

AN ESTIMATE

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Keshavrao Jedhe as an important leader of the non-Brahman movement and our national freedom movement occupies a significant place in the history of modern Maharashtra. An attempt has been made in the foregoing chapters to study the life and career of this eminent leader of the masses from various points of views. This is an estimate of Keshavrao Jedhe as a socio-political leader which has been formed as a result of my studies.

He was born in a rich, prestigious family having glorious historical traditions. His house 'Jedhe Mansion' proved to be his early training school. The training received at home and the influences exercised on him by men like Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur, Maharshi V.R.Shinde and his elder brother Baburao Jedhe together moulded Keshavrao Jedhe into a social worker first and a social leader later.

After Shahu Maharaj's death in 1922 he assumed the leadership of the non-Brahman movement. He was an eminent leader of this movement. He spent about twelve years of his life in the non-Brahman movement. During the initial stage of his career he was engaged in fighting against Lokmanya Tilak and his followers for some years. His was a fight against Brahman Conservatism and

reactionary social policies of Tilak and his group. As the leader of the non-Brahman movement he always attempted to implement the Satyashodhak ideals of social justice and social equality. His role as the non-Brahman member of Pune Municipality is really remarkable. He as the member of Pune Municipality proposed to the municipality to erect Jotiba Phule's statue at a public place in Pune. city. But his attempts failed and his dream remained unfulfilled at that time. He was also associated with the activities of the Shivaji memorial in Pune. In politics he did not like the pro-British government policy of the non-Brahman party. It was due to this difference that Jedhe had to part company from Bhaskarrao Jadhav and Dinkarrao Javalkar his old friend. Keshavrao Jedhe though he was a leader of the non-Brahman movement was a nationalist in his outlook from the beginning of his career. It was due to his progressive social outlook and views that he completely identified himself with the Mahad Satyagraha and the Parvati Satyagraha planned by the Dalit masses struggling under the inspiring leadership of Dr. Ambedkar.

As Keshavrao Jedhe was fed up with the narrow council politics of the non-Brahman party and as there was a growing influence of Mahatma Gandhi on him he entered the national freedom movement carried on by Congress under Gandhiji's leadership. With him he brought the non-Brahman peasant masses living in the rural parts

of Maharashtra into the freedom movement. Consequently freedom movement in Maharashtra became broad based. Thus Keshavrao was responsible for winning the non-Brahman masses to the Congress side. He was twice president of the Provincial Congress Committee. He built up a strong organization of Congress party in Maharashtra and also spread Congress activities throughout the province. It was Keshavrao Jedhe who provided a firm base to Gandhian politics here and who also implemented Gandhiji's constructive works programmes enthusiastically. In the 1934 elections he was a Congress candidate along with Kakasaheb Gadgil and he won the election. Jedhe and Gadgil worked together for a pretty long time in Congress. Jedhe and Gadgil provided a powerful joint leadership to Maharashtra till 1948. His efforts to further the cause of Congress and the freedom movement in Maharashtra were numerous and praiseworthy.

From the beginning of his career Jedhe championed the cause of the peasants. So he was seen in the forefronts of the famine relief operations. He was mainly responsible for organizing a strong peasant organization to protest against the Small Holdings Bill and Land tax increase proposed by the Bombay presidency government. In 1948 he along with Shankarrao More, Tulshidas Jadhav and Bhausahab Raut etc. laid the foundations of the Peasants and Workers Party. As the Congress in Bombay presidency was- passing

under the influence of the capitalists and as Congress government led by B.G.Kher failed to implement the welfare programmes for the benefits of the toiling masses, Jedhe and his colleagues had to leave the Congress party and found the P.W.P. within six years time he realized that the P.W.P. has also failed to achieve its objectives. For a short period Jedhe-More joint leadership of P.W.P. was extremely popular in Maharashtra. Unfortunately soon there arose sharp differences between the two leaders. Keshavrao Jedhe didn't like Shankarrao More's pro-communist policies and his attempts to form an alliance with the Communist Party. He felt that it won't matter much even if the P.W.P. remained confined to the Marathi speaking regions but it should always strive to achieve its objectives. More on the other hand, was eager to develop both party as well as his leadership to national stature. Soon ideological differences came on personal level. Keshavrao Jedhe left the P.W.P. and re-entered Congress in 1954.

However since 1954 he was given a secondary position in the Congress party. Yet his reputation in the society remained unimpaired. His roles in the agitations for the Goa liberation and for the Sanyukta Maharashtra are very important. He enthusiastically participated in those struggles. He even led for some time the Goa Vimochan Samittee (Goa Liberation Committee). During those struggles he often openly criticized the unwise policies of the Congress government.

