars. Parsoji Bhosle was awarded the epithet of 'Sena Saheb Subha', Phatehsingh Bhosle of Akkalkot as 'Senapati' while Kanhoji Angre was made the head of the naval fleet and was called as 'Sarkhel'. Govindrao Chitnis was appointed as the military 'Amaldar'. Haibatrao Nimbalkar was appointed as the Sarlashkar who was later replaced by Somwanshi. The post of Chitnis was sacked from Khando Ballal Prabhu and was given to Anandrao Prabhu. The responsibilities of 'Parasniti' and 'Potdari' post were shouldered on Yadavrao Bajiprabhu and Pund respectively. The post of Potdar was later given to Krishna Joshi.

Shahu Maharaj had granted some of the villages of his empire to the Ashtapradhans according to the Saranjam system. The system implied that the villages granted to the Ashtapradhans, Sardars, Karkhandars and others as the Inams, they had to look after the governance and welfare of these villages. He imposed rules regarding the welfare of the villages, administration, expenditure on the army from the revenue etc on the owners of these villages. He also made provisions that if there would be excess expenditure on the army, they should rearrange the budget after seeking permission from his majesty. He prescribed the rules for collecting the expenditure from the ministers, for example the expenditure of the elephants were borne by Sachin, expenditure of the Mahal by the representative (Pratinidhi), the expenses on building by Pradhan Pant etc per month. A decree was issued to recover Hundi (Varata) from Dattaji Shivde and the collected funds were deposited in the royal treasury.

The empire was divided into the Subhas under the control of his Ashtapradhan Mandals and Sardars. Phatehsingh Bhonsale was given the Subhas of Akkalkot and Pargana, Senapati Khanderao Dabhade Gujrat, Ahmedabad and Kathewad. Bhosale, Senasahab Varad Gondwana, Katak and some Mahals of Hindustan. Sachiv was given Malwa, Konkan, some Mahals and Sahodi Subha. Pradhan was granted Khandesh, Malwa, Baglan subhas and the control over all the territory occupied by the Marathas in Hindustan. Sarlashkar was given the territory along the banks of river Ganga and the responsibility to execute the administration effectively which was gained from the Mughal authority.

The most of the territory of the Swaraya, established by Chatrapti Shivaji Maharaj was conquered by Emperor Aurangzeb. The Marathas under the able leadership of Maharani Tarabai launched a massive struggle against Aurangzeb to regain it in the Maratha Empire. When Shahu reached Deccan, some part of the Swaraj was still under the control of the Mughals. Shahu had accepted the patronage of the Badshah and he received the earlier territory of the Swaraj. The sanad in this regard was granted by the Badshah to Shahu in 1719.

CONCLUSION:

While undertaking the selective study regarding the life and development of Empire of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, we come across various events related to struggle, emotions and turmoil situations. To combat the difficult situations, he had undertaken several decisions courageously. He had not only given a new vision to the Maratha Empire but also immensely contributed in its development. His several virtues came to fore while undergoing the study. Every decision taken by Shahu Maharaj proved to be the fruitful and effective. The study has put light on these virtues of Shahu Maharaj. In this part, the study undertaken in the last volume was considered to exhibit new dimensions of his life. A glance if given at political scenario in the medieval India, Chhatrpati Shahu Maharaj availed the advantage of the declining Mughal Empire and established a vast Maratha Swarajya keeping it intact. Immediately, after getting free from the captivity of Aurangzeb, he hold the front against his opponents establishing his own Empire with the support of his able statement and utilized commendable the qualities in individual persons. Accepting this tactics, he successfully established the Maratha Supremacy in every nook and corner of Hindustan. As a result, Shahu Maharaj had not only gained importance status in the history of Marathas but also in the history of entire India. While transforming the Maratha Empire, the graph to this effect was always at highest elevation even in the critical period. After acquiring the position of "Chhatrapati", Shahu Maharaj chosen the strategies of keeping the Maratha imperialism intact, which was really an extraordinary task. While studying the glimpses of his life, one eventually comes across if

abilities accomplished in political, social, economical and cultural fields. The work of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was not remained restricted to the development of Marathas, but it assumed an importance to the national leadership. He maintained cordial relations Mughals, Rajputs, and Samants and tried to narrow down the gap between them through his intelligency. A separate identity of Shahu Maharaj's works was seen in the administration of Empire or restructuring the administration. In this research work, the evidences found on the works and domination of Shahu Maharaj in the history was re-examined.

Shahu Maharaj's inclination towards arts, literature, religion, culture and others activities have also been described in brief. The explanation also carried out on setting up new localities in satara, peth, gardens of fruits and flowers established by Shahu Maharaj were also given a due consideration. Other aspects of the life of Shahu Maharaj as a religious person, patronage to the musicians, astrologers, intellectuals and artists have also been taken into consideration. This showcased various qualities of Shahu Maharaj. It proves that Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was a kind and benevolent ruler. Even in the crisis situations, Shahu maharaja had not hesitated to take benevolent decision and did not diverted from his moral duties and policies. Therefore, he has become immortal in the history of Maratha.

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