

CHAPTER - VI

AN APPRAISAL

To the present generation of Maharashtra it is somewhat striking that Acharya Bal Shastri Jambhekar achieved great distinction, even when he spent his whole life in Government service. Though he was, throughout in Government service, still he was able to play an important part in the educational, social, religious, political and cultural life of the Western India. Whether he was a Native Secretary, Assistant Professor, Tutor, Acting Professor, Superintendent of the Government Vernacular Schools or the Director of the Normal Class, still-education, literature, science, Indian antiquarian research, journalism, social reform and political progress- all these received his attention in due proportion. He was a prominent public figure brought to the surface by the forces of those times. He led the renaissance of Indian thought which had its origin in the city of Bombay, and developed some special features thereof which still continue to be the characteristics of Bombay public life. He formed a remarkable link between Indian and European thought, and had consequently the opportunity and privilege of laying in that city, the earliest foundations of almost all the activities that constituted public life in those times.¹

He was an eminent leader of thought who lived and flourished about a hundred and fifty years ago. Maharashtra

was then awakening from the stupor consequent on the downfall of the Maratha Rule and its replacement by the British Power in Bombay Presidency.² This was a period remarkable for general stagnation, despondency and cultural demoralisation in Western India.³ It is not, therefore, a matter of surprise that present-day Maharashtra has only a fragmentary knowledge of this great man.⁴

Bal Shastri was born about the year 1812 and died on 17th May 1846. Yet, in this short span of life so many remarkable achievements stand to his credit. He lived and did all his life work in the first half of the 19th century.⁵ This was the period, when Maharashtra especially Bombay began to receive the impact of formal western education after the appointment of Mountstuart Elphinstone, as the Governor of the newly constituted Bombay Presidency in the year 1819. He laid the foundations of modern education which produced a renaissance in Western India.⁶

The dissemination of western knowledge as a result of the new education gave a new impetus to the minds of the newly educated youths. They were exposed to western ideas of rationalism and humanism. The new spirit of inquiry made this new generation of scholars conscious of the general ignorance and degrading influence of superstitions around them. Besides Western Literature, some of them had also studied the ancient writings of the Hindus and were convinced that many of the customs and practices that prevailed then

had no sanction in the ancient texts. They were also convinced that the prevalent obscurantism was responsible for social degeneration and the consequent national decline. The society had to be reformed if the country was to achieve national unity and progress.⁷

This first generation of the English educated youths was rather responsible for ushering in an 'Era of Progress' in Western India in the former half of the 19th century. These youths realised that western education and knowledge will be useful to achieve progress and development of their natives. This will help to remove the darkness of ignorance and to make the natives capable enough to shoulder the responsibilities of their own state.

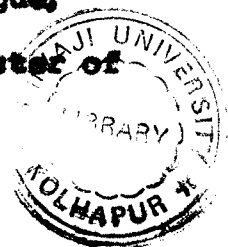
Bal Shastri - laid the foundation of 'Public Awakening'

Bal Shastri Jambhakar was the first product of liberal education in Western India. It was Bal Shastri who realised the ageold weaknesses of our society and accordingly devoted his entire life for the all sided improvement of his countrymen. He believed that through English education, our society will be improved, people will feel the value of governing themselves, but for such type of transformation, our native should adopt themselves with the western system of education and obtain western advanced knowledge. And accordingly to achieve such type of progress and development he strived hard throughout his life for bringing about the mental awakening of his countrymen.

Considering the importance of 'knowledge' as an effective means to achieve freedom of state and people, he utilised each and every opportunity for educating his own natives. He made herculean efforts to bring about awakening in our society, through the educational machinery, press and platform. In the history of freedom movement, we observe that there were three important stages viz. - Public education (1818-1874), Public agitation (1875-1920) and Public action (1921-1947). But in all these three stages- Public Awakening- was an important factor. Bal Shastri realised the importance of this factor and to make his society active and alive he undertook the task of effecting the mental awakening of his countrymen, which in turn speeded up the process of transformation from medieval to modern in Western India. If we take into account his unwearied efforts on behalf of his countrymen for bringing about awakening in the society it may be said without exaggeration that Bal Shastri laid the foundation of- Public Awakening - in Western India.

