



## Contribution of A British 'Guru' in the Making of Chhatrapati Shahu, the Revolutionary King of Kolhapur

### KEYWORDS

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During his reign from 1884 to 1922, Shahu Chhatrapati, the king of Kolhapur State, undertook the herculean task of social revolution even under the dominance of the British power. He exhibited his progressive and liberal attitude in establishing social and educational equality within his state and without. He succeeded in his attempt to build a new social structure by struggling hard not only with the aliens but also with his country-men. A critical assessment of Shahu's exemplary work makes us pursue the fundamentals on which his persona was built.

Great men are never born out of any one particular impetus and Shahu was no exception to it. He carried with him as his western education, his native and British teachers, and the environment around him. But the major contribution in building Shahu's personality was that of his British teacher and Guru. It was Sir Stuard Mitford Fraser who became his first and foremost Guru, his 'Friend, philosopher and guide.'

Sir Fraser was an I.A.S. officer in the British government. He was Assistant District Collector of Nasik before being appointed as Shahu's teacher. He was well known as an honest, efficient and competent officer. Before Fraser's appointment as Shahu's teacher and guardian, Abasaheb Ghatage, the Regent of Kolhapur state, had appointed Fitzgerald as Shahu's teacher. Fitzgeralds worked in this capacity from August 1884 to March 1889.<sup>1</sup>

Later, in April 1889 the British Government appointed Sir Fraser as a tutor and Guardian of Shahu, as well as his brother Pupaasheb, the Jahagirdar of Kagal, and Bhausinghji, the Prince of Bhavnagar. The British Government posted Fraser at Dharwad to look after the Princes education. Though Fraser was granted complete freedom in imparting education to the Princes, he was expected to work under the surveillance of the Political Agent. Governor General in Council also expressed his satisfaction over the appointment of Fraser.<sup>2</sup>

Fraser, thus, joined his duties on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1889 at Kolhapur. Shahu's education began on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1889 under his guidance at Dharwad. Their relations as the teacher and the taught remained unimpaired till the death of Shahu (i.e. in 1922). Shahu-Fraser relations were strengthened during the period of 1889 to 1894. It seems that it is in this period that Fraser tried to shape and moulds the sensitive mind of Shahu.

Fraser sent his first report of Shahu's progress to the British Government on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1890. The report includes even the minute details of information of Shahu's height, weight, his physique, as well as the characteristics of his nature. Fraser writes, "though Shahu is not exceptionally intelligent, he has tremendous commonsense and good memory. He has in him a curiosity to learn and he is ready to put in hard work to take his education. He is superb in political economy compared to the other princes." He is healthy minded, open, generous and truthful. He is totally free from bumptiousness and I have

seen many little instance if unselfishness and thoughtfulness on his part."<sup>3</sup> The characteristic features of an eighteen year old youngster Shahu, observed by Fraser later became clearly visible during his life time achievement as a social savior.

Shahu and his fellow mates participated in three educational tours with their teacher Fraser. The first tour of India took place during the winter of 1889. Later in their second tour from 5<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1891; they traveled through South India and Ceylon. And finally they went on the tour of North India for the second time on 28<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1892.<sup>4</sup> During this journey Fraser introduced Shahu with the entire region of North and South India and the diversity amongst the natives of those regions. Fraser took Shahu beyond the bookish education to the real world education by traveling thorough different holy places, historical monuments, geographical regions, temples, museums and gardens. The objective of Fraser behind these tours was to make Shahu aware of the real condition of his country and his people and to develop him psychologically and intellectually. Fraser brought to Shahu's notice the different examples of religious secularism such as that of the Mughal Emperor Akbar through his building of the monuments like the Hindu temple for Jodhabai near Fattepur Sikri as well as the Portuguese place adjacent to a Jain temple. Fraser also showed him the Tea gardens of Darjeeling, the temples demolished and destructed by Aurangzeb as well as the web of canals in Punjab. He not only showed him various Zoos and Sanctuaries but also made him experience the dominance of Hindu priesthood and extreme sights of religious fundamentalism. During their journey through all such sights and cities, Fraser imbibed on Shahu their educational and social significance. Fraser would make a subtle comment over all those sights, experiences, regions, and rituals that they would come across. Despite all this Fraser also trained Shahu in the manners and etiquettes to be followed during their public meetings with the then Indian Princes and their officers in various princely states.<sup>5</sup>

All these three educational tours in the company of Fraser contributed significantly to the knowledge and experience of Shahu. They also helped to broaden his social vision. He was enlightened about the Indian social structure, customs and traditions and human nature and values. This growing social consciousness of Shahu has been explicitly reflected in his further revolutionary moves in his administration. It is clearly evident that Fraser sincerely tried to develop Shahu as a sensitive ruler, completely dedicated to the welfare of his subjects.

