



Colonel His Highness Sir Shri Shahu Chhatrapati, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O.,
LL.D., &c., Maharaja of Kolhapur
(in his Durbar dress).

AUTHOR'S PREFATORY NOTE.

FOR various reasons I would not have undertaken the writing of the following pages. But one paramount fact outweighed all considerations which might have induced me to decline the invitation of the Kolhapur Durbar to undertake this work. While discussions were going on this point, it was quite clear to me that His Highness Shri Rajaram Chhatrapati Maharaja and his august mother, Her Highness the Dowager Maharani Saheb, were determined to have the work done by me, however much others, including my own humble self, may have wished otherwise. The courageous attachment to the Non-Brahmin cause which the new Chhatrapati Maharaja and his mother showed at a very delicate and critical moment impressed me so deeply that it became impossible for me not to obey a call which came from them. By obeying their command, I felt I was obeying a call to duty made by the cause of Non-Brahmin regeneration.

The difficulties in my way were quite numerous. If I have succeeded in overcoming them to some extent, thanks are due entirely to His Highness Shri Rajaram Maharaja himself. He was pleased to place at my disposal all the materials for a memoir of his father which were available. Some of this material was of a highly confidential nature. He left it wholly to me to make whatever use I liked of that material. I am grateful to His Highness for this as well as many other ways in which he was good enough to assist me in the work entrusted to me.

The next to come to my mind is Sir Stuart Fraser whose help has been of very valuable and varied. He took the keenest in the whole of the work, read almost every page of the book before it was finally printed and sent to me several

important suggestions. His "Personal Reminiscences" and Preface will be read, I am sure, with the greatest interest by every reader of this book. I cannot be too thankful to him for all this assistance.

The advice and help of Rao Bahadur R. V. Sabnis, C.I.E., was simply indispensable to me. If the choice had been left to me, I would certainly have pointed out to him as the fittest person to write a biography of the late Chhatrapati Maharaja. Failing his writing it himself, I had a right to claim his assistance at every step; and I am glad to find that he was always ready to give it to me in full measure. I thank him very sincerely.

I had to indent upon the kindness of many others for information in connection with this work. Among those of them whose names must be particularly mentioned, Shrimant Bapusaheb Maharaj, the Senior Chief of Kagal and Shrimant Kakasaheb, the Junior Chief Saheb, are the first and foremost. I must also mention here the full notes which Rao Saheb Dr. Tengshe sent to me in respect of the Maharaja's trip to Europe in 1902. My thanks are due to all of them.

I feel I cannot close this Note of thanks without making, however briefly, a reference to the Kshatra Jagadguru and Mr. Shankarrao Indulkar. I need not try to describe how they helped the present work. But I will say only this: Without their sincerity and directness to stand by me, I could not have discharged the duty entrusted to me. I thank them both as sincerely as they helped me.

BELGAUM,
6th May 1924.

A. B. LATTHE.

PREFACE.

BY SIR S. M. FRASER, K.C.S.I.

THIS Memoir of H. H. Sir Shahu Chhatrapati, Maharaja of Kolhapur, is no mere selection from the annals of a Native State, compiled by a panegyrist of the late ruler. Not the least interesting part of the book, it is true, will be found in the chapters sketching the history of Kolhapur, and showing how the Maharaja's illustrious ancestor, Sivaji the Great, built up the Mahratta nation, and how Sir Shahu's similarly masterful personality re-established in no small measure the old authority, social, and religious, which attached to the ancient conception of Kshatriya Kingship in a State where the prestige of the rulers had fallen low during a long succession of minorities. His own people will rightly honour him as the greatest ruler of his line since the days when the Kolhapur State attained a separate existence, and, if only from the local point of view, a record of his life would have been well worth preserving.

His biographer, Professor Lattbe, however, who is himself a leader of the non-Brahmin movement in British India, writes with none of the limitations of a courtier, and has been fortunate in finding ready to his hand materials for a work of far wider scope—the history of a movement as well as of a man—which should prove of interest to a large circle, including many who are unfamiliar with the name of Kolhapur.

