

**CHAPTER - V**

**HIS CONTEMPORARIES**

In the first half of nineteenth century when Acharya Bal Shastri Jambhakar was busy in his multifaceted activities in different fields for the advancement of his Natives, other such great worthies also strived hard for the progress and development of the society in Western India. Some of them were the leading personalities and elders of that period and much senior to Bal Shastri in years and experience. However they consulted Balshastri in all public matters, e.g. Jagannath Shankershet, Mahomed Ibrahim Muckba, Franji Cowasji, Ramachandra Shastri Jansvekar, Moropant Dandekar etc. were the leaders of public life in Bombay then. Some of them like <sup>Bhau</sup> Babu Mahajan were inspired by Balshastri and worked along with him and the persons like Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadekar were inspired by him but worked independently and some others who were educated under Bal Shastri were found bearing the stamp of his teaching and example more or less. Dr. Bhau Daji Lad, ~~Prof. Bhau Daji Lad~~, Prof. Dadabhai Naoroji, Prof. Kero Laxman Chhatre etc. were some of his such illustrious students.

All these reformers who happened to be Bal Shastri's contemporary worked during the same period for the overall progress of the society in Western India. There was division in their own ranks regarding the method and speed of reforms.

Some were so much carried away by their zeal that they would not brook any delay, nor refuse any means by which the object could be gained. Others were against sudden and violent changes and wanted to proceed more cautiously. Because of this difference, some of them were satisfied with the kind of reform advocated by Bal Shastri, but there were a few who were not satisfied and such social workers followed their own method and worked independently. But the zeal with which the progressive section in society took up the various problems and launched series of campaigns against enormous odds is truly remarkable.<sup>1</sup> All these social reformers carried on their struggle throughout the nineteenth century at great personal sacrifice and not unoften at the risk of personal safety. Though they differ in their views and methods of social reform, still their efforts helped for the overall progress of our society.

For an authoritative picture of the life of the age in which Bal Shastri worked it is essential to know some of his contemporary personalities and their contribution towards the reform movement in Maharashtra. It is not possible here to give an account of the very large number of those great social reformers contemporary to Bal Shastri and who played a significant role in almost all the branches of public life in Maharashtra. Moreover, it is also not healthy to compare their contribution in the reform movement.

All of them launched series of campaigns against enormous odds with the same spirit. Though they followed their own ways of reform, still their prime object was the same. But to get the clearcut picture of the period in which Bal Shastri worked, an attempt has been made here to give a brief account of some of his eminent contemporaries and their contribution towards the reformation movement in Maharashtra.

Sadashiv Kashinath Chhatre (Bapu Chhatre)

( 1788-1830 )

Sadashiv Kashinath Chhatre, is now chiefly remembered as a Marathi Scholar, but one has to take into account his strenuous exertions to popularise and help in the cause of the New Learning in Western India in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

S.K.Chhatre was then known among his friends by the familiar name of Bapu Chhatre. He was a somewhat prominent man of his time and interested himself most actively in educational questions. He enjoyed a high reputation as a Marathi Scholar.<sup>2</sup> Now, he is chiefly remembered for his excellent Marathi translations of "Aesop's Fables" and Berquin's "Children's Friend" which are regarded as the first prose-classics both in Marathi and Gujarati.<sup>3</sup>

But while taking into consideration his scholarly work in the literary field, unfortunately his attainments in the educational field, have not been given due consideration. It was he who in the early part of the 19th century made herculean efforts to espouse the cause of New Learning.

It was in the year 1823, when 'The Bombay Native School Book And School Society' (From 1827 onwards, termed as Bombay Native Education Society) was badly in need of the services of an able Native Secretary to shoulder the responsibility of the society and to popularise and promote the cause of the New Learning among the Natives. At this juncture, S.K.Chhatre, an able English-knowing Brahmin in the Public Works Department and a respectable citizen of Bombay, was selected for that post. He filled this situation very creditably for about seven years from 1823 to 1830.<sup>4</sup>

During this period, even the inhabitants of Bombay were not willing to send their children to the English School, lest they should be converted to christianity.<sup>5</sup> Under such circumstances, Bapu Chhatre, induced the inhabitants of Bombay, to send their children to the aforesaid school. In the process - it was he who brought to Bombay a batch of young men from different parts of the Presidency to receive instruction in it. Among these, there was one whose remarkable intelligence soon attracted his Professors,<sup>6</sup> This was the Bal Gangadhar Shastri, who was then acclaimed by his

contemporaries as - "far in advance of any of his countrymen". Among his other students we can mention the names of Bhanu Mahajan, Dadoba Pandurang etc. who distinguished themselves in different walks of life during the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