Fraser guided Shahu at every important mode of his life and developed in him an unusual vision to look at course of life. It all started with the thread ceremony of Shahu. He expected that Shahu should realize the significance of every ritual in his life and should recognize the implied meaning hidden in it. He further expected that he should keep in mind that ritual was symbolic of his journey from adolescence to adulthood. Fraser says, "Such an occasion is like a mile stone on the road which reminds us how far we have already gone and how far

we have yet to go and you may well stop here a moment, and see how far you have got on the journey of life....you will now give more thought to serious things, responsibility for your thoughts and actions which distinguishes as child from a boy and a boy from a man."<sup>6</sup> The above quote of Fraser indicates the maturity of Fraser as a guardian and Guru of Shahu.

Shahu got married on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1891. Even on this important occasion, Fraser does not seem to hesitate in advising Shahu: "Marriage is not simply a celebration but a responsibility accepted by a holy ritual."<sup>7</sup>

Fraser sent his second report of Shahu's progress to the Political Agent in April, 1891. In which he writes that he is giving a deep knowledge of the subjects like Arithmetic, Stocks and shares, History of India, History of the Bombay Presidency, Geography of India, Political economy, Law-Indian Penal Code, Astronomy, Drawing, Mathematics, and English to Shahu and his fellow mates. While writing about Shahu's individual progress further, he says, "Shahuraje is quite willing and attentive in his studies. He is especially interested in Law and primary Science. But his weakness of carelessness makes his every work unsatisfactory. He still hesitates while communicating with the strangers. But he is immensely interested in dogs, horses and guns." He further writes, "During last six months Shahu Skillfully has driven the chariot of six horses well trained by him."<sup>8</sup> The above report of Fraser indicates that Fraser was trying his level best to make Shahu a competent ruler by imparting his knowledge of all the possible subjects from Mathematics to Drawing and from Law to Astronomy. He was praising Shahu for his virtues and also simultaneously monitoring his weaknesses. Bombay Government was quite satisfied with Fraser's intimacy with Shahu as a teacher and a guardian. Therefore, the Political Agent Col. Woodhouse advised Fraser to finalize the decision of the education of the Rani only after discussing it with Shahu. Fraser later tried to know Shahu's opinion about the decision regarding the education of Ranisaheba. While conveying Shahu's opinions to Woodhouse, he says, "Shahuraje wishes his queen to be educated but he is against sending her to school for learning. Therefore, he wishes to appoint lady teacher Miss. Little and a local teacher as her tutor. He also expects that his Rani should strictly observe Purdah and avoid exposing her face before any 'other' man, during her learning. Shahu also feels that His Rani must never visit any European woman's house not even her own female teachers. However, the European women were allowed to visit the Rani." Fraser further explains Woodhouse that, "This prejudiced opinion of Shahu could be tolerated keeping in mind the orthodox framework of the local obligation of observing the custom of Purdah by Indian women. It is only when he grows up enough to realize the advantages of this education; he will come to see the significance of the endeavors of the British Government,"<sup>9</sup> It should be noted here that in his later period, Shahu had publicly protested the custom of Purdah and thus Fraser's prediction came true.

By intimating Shahu's orthodox opinions to Woodhouse, Fraser has tried to make him understand the psyche of the then Shahu. Since Fraser was well acquainted with Indian culture and traditions; he is seen here functioning as a mediator between Shahu and British Government. On 17 May, 1891 Fraser advises Shahu with the following Mantra/formula for success.

1. "Carefulness in reading, writing and composition.
2. Neatness not only in handwriting, but in dress.
3. Thoroughness not only in preparation of lessons, but in all you do, whether work or games. Bear these three words in mind-Carefulness, Neatness, Thoroughness."<sup>10</sup>

Bombay government appreciated Fraser's work as the teacher of Shahu as the most creditable one. This was also approved by the Governor-in-Council.<sup>11</sup>

After Shahu's wedding, Fraser even writes Shahu about his intensely private life. This letter throws light on the extraordinary teacher-taught relationship between Fraser and Shahu. Fraser writes, "Ranisaheba is still not even 12 years old and Indian Government has considered keeping physical relationship with a woman below 12 as a crime by recently making a law for it. Therefore you should read the book 'Harimaitism' and consult competent English and Native doctors for it and promise me that you will not treat your Ranisaheba as a wife till she turns 15". While justifying this he writes, "It was your father's wish, which he repeated on his deathbed, that you should not marry till you were 18 years of age... Government also does not wish that there should be any more adoptions in the Kolhapore family, but hope that you will be the founder of a line of healthy and strong descendants and heirs to Raj..."<sup>12</sup> This letter indicates the significance of Fraser in Shahu's life.