Keshavrao Jedhe, though he was a political leader, was never after political power and he never indulged in the game of power politics. He was a fearless patriot, an organizer, a straight forward politician and an eminent leader of the rural peasant masses. He was highly respected as a valiant leader of the freedom struggle and also as an architect of the Congress organization in Maharashtra till the end of his life. Keshavrao Jedhe regarded his commitment to the masses more important than that to his party and so he changed the parties on some occasions. Despite that he possessed an overwhelmingly popular image throughout his life. It is because of his own political image and his long standing services in the public life that he got elected to parliament in the 1957 elections on Congress ticket when many other Congress leaders had been defeated.

In 1954 when Keshavrao Jedhe left the P.W.P. and joined Congress Shankarrao More criticizing Jedhe stated that Jedhe always needed somebody's support in his political life. Out of this need he joined hands with Javalkar, Gadgil and me and as soon as the need was over he threw all of them aside.¹ But More's criticism of Jedhe is prejudiced one because at that time More, as he was removed from the General Secretaryship of the P.W.P., was angry with Keshavrao Jedhe. More over if one reviews Keshavrao

Jedhe's relationship with Javalkar, Gadgil and More one won't fail to understand that he was second to none of them.

The socialist leader N.G.Gore too while forming as estimate of Jedhe stated "Keshavrao Jedhe remained throughout an unskilled politician and hence he required others' eyes to see and go on. He used the eyes of Kakasaheb Gadgil or of Shankarrao More or else those of his brother Baburao Jedhe."² Gore's views are quite identical with those of More. Of course Gore's criticism also seems to be biased. Prof.Y.D.Phadake while disproving N.G.Gore's views stated, "Had Keshavrao seen with others' eyes always he would not have parted company of Javalkar and More nor would he have had political differences with Kakasaheb. Even though he loved his elder brother very much his brother did not like that Keshavrao participated in the satyagrahas of 1930-32 under Gandhi's leadership and courted imprisonment. Baburao Jedhe said that all this happened due Keshavrao's attachment to Karmveer Shinde. Many leaders can be pointed out who were superior to him regarding scholarship, learning intellectual capacities, oratory and statesmanship etc. If Keshavrao's life is compared with those of other great leaders from different angle of vision we find that Keshavrao Jedhe was second to none of the great leaders regarding the virtues like selflessness, honesty, strait

forwardness, fearlessness, simple living etc." ³

After Keshavrao's death a reporter of 'Sakal' wrote " He worked for the masses and the peasants in the former half of his life. But in the latter half of his life the field of his activities couldn't go much beyond Poona. He could not come forward to undertake any work on his own as an accomplished leader. This is the sum substance of his life".⁴ This is an absolutely wrong estimate of Keshavrao Jedhe. His work was never limited to Poona. He was highly reputed throughout the Marathi speaking regions. Though we cannot put him in the row of the national leaders like Gandhiji, Sardar Patel, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru etc. he certainly occupies a significant place among those Congressmen who formed second line of leadership in pre-independence era. None can refuse to admit the fact that it was only because of Keshavrao Jedhe the P.W.P. got importance in its initial stage.

Madhavrao Bagal of Kolhapur, a veteran leader of the non-Brahman movement while assessing Keshavrao Jedhe's personality wrote "Keshavrao was a born leader in Maharashtra. The growing ambitions of the masses were reflected in his life. He did not stick up to the party but stuck up to the society at large. He proceeded according to the growth and needs of the society. Otherwise he wouldn't have stepped out of the social movements. It is not true that he was guided by others and he acted

according to the whims and advice of the others. In case of having intellectual differences he did have regards for friends, leaders or even ministers. It was not that he was a learned scholar or a very intelligent person. Yet in politics he followed his own path."⁵

In 1967 while unveiling the statue of the late Keshavrao Jedhe Yashavantrao Chavan by way of forming an estimate of the departed leader stated, "Even though different inspirations are seen working at the different stages of his life, his life on the whole appeared like a quiet flow of a river. Keshavrao was such a self-respecting man who accepted people's captainship in their fights against injustice wherever it existed. Maharashtra is much indebted to Jedhe". Chavan further stated, "He fought against the oppressor whosoever he may be. He fought against the Brahmans, the British, the Congress government after independence and also the Portuguese for the liberation of Goa. In all that his stand was to fight against injustice. He had the nobility of mind to admit his own faults. It was Jedhe who fostered the feelings of freedom and the organization among the rural people. Tatya strived hard to strengthen the nationalist movement."⁶

Keshavrao Jedhe, who started his public career as a social worker and spent twelve years of his life in the non-Brahman movement, was one of the prominent leaders

of that movement. Yet he was essentially a political leader and as a political leader he had always been a nationalist in his outlook throughout. Thus his role as a non-Brahman, nationalist political leader appears to be outstanding.

REFERENCES

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- 3 Ibid., pp.266-267.
- 4 'Sakal'. 13th November, 1959.
- 5 Bagal M.K. 'Bahujan Samajache Shilpakar' Thokal Prakashan, Poona, 1966, p.81.
- 6 'Kesari'. 6th September, 1967.