In the case of Bal Shastri, it was S.K.Chhatre, who induced Bal Shastri's father to keep his very talented and promising son- Bal Shastri under his own care and supervision, which transferred the scene of Bal Shastri's early life- from Konkan to Bombay - the centre of the New Learning and Public life. This transfer of scene was rather responsible for the development of Bal Shastri's future career. If the young lad had grown up to manhood in the rural surroundings of the Konkan, Bal Shastri would have been little more than a learned Sanskrit Pandit or Puranik like his father. But destined to lay the foundations of a new epoch in Western India, he was taken to Bombay to receive the New Learning, which enabled him in due course to be the foremost leader of the Bombay Presidency and work for the salvation of his countrymen.<sup>7</sup>

As reported by Dadoba Pandurang in his Autobiography- he (Bal Shastri) prosecuted his English studies 'with unabated zeal' not only under his English masters, but also under his kind guardian S.K.Chhatre, who used to explain to him several English books, including Dr.Johnson's 'Rambler'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1830, S.K.Chhatre, his guardian who was then 42 years of age retired from the post of Native Secretary in favour of Bal Shastri so as to give him wider scope for work.

In this way, because of the initiative taken by S.K.Chhatre, a number of young men came in contact with the New Learning, which enabled them in due course to work for the salvation of their countrymen. In other words, he was the trainer of so many in the race leading to distinction. This noble man died in the year 1830.

Jagannath alias Nana Shanker Shet (1803-1865) :

Bal Shastri was loved and highly respected not only by the younger generation but was also greatly admired by the leading elders of all communities. Everybody looked upto him for guidance and men much senior to him in years and experience willingly consulted him in all public matters. One of senior and great personality of his period was Jagannath Shanker Shet.

Jagannath alias Nana Shanker Shet was born at Bombay on 10th February 1803 in a wealthy Daivednya Brahmin (Sonar)family. Though he was born in a rich family, still he devoted his entire life for the educational, social and political development of the Bombay city. About his educational contribution, Dadabhai Naoroji has aptly expressed his opinion in following words,

"We natives owe much debt to Jagannath Shanker Shet, who was among the first, that first sowed the seeds of education and watched and nursed it to its present healthy growth."<sup>9</sup>

He was the person, who in the early days of British rule attained a position of great eminence in the public life of the city of Bombay sheerly by dint of his ability and industry. Having won many distinctions as the most prominent Indian social and public worker he set out to work in the field of education and established various organisations for the development of Bombay. So naturally Jagannath Shanker Shet looked up to by the British Government as an authority on most questions affecting the natives and accordingly he was nominated as the Justice of the Peace by the Commission of the Peace in the year 1834.

Though he was a keen social reformer, still he held fast to his moorings in Hindu religion and culture. He was not a sycophant, but held independent views on public questions and freely expressed them and acted accordingly. Therefore, he was regarded in those times as the leader of the Hindu community. He was also convinced like the English educated youths of the period that many of the customs and practices then prevailing in the society such as- idol worship, caste distinctions and priest craft with its attendant evils- had no sanction in the ancient texts. And hence, he helped and supported Bal Shastri Jambhekar in the case of the



readmission of a Brahmin boy named Shripad Sheshadri Paralikar to the Hindu fold, after he had practically joined Christian mission. There was then a great deal of commotion over the matter in the Hindu society of Bombay, and the whole community was opposed to the admission of the young man. The late Dhakjee Dadajee, then a prominent leader of the Hindus led the opposition, but by their tact Bal Shastri Jambhekar and Jagannath Shanker Shet succeeded in getting round the community, and the young man was readmitted. That was the first breach made in the stronghold of orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup>

Jagannath Shanker Shet made sincere efforts for the overall progress and development of his countrymen. He was a prominent public figure brought to the surface by the forces of those times. He developed some special features in the city of Bombay which still continue to be the characteristics of Bombay Public Life. Like Bal Shastri- education, social reform and political progress- all these received his attention in due proportion. Such was the person who shaped the public life of Bombay and was found in the forefront of the reform movement in Maharashtra which began in the first half of the nineteenth century. He died on 31st of July 1865 at the age of 63.

Govind Vitthal Kunte alias Bhaui Mahajan (1815-1890);

Unfortunately, an authentic biographical account of Bhaui Mahajan is not available to day. Still with the help of

available sources and references we can state that both Bal Shastri Jambhakar and Bhaui Mahajan were the students of Bombay English School, established in July 1824.