The most learned native:

Bal Shastri himself was a learned native of his period. He was acquainted more or less with a dozen European and Asiatic languages viz. English, French, Greek, Latin, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Gujarathi, Bengali, Hindi, Kannada and Telugu, exclusive of Marathi, his own mother tongue, of which he was a perfect master. Not only was he master of



Marathi, his own mother-tongue and of Sanskrit, the then traditional language of learning, but he attained a proficiency in English and also in Mathematics, Astronomy and Natural Sciences, all studied through the medium of English.⁸ He wrote a number of articles in English and also in Marathi for the enlightenment of his countrymen. He translated and prepared a number of well known books in Marathi, even he prepared books for the use of vernacular schools in the Bombay Presidency. Bal Shastri wrote and published his unique Marathi books on the Theory of Equations and the Differential and Integral calculus. It is the lasting credit of Bal Shastri, that he actually produced excellent Marathi books on higher mathematics more than one hundred and fifty years ago, by coining a new terminology. His labours in connection with Dnyaneshwari must be deemed to form a great land mark in the history of modern Marathi literature.⁹

His English articles in the weekly 'Durpun', the first Anglo-Vernacular newspaper in Western India which he ably conducted, his Marathi magazine 'Dig-Durshun', the first of its kind in the language, and the various books he wrote, covered a very wide range of subjects, from widow-remarriage to the evolution of marathi script and deciphering of old inscriptions, from measures of reform in his Majesty's Privy Council to the necessity of Indians studying European medicine, from the intricacies of a new Marathi grammar to

the importance of geography and the advantages of pure and applied mathematics, and from the microscope and steam-engine to astronomy and 'inquiries regarding intellectual powers and the investigation of truth',¹⁰

As a remarkable linguist and a scholar with varied acquirements in literature and science, Bal Shastri was bound to associate himself with the leading learned societies of the Presidency.¹¹ He was appointed Native Secretary to the Oriental Translation Committee. He was the member of the Bombay Geographical society which was established in Bombay as a branch of the Royal Geographical Society of London. He also helped the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in its field of activity, though he was never actually a member of that association. The doors of the society were in those days closed to all natives irrespective of their rank or scholarship, still it is certainly worthy to note that Bal Shastri contributed number of valuable papers on Indian Inscriptions in the journal of the society. He was the first and only native scholar of his time to write upon Indian Antiquities, not only on this side of the Presidency, but in the whole of India.¹²

And all this was done within some fifteen years of a life of active Government service. Though all of his work was done at such a young age, he has displayed a keen foresight, an intelligent appraisal of events and a sober and a wide outlook on life, and above all, a keen desire to reform

and serve the country. In this way, Bal Shastri was an outstanding intellectual of 19th century Maharashtra. 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. No wonder the Shastri was acclaimed by his contemporaries as 'far in advance of any of his countrymen', 'a conspicuous ornament of the society' and 'the most learned native who has yet appeared in Western India'.¹³

Efforts to educate the natives :

"Stimulated by a desire to encourage amongst his natives the pursuit of Western Education and knowledge and to open a field for free and public discussion on the points connected with the prosperity of the country and the happiness of its natives-" Bal Shastri started a Newspaper, entitled as-'The Bombay Durpun' in the year 1832.

Throughout his life he made his efforts to educate his natives through the educational machinery. But he realised the limitations of the educational machinery and therefore he turned his attention towards the newspaper which was rather useful and effective media for the spread of advanced knowledge among his natives and making them alert and conscious about their own problems, and keeping them informed of the events passing around them, and in other parts of the world and aiding the active and curious mind in pursuing those

investigations to which it is awakened by education, and which precede improvements in the intellectual, moral and political condition of the people. Naturally, he concentrated all his energies towards educating the people not only through the educational machinery, but through the press and platform.

It was with this object, he conducted the 'Bombay Durpun' for over eight years and the 'Dig-Durshun' later on, for at least four years, in the result that he succeeded in creating a new reading public which began to take interest in all sorts of public questions- social, political and educational etc.¹⁴ Moreover, to increase the usefulness of 'Durpun' and knowing the limitations of his natives, he published 'Durpun' in both the media English and Marathi.