Averse as he was from the arts of self-advertisement, His Highness was less known either in India or in England than many other Euling Princes, but readers of this book will agree that few, if any, Indians of whatever rank have made a contribution to the cause of social and religious

reform more courageous, more practical and more inspiring to his fellow countrymen alike in British India and in the Native States.

Preachers of reform have appeared from time to time of many different types ; scholars and philosophers of the literate classes, saints, poets and lovers of their fellowmen, who sprang from a variety of castes. It may be doubted, however, whether anything like a similar instance is recorded of a Ruling Prince who worked and suffered during his whole manhood in one long struggle against the deep-rooted evils of a complex social and religious system in order to effect the betterment of the humblest of his fellow-men.

Not a low-caste man who had himself been under the harrow of oppression, but a Kshatriya of illustrious family, and Ruler of the principal State in the Bombay Presidency—not a studious ascetic, but a genial figure, fortunate in his one wife and his children, and very human in all his traits—not a freethinker, but scrupulous even to the verge of superstition in his personal observances—untouched by Western republican ideas and a model of personal loyalty to the Crown—an all-round sportsman who loved horse and hound—the Maharaja was a man who might have found his place among the ranks of those who view the world as a comfortable dwelling on the whole, make the best of things as they are, and avoid stirring up hornets' nests. Such a conventional attitude, however, did not accord either with the Chhatrapati Maharaja's militant conscience or with his ideal of the obligations attaching to his position. His varied characteristics add interest to the story of his life-long fight in one of the most unselfish of causes.

From the very beginning of the twenty-six years of his rule, the Maharaja made it his mission to work for the amelioration of all classes by emancipating them from the domination of the caste system. It is a common place that the status of a Hindu, social and religious, depends upon the caste or

Priest, the Shankaracharya Swami, who professed to keep the keys of the Hindu heavens. This and other similar movements of which Mr. Latthe gives a sketch, may prove, it is obvious, of great importance in the evolution of Hinduism. Time alone will shew whether their growth is continuous or whether there is a set-back before the new spirit leavens appreciably the masses, as, I believe, it ultimately must. However this may turn out, the Satya Shodhak made way in Kolhapur and the adjoining districts. The Maharaja established a Satya Shodhak School in 1913 and the revolt against the authority of the Swami spreading from the towns into the villages, hundreds of marriages and other lesser ceremonies were performed by Marathas for Marathas.

Later on His Highness came to entertain greater hopes of a religious reconstruction in the equally tolerant doctrines of the Arya Samaj which, being based on the foundation of the Vedas, were more acceptable to Hindus as a creed and stronger as a weapon for the breaking of Brahmin despotism. In 1920 he instituted the Shivaji Kshatriya Vedic School for Marathas "to root out the superstitions which have been mixed up with the Vedic religion, and to restore the purity of the Vedic system." A bolder innovation was made when he appointed a Maratha to be the Jagadguru of the Patgaon Math with the following instructions :—"Your ideal ought to be to do away with the middleman between God and man." In his own Palace he ordered that the worship of the family Gods should be performed at the hands of Marathas instead of Brahmins.

Nor did any inconsistency occur between his precept and his practice. Sir Shahu Chhatrapati never asked any one to do what he was not prepared to do himself. Many an advanced thinker, Eastern as well as Western, has turned again to his old faith and his boyhood's rites, when he felt the sands of life running out. But it was not so with this man. His last words, we are told, were :—"I am ready to go. I

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particular water-tight compartment of society in which he is born and lives and ends his days. Therefore from the nature of the case, His Highness, in combating a system based upon religion and hallowed by tradition, undertook a task of stupendous magnitude, in which the concurrent social and religious issues were later on interwoven with the question of political reform.

Reduced to their simplest terms, his manifold activities may be classified as aiming at two connected objects—the education of the masses and the breaking down of the barriers between man and man created by caste.

