

CHAPTER - III

LIFE SKETCH OF

' ACHARYA BAL SHASTRI JAMBHEKAR '

(1812 - 1846)

Among the few great worthies that have distinguished themselves by a rare combination of exceptional natural talents, varied and extensive learning, high moral character, and strenuous exertions in different fields for the advancement of their countrymen, since the advent of the British rule in Western India during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the name of Acharya Bal Gangadhar Shastri Jambhekar stands first and foremost. And when it is remembered that he had already laid the broad foundations of our national progress in Bombay, before he was snatched away by the cruel hand of Death at the very early age of thirty-three in the year 1846, we must, indeed regard him not only as the most brilliant Indian of the nineteenth century, but as one who is rightly entitled to be called the 'Pioneer of the Renaissance in Western India' and 'Father of Modern Maharashtra'.¹

As Bal Shastri was the first Indian Professor and and the revered Guru of the first generation of English educated men in Western India, he has rightly been called as 'Acharya'. The lifesketch of such an eminent social reformer, therefore, deserves to be recorded howsoever briefly, in this chapter and the following is an attempt in that direction.

Family Background :

The Jambhekars that found scattered all over Maharashtra, Karnatak, Gujarat and Central India - belong

originally to their main stock in Pombhuria, their old ancestral village, under the Bavada Jahagir of the Kolhapur State, which is now merged in Devagad Taluka of Sindhudurga district in Konkan.²

The House of Jambhekars :

The House of Jambhekars, who belong to the Karhada sub-caste of Maharashtra Brahmins, has been resident of the above mentioned village Pombhuria for more than four hundred years, as can be gathered from its genealogical tree.³

The two main branches of this House are traditionally known as - (1) The Mahajans who mostly followed civil occupations, and (ii) the Bhats who generally pursued the priestly and learned occupations.⁴

The Bhat Branch :

An old ancestor of the Bhat branch- Ganesh Bhat- by name, was a distinguished Pandit at the court of Chhatrapati Sambhaji, during the last quarter of the 17th century, while - Gopal Bhat - the great grand-father of Bal Shastri who sought the patronage of the Raja of Sawantwadi about the same period, was fortunate enough to secure for him, a modest hereditary 'watan' (landed property) in that state as - Raja-Puranik - which continues to be held by his descendants to this day. His son Venkatesh or Bhau Bhat was also a famous Puranik who was specially invited for sometime

by Gopikabai, the widow of the illustrious Peshwa Balaji Bajirao, to recite the Sanskrit Puranas to her at Nasik.⁵

And Bal Shastri's father, Gangadhar Bhat who on account of his Shastric lore seems to be better known as Gangadhar Shastri was also a well-known Puranik of his day, whose regular seasonal recitations at Rajapur and elsewhere brought him an income of hundreds of rupees from his devoted audiences in those times. As, however, he had to support a number of younger brothers with their growing brood, it appears that he left the old 'Watan' to them at Sawantwadi, and returned to Pombhuria about the beginning of the 19th century to pass his later days, though he normally stayed at Rajapur, which, as a centre of wealth and learning nearby, proved more hospitable to him.⁶

Gangadhar Shastri was respected by the people at large as much for his piety and charity as for his Sanskrit learning. Bal Shastri's mother, Saguna Bai, kind and affectionate by nature had, as a devoted wife, accompanied Gangadhar Shastri on his pilgrimage to holy Benares, where she had the good fortune to quit this mortal world after a short illness in 1830, when she was probably fifty years old. She left behind her two sons and two daughters, all of whom (except Bal Shastri) were not only married, but had become parents themselves. Narayan Shastri, the eldest son, followed the family profession of the Puranik. But he died, when he was under forty. It is rather a sad irony of fate that such a

good and pious man as Gangadhar Shastri should have lived not only to mourn the death of his wife and the eldest son, but also the demise of his elder daughter Ladu Bai who was married to Ramachandra Shastri Janavekar, probably a native of Sawantwadi before she was apparently twenty-five.