'Durpun' was rather a views paper than a news paper. It covered a very wide range of subjects and inquiries regarding intellectual powers and the investigation of truth. Not only this, but in those benighted times, through this paper, he rendered valuable services in educating the people. During the first part of the 19th century, when our old society came under the Sway of new rulers and their laws, their culture and knowledge, at this juncture our society was in need of proper guidance. Similarly the British rulers were also foreigners to the native culture. Under such circumstances, it was through this paper that Bal Shastri with his balanced thinking guided them. In this connection he

clearly stated,

"... to encourage a taste for them and spread liberal sentiments in matters of religion and politics, that might promote the improvement of our countrymen, were the causes which led to the publication of this paper" 15

In short through this paper, he made conscious efforts to improve the mind and to aid the diffusion of useful knowledge and to achieve the overall improvement of his countrymen.

To educate the natives, Bal Shastri also realised the value of disseminating knowledge through the creation of public libraries and organizations. Accordingly with the help of his friends, he established the first Native General Library in Bombay. Then he took lead in founding the Native Improvement Society to inspire the young educated men of the day and to study a number of questions of general improvement.

In this way, with the help of newspapers, organizations and associations, Bal Shastri endeavoured to educate his own natives and to bring about the mental awakening and improvement of his countrymen.

A Practical Social Reformer :

Bal Shastri Jambhakar was a remarkable man not simply because he was a genius, but more because he was a social force of no ordinary character in his time. He did

not, it is true, put himself forward as a reformer, nor did he side with his more go-ahead, and ardent contemporaries, that wished to reconstruct society by revolutionising it—by that is, throwing off caste. He held to the opinion that reform could not endure without religion, and that the best way to break down caste and priest-craft was to begin by slowly purifying the religious practices of the people. This was the work which Raja Ramohan Roy had proposed to himself, and Bal Shastri was inwardly moved by similar spirit. He looked to the devotional element, so natural to the Hindus as an element, through which alone Hindu society could be gradually enlightened and elevated.¹⁶ Therefore, while feeling very keenly the necessity of removing the glaring social evils and religious superstitions of his countrymen, Bal Shastri was far from being a revolutionary in these matters, being convinced that all reform must grow slowly from within, on evolutionary lines, conforming as far as possible to the best thought of the Hindu Shastras and traditions.¹⁷ To these opinions he held firmly but unostentatiously.

Liberal in his ideas and free from superstition, he nevertheless performed his Sandhya like any orthodox Hindu, because he considered that the institution of Sandhya supplied one of the best means of cultivating the spirit of devotion, and that without prayer and devotion men could not prepare for trials and temptations of life.

Another practice, to which he adhered almost to his last day, and which shows how he cherished the spirit of Godliness, was the regularity with which he performed bhajan daily before retiring for the night. Was the man, then, superstitious, or was it that he put on airs of a devotee to ensure his popularity with the orthodox? He was nothing of the kind—neither a superstitious bigot nor a religious hypocrite. Though a Brahmin himself, among the orthodox he was known and hated as a hater of Brahmanism. As he was thoroughly devout and God-fearing, he cherished liberal views, and, as far as he could, supported the cause of sensible, and practical reform. As an instance of the spirit of liberality which characterised him may be mentioned the circumstances connected with the readmission of Shri Shripad Sheshadri into his caste. He had been outcasted by his community merely because he had joined a christian mission. He desired re-admission, but the orthodox most vehemently denounced and opposed the idea. Bal Shastri supported Shripad and struggled with the popular prejudice and he was supported by Jagannath Shankershet. The opposition was then headed by a leading Prabhu of the time—Dhakjee Dadajee. The controversy lasted for some time, and called forth much bitterness of feeling, the principal victim of which was Bal Shastri. It ended, however, in his victory, Shri Shripad being taken back into his caste, and thus was the first in road upon this unreasoning bigotry and ignorance of an institution that has denationalised the Hindu community. Unfortunately Bal Shastri

was removed by the cruel hand of death from the scene of his labours in the very prime of life- for he was, when he died on the 17th of May, 1846, only 33 years of age. Had he lived longer, he would have perhaps been able to do what he had been silently contemplating- to translate the Sandhya, to purify the religious practices of his people, and withal to prepare slowly the way for their social emancipation by enlightening their religious instincts.¹⁸