Education in India, it will be remembered, ceased to be in any way a Brahmin monopoly from the date of the British Government's cardinal decision in 1833, which put in the forefront of Britain's duty to India the task of opening up instruction in schools to all castes and creeds. Progressive efforts to extend education downwards among the masses were made from that time onwards, in spite of the handicap imposed upon a Government, which is necessarily pledged to religious neutrality, by the inveterate prejudices of Indians themselves. Millions, however, remained steeped in ignorance, and the Maharaja devoted his energies to the free and compulsory education of the backward classes as the first plank upon which to build the non-Brahmin structure for their elevation. To the end of his life he continued founding and endowing new schools and, most important of all, hostels in order to extend the benefits of higher education to those who hitherto had possessed little desire or power to seek them. The special value of such hostels is now recognized by all educational authorities in India, but in no city throughout the continent has the system been developed to the same extent as in Kolhapur, or with the same success in supplementing the lack of religious teaching in schools. By 1920 separate hostels had been started in the Maharaja's small capital for no fewer than eleven different sections of

the community, including the Indian Christians and the so-called Untouchables. Nor were his catholic sympathies limited to his own subjects. In all his reform work, his mission extended itself beyond Kolhapur and not merely to Marathas in the caste sense of the term, but to all the people of Maharashtra.

The religious side of his reforms gained its first impulse from what is known as the Vedokta controversy, which, it will be seen, involved a great deal more than the question whether the Bhosale and Ghatge families were entitled to the status of Kshatriyas or should be relegated to the rank of Shudras. Professor Latthe traces historically the age-long struggle between the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, which assumed an acute shape in the Deccan as far back as the days of Shivaji when the Brahmins resisted the rising ambitions of the martial classes to assert their social rights. As in those times, so again in this century, political jealousy of the Maratha was a class motive colouring the religious issue in the trial of strength that took place from 1901 onwards between the ruler of Kolhapur and the Brahmin hierarchy. To the European of to-day the pains and penalties of Papal excommunication are little more than a curiosity of mediæval history, and it is almost impossible for him to realize the odds arrayed against the Maharaja, and what it cost one who was then an orthodox Hindu, to hold out against the religious ban imposed upon him by the Brahmin mouthpieces of the Gods and the dispensers of divine favour as he was brought up to regard them.

His own hereditary priest, the Jagadguru Swami, or High Priest of the Shankaracharya Math, and the whole close corporation of the Brahmin community in the Deccan, including thousands of his own hitherto loyal subjects, were instigated to unite against him. So far as the Maharaja personally was concerned, it seems clear that he might have compromised matters and obtained recognition of his own

Kshatriyaship as a Ruling Prince. A weaker man would have yielded to this temptation, but the injustice of the bigoted persecution he had to endure merely quickened his sympathy with those who were less able to fight for themselves, and when after an interval of years he finally won the battle, his resolve had become fixed that thereafter not only Kshatriyas, but other castes as well, should stand in social and religious matters independent of the Brahmin priesthood.

The results of this determination were far reaching. No longer content to admit the predominance of the Brahmin so long as the Kshatriyas' claim to the Vedic form of worship was conceded, the Maharaja began to contemplate the creation of a separate priesthood of his own caste on the analogy of the Jains and Lingayats. First, however, His Highness made inquiries, in what Mr. Latthe aptly terms the spirit of an Akbar, into various reformed movements of Hinduism, the Satya Shodak in the Deccan, Brahmoism, Theosophy and the Arya Samaj, in search of the system which would best satisfy the spiritual as well as the social needs of the non-Brahmins. Until comparatively recent times, it is pointed out, the conscience of the layman had remained a negligible factor in the disputes between rival religious factions, and Hindu society was content to assume without question that the claim to officiate as Purhohit was a monopoly vested in the Brahmin priests. A new spirit, however, was stirring, and fresh manifestations of Brahmin bigotry awakened among considerable masses the desire to purify the Hindu religion by rooting out priestcraft as the indispensable intermediary between God and man. The analogy of their ideas with the spirit of the great Protestant Reformation in Europe was not overlooked by the Satya Shodak leaders who asserted the position that, just as the Protestants rebelled under Luther against the infallibility of the Pope, so the Non-Brahmins must rebel against the Brahmin priesthood and its High

