Contribution of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj in the Development of Maratha Empire : A Study

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.

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 Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to Maharani Tarabai. Chatrapati Shahu stands as the brightest star in the darkness of the unfavourable situations prevailed in the medieval era.
“Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj revitalized the feeling of their existence in the Marathas variors and developed the sense of self-respect, self-religion and self-culture in them, which made the Indian society forgot the four centuries old tyrannical rule of Turks and Mughals. This achievement is not only a source of inspiration for Maharashtra but also for the entire nation, over the past centuries. Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj had immensely contributed in inculcating a sense of patriotism in the Indians.

While studying the historical background, the contribution of Chatrapati Shahu resembles the era of negativism. Despite the negative situations all around in the medieval era, the Marathas have immensely contributed in the Freedom struggle for establishing an autonomous regime. Shivaji Maharaj was the forerunner in the establishment of Swarajya, which was the beginning of an new era in the medieval history. This period diminished the four centuries old tyrannical history dominated by Turks and Mugals. No doubt, it had also proved instrumental in generated self confidence amongst the fellow countrymen.

In the later course of History, Sambhaji Maharaj, Ranangini Tarabai, Santaji and Dhanaji continued the struggle of Marathas after Shivaji Maharaj.

After the release of Shahu from the Mughal captivity, he transformed the disintegrated Maratha state into a consolidated empire during the period of 1708 AD and 1748 AD. He expanded the ambit of the Maratha Empire in the Northern India with the help of Maratha senapati, Peshwa and other brave Sardars. The boundaries of the empire were spread in Gujarat, Malwa, Karnataka, Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the country. While doing so, he established an influence of the Maratha Empire over the
central governance of the Mughals. By imposing several restrictions on the Mughal emperor, he gained Sanads (Charters) for Chuthai and Sardeshmukhi from him. On the other hand, the disintegrated Marathas were reunited under his able leadership.

The character and works of great men is important while doing scientific study of history. The reason is that contribution of great and noble men makes history prosperous. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was a great man who changed the course of history of Maratha during the medieval period. One has to examine history from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, local saints and bravery of Marathas (Maharashtra) for studying rise, development and contribution of great men in creating Maratha Kingdom. Shahu Maharaj shone like a star in the darkness of medieval period. He was among those great kings who left their footprints on the history of Maratha by their noble duties and deeds. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was born on January 15, 1682 and his political career runs through 1708 to 1748.

Shahu succeeded the Maratha throne (with Satara as his capital, 1708) at the age of twenty six with the help of Balaji Vishwanath, an astute diplomat who was in the service of Dhanaji Jadhav, the Maratha commander in chief. After becoming Chhatrapati, he started turning his empire into ‘Swarajya’ successfully. He expanded his kingdom in different parts of the country including Gujarat, Malwa, Karnataka, Bundelkhand and Uttari Pradesh with help of loyal Peshwas and Sardars.

He got the rights from Mughals to collect Chauth and Sardeshmukhi. This leap of Marathas in 18th century was matchless. Marathas could move freely from Thanjavur to Attock and Bengal to Gujarat. Gradually, the reign of the whole country came into the hands of Marathas who were chief rulers of India till the British spread their control (19th Century).

Shahu was a good judge of character, a benevolent king and an excellent manager. The main objective of adopting policy of imperialism was to safeguard the interest of Maratha State. The graph of expansion of imperialism kept going up continuously during his period.
The most important quality of this great man was that, he never allowed the division of Marathas. Shahu was truly a secular king who was comfortable with Muslim customs as well as his Hindus. He used to give respect to saints like Brahamhendra Swami and Kachreshwar Baba.

In short, he proved to be a link between Marathi Swaraj and imperialism. He was the last Chhatrapati of Maratha rule.

Despite this, the required research to shed light on various aspects of life was not carried out. So, the researcher made a plan to study different aspects of Chhatrapati Shahu.

***