Shri Govind Vitthal Kunte was popularly known as Bhaui Mahajan. In age probably he was younger by three or four years than Bal Shastri and probably somewhere nearer to 1825 both of them were in English school under the supervision of late S.K. alias Bapu Chhatre. When Bal Shastri began his career as Deputy Native Secretary in 1830 perhaps Bhaui was still a student in the English school, and when Bal Shastri began his work in Elphinstone College as an Assistant Professor (1834), at that time Bhaui was studying in the same institution as an 'Elphinstone Scholar'. While still a student, he worked as a teacher in society's English school on a salary of Rs. 20/- per month. Bhaui Mahajan after completion of his education left the institution in the year 1841.<sup>11</sup>

As soon as he left the institution, Bal Shastri helped his young friend and pupil, Bhaui Mahajan, to start a new Marathi weekly- the 'Prabhakar'- from the 24th October 1841, the Vijaya Dashami day and its own lithographic press of the same name. Moreover, Bal Shastri gave him necessary help and guidance and inspiration in this task.<sup>12</sup>

The weekly 'Prabhakar' continued to be edited by Bhaui Mahajan not only during the life time of Bal Shastri, but at least till 1860, when the weekly established itself

as the first most influential and fearless organ of the native opinion in Marathi.<sup>13</sup> From 1853 along with -Prabhakar-Bhau Mahajan started a new weekly called 'Dhunketu' and also he started a quarterly magazine entitled 'Jnanadarshan' between the years 1854 and 1856. Through these literary enterprises, he followed the path of Bal Shastri of educating his natives and making them versatile.<sup>14</sup>

In this way, Bal Shastri's disciple and follower, Bhau Mahajan worked along with him with utmost devotion and even after the death of his revered Guru, he concentrated all his energies on educating the people through the press. This famous reformer of the nineteenth century, died at the ripe age of 75 in the year 1890.

Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadekar (1814-1882) :

Like Bal Shastri Jambhekar, Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadekar also belonged to the first generation of the English educated men, who strived hard for the upliftment of their natives. He was a disciple of Bapu Chhatre and co-student of Bal Shastri Jambhekar.<sup>15</sup>

Dadoba was born at Bombay on May 9, 1814 in a Vaishya family. He had his primary education in a traditional Marathi school in Girgaon, Bombay. In 1825, he was admitted to the Marathi Section of the Bombay Native School and Book Society, and was promoted to its English Section three years later.

in 1830, while still a student of the higher classes, the authorities were pleased to appoint him as an assistant teacher in the same school. He served the Government in various capacities; first as a teacher, then as an educational inspector and before his premature retirement in 1861, he was a deputy collector. All through his life he was actively engaged in intellectual pursuits, at the same time working sincerely for the social and moral uplift of his fellow-countrymen.<sup>16</sup>

A man of studious nature and philosophical bent of mind, Dadoba turned out to be an outstanding intellectual of the nineteenth century Maharashtra. When barely 24, he wrote the first standard Marathi grammar which earned for him the honour of being called the 'Panini of Marathi Grammar'. An annotated list of 27 published and unpublished works of Dadoba is to be found in his biography written by A.K.Priolkar. In addition to this, his 4 English articles published in the Theosophist which he wrote towards the close of his life reveal his deep knowledge of Sanskrit and Persian, and also show how serious a student of comparative religion he was. More particularly his work entitled 'A Hindu Gentleman's Reflections respecting the works of Emmanuel Swedenborg' is indicative of his deep study of Advaita, Yoga and teachings of the Hindu Saints. So impressed M.G.Ranade was by his work on Swedenborg which was widely acclaimed even in the West- that he assigned Dadoba - 'a foremost place in the ranks of

thoughtful inquirers after religious truth', Subodha Patrika referred to him as 'A Prince Among Scholars'.<sup>17</sup>

Besides Western literature he had also studied the ancient writings of the Hindus and he was convinced that many of the customs and practices that prevailed in his days - such as idol worship, caste distinctions and priest-craft with its attendant evils- had no sanction, in the ancient texts. Therefore, he came to the conclusion that India had suffered a lot on account of the divisions of caste which prevailed among the people and there could be no national unity and real progress unless this hateful institution of caste was completely done away with. Demolition of caste, became an article of faith with Dadoba.<sup>18</sup> Because of this rebellious thinking, Dadoba and some of his followers were not satisfied with the kind of mild reforms advocated by the Shastri School. It was these rebels who founded the - Paramahansa Sabha- . The moving spirit behind the sabha was Dadoba Pandurang Tarikhedekar, who may well be regarded as the first rationalist of Modern Maharashtra. He was basically a philosopher and his social philosophy rested on the twin pillars of rationalism and humanism. He initiated the first secular reform movement in Western India, even before Lokहितavadi i.e., Gopal Hari Deshmukh and others appeared on the scene.<sup>12</sup> This first organised effort at social reform in Western India was however shortlived.<sup>20</sup>