Priest, the Shankaracharya Swami, who professed to keep the keys of the Hindu heavens. This and other similar movements of which Mr. Latthe gives a sketch, may prove, it is obvious, of great importance in the evolution of Hinduism. Time alone will shew whether their growth is continuous or whether there is a set-back before the new spirit leavens appreciably the masses, as, I believe, it ultimately must. However this may turn out, the Satya Shodhak made way in Kolhapur and the adjoining districts. The Maharaja established a Satya Shodhak School in 1913 and the revolt against the authority of the Swami spreading from the towns into the villages, hundreds of marriages and other lesser ceremonies were performed by Marathas for Marathas.

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Nor did any inconsistency occur between his precept and his practice. Sir Shahu Chhatrapati never asked any one to do what he was not prepared to do himself. Many an advanced thinker, Eastern as well as Western, has turned again to his old faith and his boyhood's rites, when he felt the sands of life running out. But it was not so with this man. His last words, we are told, were :—"I am ready to go. I

have no fears," and for the first time in the history of his race, the obsequies of a Chhatrapati Maharaja were performed, as he desired, by men of his own caste and not by the Brahmin priests.

From the characters of the two men it was inevitable that the Maharaja should come into conflict with Tilak and his Shivaji movement, which was socially reactionary as well as politically anti-British, and the wave of sedition and anarchy which swept over India in the opening years of this century broke over Kolhapur with more severity than any other Native State. An attempt was made to murder the Resident, Colonel Ferris, and numerous prosecutions followed. The whole story is not told in this book but His Highness threw himself into the anti-Sedition Campaign with all his usual zeal and thoroughness. Not content with tackling the evil in his own territory, his successful efforts in unravelling plots in the Bombay Presidency were of the greatest value to the British Government, who repeatedly acknowledged the splendid loyalty he displayed and awarded him in 1909 the high honour of a personal salute of twenty-one guns. On the other hand as a matter of course he incurred the hostility of the extremist press in British India, which pursued him with unscrupulous malignancy to the end of his life.

The Great War offered His Highness another opportunity of spending himself in the service of the Crown with all his characteristic energy. He subscribed money so far as the limited resources of his State permitted, but his most valuable contributions took the shape of personal work. Notable as proving the reality of his authority over all Marathas, wherever born, was the incident described by the author, when the garrison in Kut ran short of food and the Maratha sepyhs had scruples about eating horse-flesh, the Chhatrapati Maharaja volunteered to go to Mesopotamia and be carried into Kut by aeroplane in order to talk personally with the men, and, when this proved impossible to attempt, sent

them a stirringly worded appeal as from one caste man to his brethren, which effected its object and helped to prolong their gallant resistance.

Returning now in order of time to the Maharaja's principal work among the masses, Mr. Latthe shows how the British Government's momentous announcement of August 20th, 1917, of a constitutional policy in India, which promised the people the progressive realisation of responsible government, gave a political turn to the non-Brahmin movement and led His Highness to open a new campaign. He was quick to realise that the constitutional changes in British India must react upon the territories under the rule of every Indian Prince and create new problems for them as for the British Government. But viewing the question less from the angle of his own Order than as a leader of the non-Brahmin classes generally, he enunciated on many a platform the view—not so popular as its commonsense merited—that if the Indian continent were to be made fit for Home Rule and if that rule were to develop on true democratic lines instead of reimposing upon the people the yoke of an oligarchy, it was now more necessary than ever to level up the backward masses in the matter of education, to teach them their civil rights and to substitute the spirit of toleration for the rigid exclusivism of caste. These, as we have seen, were but the aims he had been steadily pursuing ever since his accession but with the prospect of the country's policy being controlled in the future by Indians elected on a popular franchise, he now redoubled his efforts to improve the status of the "untouchable" masses in particular. His text, "Those who take part in politics must treat men as men" reads like a platitude to all who do not realise the inhuman degradation to which the ban of untouchability condemns millions of human beings at the hands of the Hindu community. Rightly does Mr. Latthe term the work His Highness did for the depressed classes as stupendous and give it the place of honour among his