It may be remembered that the cruel customs of Sati, Infanticide and child marriage etc. were still prevalent during the first quarter of the 19th century, though these practices had been prohibited by law in British India. Illiterary among the fair sex and the custom of child-marriage seriously affected the growth of a healthy womanhood and indirectly of a healthy manhood- the one being the root cause of general backwardness and superstition, and the other of social impurity and injustice. Hence the improvement of the lot of women- their education and remarriage- came to occupy the first place in the movement of Indian Social Reform. It must be said to the credit of Bal Shastri that he happens to be the first social reformer of Western India, for he not only pleaded for the education of women, but also for the remarriage of young widows, so far back as the thirties of the 19th century.¹⁹

In brief, Bal Shastri gave his thoughtful mind, a correct perspective of our social and religious life, which was absent even among the most intelligent of his contemporaries.²⁰ He was no social rebel or religious visionary that would wholly cut himself off from the general community, but was a practical reformer, who would first properly educate and then carry his countrymen with him slowly but surely towards his goal.²¹ Be it noted here that there was one thing which he hated more than another, it was vain show and tall talk.²²

The following observation of 'A Political Mishi' in the course of a series of articles on social and Religious Reform in the English columns of the Indu-Prakash of Bombay, dated May 11, 1895, correctly sums up the position of Bal Shastri :

"From his (Bal Shastri's) premature death, the cause of intelligent and rational reform, religious and social, received a shock from which it has since never been able to recover. After him a new spirit of reform - more dashing and temporal and less spiritual moved the educated young men of the day - a spirit, which for a time threatened to turn the basis of Hindu society topsyturvy, but which, for reasons easily conceivable, ended at last in its own defeat and decay." 23

A Great Teacher ;

Bal Shastri was a great teacher. It is not often that profound learning and successful teaching ability go together, but this rare combination distinguished Bal Shastri.²⁴ Throughout his educational career he cherished an ardent desire to promote the cause of education. He himself was no service-seeker, he had ever looked upon his own educational career as a valuable opportunity to serve his country and improve his countrymen.²⁵

As an example of the great interest he used to take in all good objects calculated to benefit the public, we can mention his connection with the Normal Class. He looked upon the profession of a teacher as one for which special training was necessary and with this view he induced Government to establish a Normal School, of which, he was appointed the Director. The school was established in 1845 as an experiment to be tried for three years, and the industry and zeal, which he brought to bear upon it, were indeed most remarkable. With a view to make it a success and qualify the young men as teachers in the real sense of the term, he went through almost every work extant in the English language at that time, on the subject of Normal class, and obtained information about the working of such institutions in the different parts of Europe. And in all that he did in this direction, he was inspired by no other idea than to train a number of young men, who might be sent out into the mofussil not only as

teachers, but also as pioneers of enlightened ideas.²⁶ Throughout his life, he had many other things to do, yet he never neglected this self-imposed task of the school.

In spite of his rare success as a teacher, it is also noteworthy that he impressed all his students not only by his brilliance as a scholar and a teacher, but that he also left a permanent mark on them by the purity and integrity of his character, no less than by his kindness and discipline. One of his distinguished pupil, Dadabhai Naoroji spoke of him in these words -

"I know him only as my teacher, and indeed as a very able, tactful, amiable and wise teacher. He was kind and interested in his pupils. We looked up to him with great respect and admiration as much for his wide learning as for his whole character..."

This expression of opinion by Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji correctly represents the view and regard of the whole generation of young men educated under Bal Shastri. It is also remarkable that most of men that distinguished themselves in different walks of life during the third quarter of the 19th century - in education, literature, science, Indian anti-quarian research and public affairs - in western India, will be found to bear the stamp of his teaching and example more or less.²⁷

In brief, Bal Shastri tried to inculcate in the minds of his pupils this great idea of working like - the

ancient Rishis selflessly and zealously for the enlightenment and good of the people.²⁸

Role of a useful Mediator :

The period in which Bal Shastri lived and worked, was the period of transition. Maharashtra was then awaking from the stupor consequent on the downfall of the Maratha Rule and its replacement by the British Rule. Under such circumstances, his capacious mind comprehended all the aspects of changing situation in Maharashtra. To one side, British rulers, their administration, and their education system etc. were quite new to our natives and to other side British rulers were also not knowing the character of our society. At this juncture, instead of criticising the then Government, he digested the situation aptly and followed his policies for the improvement of his own natives. He served the Government in various capacities, but at the same time keeping constant touch with the natives, he tried to improve their condition. He realised the importance of English education and western knowledge for the upliftment of his countrymen and accordingly he strived hard for the spread of new knowledge among his natives. To fulfill this noble task, after realising the limitations of the educational machinery, he started his own newspaper, with the help of which he rendered valuable services in educating the public in those benighted times.