Gangadhar Shastri also passed away in 1840, when he was about sixty-five. He left behind him one younger daughter-Chima Bai married to Vishnu Bhat Yogi of Malvan and one younger son - Bal Shastri.⁷

We get, thus, a fair glimpse of the whole family of which Bal Shastri was the youngest child and the brightest ornament.⁸

Balshastri's Birth :

We have not yet been able to trace the exact place and date of birth of Bal Shastri, but it is quite certain that he was born in Southern Konkan in the vicinity of Sawantwadi and Pombhuria, his old ancestral homes- most probably in the latter half of the year 1812 A.D., for we are not in possession of any copy of his horoscope.⁹

But on the strength of the original application submitted to the Bombay Native Education Society by Bal Shastri himself on the 20th February 1830, wherein he clearly says, 'My age is now seventeen years', we can definitely conclude that he was born in all probability sometime in the latter half of the year 1812.¹⁰

Early Life and Training :

Though there is no clear account of his childhood and early training, still taking into account his own extraordinary natural gifts and the atmosphere of Brahmanic culture in which he was born and brought up, we can form a fair picture of his early life.

In those days, there was no public elementary school in his native village, hence it is clear that he received all his instruction from the elders of the family and under the direct guidance of his revered father. It has been acknowledged on all hands that the child was not only highly talented but also highly talented and very attentive to its own lessons from its infancy. Naturally, the child must have picked up the three R's in Marathi before it was eight. He must have been exceptionally quick at mental arithmetic and also taken special care in reading and writing the Balbodha and Vodi scripts, in which excellent penmanship was particularly valued in those times. He being gifted son of a learned Shastri or Purnik was initiated from its infancy into Sanskrit love. Accordingly, Bal Shastri must have entered upon his Vaidik and Sanskrit lessons, especially after the 'Upanayan Ceremony', generally performed at the age of seven or eight.¹¹

There was then no printed books in either Sanskrit or Marathi.¹² Therefore, Bal Shastri must have studied the lessons from the Sanskrit manuscripts especially the Pothis.

Moreover, he must have made acquaintance with the literature in Marathi consisted mostly of poetry- particularly prized works of Dnyaneshwar, Ekanath, Tukaram and Ramadas, Vaman and Moropant - and the Marathi prose chronicles or Bhakhars.

Bal Shastri, even in his early years, was looked upon as an able Sanskrit scholar, hence it is clear that he must have mastered classical literature like Amar-Kosha and Laghu-Kaumudi along with the famous Panch-Mahakavyas before he was even twelve or thirteen. It is, moreover, quite probable that he could recite at this early age many a Sanskrit stotra and most of the Bhagawet-Gita and was able to expound select narratives from the Sanskrit Puranas in a fair way. Naturally, reading and recitations in different subjects probably absorbed the greater part of his leisure, and we need hardly wonder that endowed with a marvellous memory and intelligence, the boy should have soon developed into the prodigy that he was considered to be in later life.¹³

English Education :

If the young lad had grown upto manhood in these rural surroundings of the Konkan, Bal Shastri would have been little more than a learned Sanskrit Pandit or Purnik like his father. But destined to lay the foundations of a new epoch in Western India he was then luckily taken to Bombay to receive the new learning, which enabled him in due course to be the foremost leader of the Presidency and work for the salvation of his countrymen.¹⁴

It is desirable here to note that after the establishment of British rule in Maharashtra, Bombay became the capital city of the Presidency. Naturally its political importance increased as well as it became the important centre of English education and Western knowledge because of liberal attitude of Mountstuart Elphinstone. But still, in these times, even the inhabitants of Bombay were not willing to send their children to the English School, lest should be converted to christianity. Moreover, these were still olden times when there was neither the steamship nor the railway plying on the western coast, the 'Padav' (ordinary sailing vessel), the bullock-cart or the horse being the general means of locomotion, travelling in distant parts of the country was both difficult and hazardous. It was altogether impossible for the ordinary parents in the mofussil ever to think of sending their children to the great cosmopolitan seat of the Presidency, unless they had some of their own Kith and Kin living there, who would be willing to providing for them the essential facilities of board and lodging.¹⁵

Now fortunately for young Bal Shastri, Bapu Chhatre, the zealous Native Secretary of the Society, who had a very high regard for Gangadhar Shastri, both for his learning and piety, induced him to keep his very talented and promising son under his own care and supervision.¹⁶

Thus, it appears pretty certain that Bal Shastri came to Bombay by the end of 1825 and joined society's English School from the beginning of the year 1826.¹⁷