many beneficent activities. Emphasizing that the highborn classes must make a sacrifice of their hereditary privileges as the Samurai did in Japan, the Chhatrapati Maharaja, the high caste ruler of the Kolhapur State, himself set such an example as no Kshatriya Prince had ever set before and actually ate in public from the hands of outcastes. Further to raise their status he appointed men of these classes to places on his personal establishment, and, removing by legislation all the disabilities from which they suffered, he threw open to them service in every department of the State. Nor here again did His Highness confine his efforts to his own territory. Always bearing in mind that the Native States and the British Provinces are interwoven parts of one Indian Empire, he did not allow his rank as a Ruling Prince to deter him from presiding over numerous conferences of the backward and depressed classes in and beyond the Bombay Presidency.

No elaborate analysis of the character of the late Maharaja need be added to this brief indication of a few of the reasons why this book deserves to be read. His biographer is a candid critic and in quoting freely from His Highness' own private letters to illustrate the many-sided character of his subject, he has not attempted to picture him only in the most favourable light.

To my mind the outstanding feature which explains Sir Shahu Chhatrapati's life-work is his combination of a broad humanity with an uncompromising courage that led him to practise what he preached without any of the reservations prudence might have dictated for one who was not free, like a private individual, from the restrictions of a great public position. Liberal ideas had been spreading and His Highness was by no means the first Hindu who deplored the social evils of Hinduism and advocated its reform, though few had gone so far in stressing the Western principle, not of the equality of man, but of the equal right of the poorest

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and feeblest to his own freedom and to a perfect equality of treatment. Wide, however, has been hitherto the gulf separating words and action in the sphere of social and religious reform, and it is for the self-sacrificing courage of his actions that the Maharaja claims our special admiration. Not his the nature to halt and talk upon the brink. Fearless of consequences, he plunged in himself to lead the way across. It is true that, as a Ruling Prince, he had great resources at his command to give effect to his policy, but the more prominent his position, the stronger were the trammels of environment he had to burst, and—it must not be forgotten—the more he suffered in the battle for his cause. His Highness would not have denied that he was a fighting man by nature and, helped by no small sense of humour, he bore his buffets in the temper of the good sportsman he was. It would be absurdly unjust, however, to believe that he fought the Brahmins for the pleasure of fighting or that he did not feel very acutely indeed the mud-throwing of which he and his family wife for years the target. Never hesitating to admit what he owed to liberal-minded Brahmins, like Mr. Ranade, Mr. Agarkar and Mr. Gokhale, he retained friends among their ranks throughout. In a word, he opposed Brahmins as a system, not so much from hatred of the Brahmins as because he loved the non-Brahmin masses and because he was that type of man—uncommon in any country—whom the sight of injustice stirred, not merely to intellectual disapproval but to a heartfelt ardour to strike a blow and remedy the wrong.

We live too close to his times to view his work as yet in its true perspective, and can but speculate whether disunion among the ranks may not—for a time at any rate—check the Reformation movements, social, religious and political, which the last Maharaja championed. The record of his life, however, it is safe to assert, contains materials which no historian of the New India, growing up under our eyes, can afford to neglect; and, when the bitterness of controversies

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in which he played so strenuous a part dies down, who can doubt that Indians of every class will treasure with pride, like a national possession, the memory of Sir Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj as a truly great man.

S. M. FRASER.

CHRISTCHURCH,
September, 1923.

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