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1893 Fraser recommended Bombay Government that Shahu should be given adequate knowledge and experience of the actual functioning of the various departments in the government. Because he thought that when Shahu will take over the reins of his administration, it would be difficult for him to find time out for training and study.<sup>13</sup> This recommendation of Fraser was sanctioned by Bombay Government.

Even after 1894 he used to send an annual progress report of Shahu to Bombay Government. Fraser sent his last progress report to the Political Agent Hunter on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1894. This report mentions how Fraser made Shahu journey through all the talukas in his state. During this journey he showed Shahu the geographical varieties in his state as well as the regions in the possession of his Jahagirdars.

During this period Shahu also visited many government officers, schools and hospitals in his State and had discussions with the concerned authorities. As is mentioned in this report, in 1894 Fraser gave Shahu the lessons on the principles of administration, law and jurisprudence. He also informed Shahu of the various treatises between Kolhapur state and British Government. Fraser also delivered lectures to Shahu and his Companions on rural and taluka Police machinery, penal and criminal procedure code, revenue system in the state, Hindu and Muslim law, and History of England. He made Shahu experience the actual administration of justice. He made Shahu read many of the great works in English.<sup>14</sup> It can be inferred from this report that Fraser wanted Shahu to examine the condition of his own state at the backdrop of his journey throughout the entire country.

Shahu's Coronation ceremony took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1894. At that time Governor Lord Harris acclaimed Fraser as Shahu's teacher. While addressing Shahu, He says, ".... It has been your good fortune to have, not merely as a Tutor but as your friend and companion as well, Mr. Fraser, who intends on that high ideal which the members of distinguished service aim at, in all they undertake, has given an unremitting and an affectionate solicitude to his important task. I have reason to believe that Your Highness and your family appreciate his devotion as much as does the Bombay Government...."<sup>15</sup> It appears from Lord Harris' words that Fraser had performed exceptionally well, even beyond the expectations of the British Government.

Thus, Fraser played a very significant role in making and grooming Shahu by imparting him versatile education during 1889 to 1894. Shahu's formal education was completed in 1894. However, in his later life Shahu sought the advice of Fraser as and when on various issues erupted during his regime. Even Fraser guided him as accurately and honestly as his genuine advisor. As the education given by Fraser broadened Shahu's vision, even thus Fraser's personality, his perspective towards life and his austere life style accompanied by his high thinking made a lasting impact on Shahu and

made him revolutionary King.

It is necessary to make a note of one more important aspect of Fraser's personality. It was his efforts to train Shahu to acquire modern and liberal vision by imparting him variety of education. But he never seems to have interfered in the traditions or customs observed by the royal family and by the local people. It is noteworthy that he had never tried to utilize his impact on Shahu to induce him towards western lifestyle. It seems that he had respect for the good traditions in Indian culture and had preferred to stay neutral on the evil orthodoxies of Indian society. It is due to this attitude of Fraser that he could comprehend Purdah system enforced on the Rani during her education. Fraser even seems to testify the other dowager queens that he is keen on treating Shahu as per the code of conduct of their religion and caste. He even declares that Shahu had never had tea at his house. At the time of hunting, he and Shahu used to lunch separately under the shades of two different trees. It is thus evident that Fraser

was well aware of the strong hold of traditions and religiousness on Indian minds. As a result, despite his intimacy and affection for Shahu; he never tried to impair the traditional and religious mind set of Shahu.

Another noteworthy feature of Fraser is that he was one among the very few British officers who were liberal, attracted to India and, therefore, became one with her. He never carried with him an air of superiority or a 'white man's burden's while educating Shahu. Their teacher-taught relationship was never affected by the ruler and the ruled discrimination. Fraser's contribution during the formative period of Shahu was beyond any racial or national discrimination.

It becomes quite evident that the later development of Shahu as a social revolutionary finds its roots in Fraser's versatile and holistic teaching through books, travels and through the various events in Shahu's life. Ultimately, it becomes apparent that its credit indirectly goes to the British Government also.

#### REFERENCE

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