Dadoba was closely associated with almost all the important educational, social and philanthropic institutions of his day. He was the President of the 'Upayukta Jnan Prasarak Sabha'- a Marathi branch of the students literary and scientific society. This Sabha was the important institution, established on 1st September, 1848, which served as a training ground for several great leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, R.G.Bhandarkar, M.G.Panade, K.T.Telang, V.H.Mandalik and others. This society encouraged the growth of a number of other associations which covered many important aspects of national reform. Then he was among the first seventy six founder members of the 'society for the promotion of widow marriage' established on December 12, 1865. He was also among those who revived the Bombay Association in 1867. In recognition of his scholastic achievements Dadoba was admitted to the Bombay branch of Royal Asiatic Society, and he was appointed to the Senate of the University of Bombay in 1864-65. He continued to be a member of the University Faculties of Arts and Law until his death in 1892.<sup>21</sup>

In this way among those great reformers who attempted to bring about advancement of their countrymen in different walks of life since the advent of British regime in Western India, one has to remember the Dadoba Pandurang. We must, indeed regard him, not only as the 'Panini of Marathi Grammar' but as one who is rightly called the 'First Rationalist of Modern Maharashtra'.

Although both Bal Shastri and Dadoba Pandurang were contemporaries, their views about social reforms basically differed. For lack of proper evidence one cannot determine the kind of relationship that actually existed between these two reformers of Bombay.

Besides above mentioned noteworthy contemporaries of Bal Shastri, there were some other eminent contemporaries who also strived hard for the overall progress of our society in Western India in the first half of the 19th century. Most of them distinguished themselves in different walks of life such as education, literature, science and public affairs not only in Bombay, but in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnatak, almost all of whom will be found to bear the stamp of his teaching and example more or less. Among such men, the following were more noteworthy : Dr. Bhaui Daji Lad, Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, Prof. Kero Lakshman Chhatre, Prof. Dadabhai Naoroji, Bhogilal Pranvallahadas and Nowroji Furdoonji etc. some of them were senior to him and leading personalities of that period, but still they admired Bal Shastri as a Scholar, Educator and Reformer. They looked up to him for guidance and more often used to consult him in all public matters. Framaji Cowasji, J.P., Mahomed Ibrahim Muckba, J.P. Vinayak Gangadhar Shastri, J.P. Moropant Dandekar (Editor, Upadesh Chandrika) Pandit Moreshwar Sathe (Principal, Poona Sanskrit College), Ramachandra Shastri Janavekar (Marathi Lexicographer), Runchhodedas Girdhurbhai (Educational and Literary

Pioneer in Gujarat), Durgaram Muncharam Mahataji (Pioneer Social Reformer in Gujarat) etc. reformer happened to be Bal Shastri's contemporaries. Some of them were inspired by Bal Shastri and worked along with him, while some others who worked separately followed his way of reforms. However, some of the English educated Indian youths though inspired by Bal Shastri, preferred to work in an aggressive manner. The net result of the efforts made by all his contemporaries was that it speeded up the reform movement in Western India in the first half of the 19th century.

Bal Shastri Jambhekar was of the firm opinion that all reform must go slowly from within on evolutionary lines, conforming as far as possible to the best thought of Hindu Shastras and traditions. He was essentially a thinker who confined himself to expression of views and ideas on various problems faced by the society. He did not ever try to either organise a band of thinkers- cum-social workers or launch a movement for furthering the cause of social reforms in Western India. However, throughout his life, while performing his duties as a teacher, a learned scholar, and an editor, he made efforts to educate his natives and then slowly but steadily initiate them towards progress and development. He was inspired by no other idea than to train number of men who would devote themselves for the overall progress and development of the native community. And accordingly we observe that in the third quarter of the 19th century, there emerged a



trail of social reformers like Bhau Mahajan, Dadoba Tarbhadkar, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad, Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, Dadabhai Naoroji etc. who worked for the overall advancement of the society in Western India. In brief, we can say that Bal Shastri Jambhakar was the person who prepared the ground for social reform movement in Western India and also inspired a number of persons and trained a number of young men of his period to speed up the process of social reform in Western India in the first part of the 19th century.

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