The Bombay Native School Book And School Society was established in August 1822 mainly because of Elphinstone's encouragement. Its first English School which was started in July 1824 had perhaps less than forty boys of all description and taught by a single English master with the help of a couple of young monitors trained by him. Bal Shastri, belonged to the second batch of students of this school. As Bal Shastri was extremely sharp and studious, naturally he became the pet of his class from the very beginning and received prizes at each annual examination at the hands of two successive Governors, the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone and Sir John Malcolm, in 1827 and 1828 respectively. Not only this but from the end of 1828 he was appointed as a monitor on Rs.15/- per month, to teach Mathematics and Geography to the pupils reading in the English School.¹⁸

Within the period of only four year's (1826-1830) Bal Shastri completed his education in English school. If we carefully examine the school curriculum and the very limited staff of the institution at this period, we cannot but conclude that young Bal Shastri must have been an exceptionally versatile and zealous student, whose attainments in various subjects were very much of his own making. It should be noted here that in those days except English and Geography, other subjects like Marathi, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Gujarathi, Bengali and Persian were never taught

in the English school as a part of its curriculum. And yet , Bal Shastri had the ambition to cultivate them independently, with such aid as was available to him in his cultural surroundings. He had made good progress in Sanskrit and Marathi even before he had joined the English School, while he prosecuted his English studies under his English masters and also under his kind guardian Bapu Chhatre. It is also worth mentioning here that very little of Mathematics was done regularly in the English school and as such Bal Shastri must have mastered the different branches of this subject on his own initiative. His study of Gujarathi, Bengali and Persian was entirely a matter of his personal predilection as this knowledge was deemed very valuable in view of the mixed native population of Bombay.¹⁹

As Bal Shastri was recognised on all hands as a highly gifted youth, head and shoulders above his young contemporaries, even S.K.alias Bapu Chhatre, his guardian and an able Native Secretary of the B.N.E.Society, thought of soon retiring in his favour and accordingly he retired in the year 1830.²⁰

As Native Secretary of the Bombay Native Education Society:

After the retirement of S.K.Chhatre from the post of Native Secretary to the society in March 1830, Bal Shastri was immediately appointed as Deputy Secretary, but only two years later i.e.in March 1832, he had distinguished himself as a highly talented Native Secretary to the Society.

As a Native Secretary, Bal Shastri had to attend not only to his clerical work, but besides doing some teaching in the English School, he was required to interest himself in the labours of the Translating Committee of which Mr. Money and Capt. Molesworth were important members. In fact, Bal Shastri had been already introduced to this type of work by Capt. Jervis since 1828, when the latter translated with his help, Lord Brougham's 'Scientific Treatise on the Objects', 'Advantages and Pleasures of Knowledge'. Consequently during the course of the next two years (1830-32), Bal Shastri translated and prepared for the press two small Marathi books 'Niti-Katha' partly adopted from Bengali and 'Sara-Samgraha' partly adopted from English 'Catechism on General Knowledge' and also translated Goldsmith's 'History of England', a much bigger work under the advice of Mr. Money, which had been then recognised as a text-book in the schools.²¹

As if these various official duties were not enough to absorb his energies, young Bal Shastri as a very promising English and oriental scholar, was soon introduced by his loving chief Mr. Money, to the most advanced circle of European Scholars in Bombay, whereby he came to be selected along with the European Secretary, Mr. J. S. Law, as the Native Secretary to the 'Oriental Translation Committee of the Bombay Branch, Royal Asiatic Society', which had just been formed in the year 1831. Taking into consideration all these literary and public activities one can easily imagine the wide mental

outlook and social enthusiasm with which Bal Shastri was imbued even in those early years.

Establishment of 'The Bombay Durpun'(1832) :

Bal Shastri's strong beneficent and patriotic urge induced him to undertake a far more ambitious and useful enterprise at the end of year 1831. This was the establishment of the first Anglo-vernacular weekly in Western India, called the 'Bombay Durpun', with the object of promoting amongst the Natives, the study of European literature and the diffusion of European knowledge.