No doubt, Bal Shastri played a very useful and effective and balanced role of a mediator. To one side he proved his worth by serving in the Government department and on other side he made attempts for the mental awakening of his own natives. He was a man of learning and was generally respected by both the Europeans and the natives. Because of his highest qualities, his simple unostentatious department, and unwearied efforts on behalf of his countrymen, ensured him the respect and regard of all the Europeans to whom he was intimately known, while on the other hand the zeal and industry with which he devoted the far greater part of each 24 hours to the best interests of his countrymen—secured for him an influence as extensive in range as it was beneficial in character.²⁹

In brief, Bal Shastri was a man of profound learning and extensive and varied accomplishment without pretence or ostentation.³⁰ In every benevolent and every intellectual enterprise within the sphere of his exertions, he took an active part. His abilities were so extraordinary in character that he served the society, the institution and the Board in every conceivable capacity as Teacher, Professor, Inspector, Superintendent of a Hostel, Head of a vernacular Training School, Secretary, Superintendent of the Publication Department, Translator and Author. Government signified appreciation of his valuable contribution to education by granting a pension to his widow and his son. To these valuable educational

services rendered by Bal Shastri, the various other aspects of his distinguished career may be enumerated as the Tutor to a Prince, Editor of the Bombay Durpun - the first Anglo-vernacular paper in Western India, Editor of the Dig-Durshun- the first monthly magazine in Marathi, a brilliant Linguist knowing a dozen ancient and modern languages - European as well as Asiatic, Instructor in Astronomy, Incharge of the Meteorological observatory at Colaba, Native Secretary to the oriental Translating Committee and office-bearer of the Bombay Geographical Society, a contributor to the Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, and the Pioneer Orientalist of India, the first eminent critical scholar of Marathi, and Editor of the Dnyaneshwari, the first social and Religious Reformer of the age, the third oldest Hindu Justice of the Peace, and a Grand Juror at the age of 28, and lastly the foremost Public Leader of Bombay, And when we take into account this long list of attainments and achievements that were to the credit of Bal Shastri at the early age of thirty-three, need we wonder, why he was regarded as "a prodigy" and 'a genius of a high order?' 31

This remarkable man was distinguished not only for his profound learning, varied genius and extensive accomplishments- but also for many excellent traits of character, that brought him the esteem of all, and which, even in those days, when educated Hindus numbered not more than a handful of men, enabled him to exercise a wide influence over

the illiterate as well as the literate section of the Hindu community in Bombay. Though he occupied officially an enviable position and was looked up to by the Europeans as an authority on most questions affecting natives, yet the man was singularly free from the 'pride of office', and both in his private and public dealings was marked by a striking simplicity of disposition and behaviour. The man was homely in his habits, and his humility was so great that it became proverbial among those who knew him of a somewhat dark colour, and short in stature, in his appearance he was more saintly than prepossessing, and no one could have said either from his features or his dress- which was always of the simplest- that he was one of the eminent scholars of the day.³²

Such was the man who was cut down in the vigor of manhood, and with little warning, while he was still forming plans for the future.³³ He lives full of honours and acquisitions, and dies lamented or regretted by thousands, both among Natives and Europeans, yet when he died, he knew not where he was going- he left all light behind, and saw nothing but black darkness before - he left all that he had, and saw no inheritance awaiting him instead.³⁴ If Bal Shastri had been spared, he would have no doubt become the most eminent Maharashtrian and Indian of the 19th century.³⁵ He lived and did all his life work in the first half of the

19th century. In his very brief life of thirty three years, he completed an all-round effort of extraordinary dimensions. Considering the marvellous nature and excellence of the work done by him in his short life, he has rightly been called -

" the pioneer of the Renaissance in Western India and the father of modern Maharashtra".

He stands in the history as the living bridge. He is the great pathmaker, who initiated us into the 'Present Era'.

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