From the letter addressed to Government on the 2nd January 1832, requesting them to subscribe for a few copies of the forth-coming newspaper, it appears that it was the joint enterprise of three young signatories - Raghunath Hurrichunderjee, Janardan Wassodeewjee, and Bal Shastri. Of these, Bal Shastri was known to be the Editor of the Bombay Durpun, while Raghunath Hurrichunderjee, senior to him by about eight years and an able servant in the military Accounts Department, seems to have been mainly responsible for the financial and business side of the paper, and Janardan Wassodeewjee, his clever school - companion, probably helped mainly to translate into Marathi the English columns edited by Bal Shastri.²²

It began as a fortnightly publication, from Friday, the 6th January 1832, and was converted into a weekly from

the 6th May of the same year, without any increase in its rate of subscription, which was six Rupees per quarter. The Durpun was printed for the first few years in one or two printing presses owned by others, until it could set up its own establishment, a few years later.²³

The Durpun was rather a views paper than a new paper, the editorial articles and notes being distinctly informative and educative. The young Editor's remarkable command over a difficult foreign tongue at once impressed his contemporaries, and the paper soon established itself as a sane and influential organ of native opinion in the country.²⁴ Its circulation was about 300 copies by the end of the year, which in those days was deemed fairly respectable, as compared with that of other papers even under European management, e.g. the circulation of 'Bombay Courier' and 'Bombay Gazettee' was about 500.

'The Oriental Christian Spectator' in its issue of March 1833, passed the following remark about the journal:

"The Durpun is a highly respectable and useful paper in Marathi and English. Both its original and selected articles are well fitted to inform, expand and correct the native mind. Though we sometimes do not agree with the editorial remarks, we admire the temper with which they are given, and the fairness of the arena which is in general afforded for the different Combatants etc."

When it is remembered that Rev. John Wilson was the editor of this well-known christian journal, this expression of opinion must be considered high praise indeed.²⁵

Bal Shastri continued to edit the Bombay Durpun weekly for eight and a half years i.e. from January 1832 to June 1840, in the full spirit of patriotic service, without accepting any remuneration. Even then it was not possible to make it self-supporting, and so the proprietors ultimately decided to incorporate it with a paper named the United Service Gazette and Literary Chronicle from 1st of July 1840.²⁶ Thus the publication of the Bombay Durpun ceased since July 1840.

Tutor to the Raja of Akulkote (Dec. 1832-Nov. 1834) :

Bal Shastri changed his verna for a short time. His Highness Maharaja Pratapsinh of Satara had requested the Government of Bombay some time ago, to secure a competent English Tutor for his young ward, Prince Shahaji Bhonsale of Akulkote. But as such an able hand was not easy to find, young Bal Shastri temporarily offered himself for the post.²⁷

After getting due sanction from the Government of Bombay and Bombay Native Education Society, Bal Shastri left Bombay and reached Satara by the 13th December 1832 and then he reached Akulkote probably about the 10th of January 1833 along with His Royal Highness. The young Bal Shastri was just twenty years old when he took up this new appointment.

There is little doubt that he worked as tutor to the young Prince to the entire satisfaction of his superiors,²⁸ while shouldering this responsibility he proved to be not only very able, but also tactful and agreeable to all.

Bal Shastri's Sojourn at Akalkote was destined to be a noteworthy stage in his domestic life. During this period, his young wife aged nearly sixteen seems to have died in child-birth about the year 1833, leaving behind her an only male infant named Pandharinath. After the death of his first wife, Bal Shastri married a young girl aged less than ten, called Chima Tai (To be known henceforth as Sundara Bai) in the same year. She was the daughter of Sadashiv Krishna Devasthali of the district of Sholapur.²⁹

This connection with Pandharpur, moreover, seems to have exerted a decisive religious influence on the mind of Bal Shastri, in as much as, his practice of daily 'Bhajan' or recitation of devotional songs in the evening no less than his deep interest in the Dnyaneshwari, in his later years, may be properly traced to the same source.³⁰

Even when staying at such a far off place in the mofussil, it appears that he kept himself in touch with the Bombay Durpan by contributing to its English columns now and then. He also took interest in the translation work of the Bombay Native Education Society and his own Marathi translation of the second volume of Goldsmith's History of English having passed through the press during this very

period. Not only this, but he also pursued his various studies with unabated zeal - the study of Sanskrit Shastras, Mathematics and Astronomy. As a scholar interested in Indian history and antiquities, he was also bound to pay occasional visits to Pandharpur, Sholapur and Bijapur, the most important historic places of the vicinity in the southern Marathe country.³¹

Assistant Professor in Elphinstone Institution, Bombay ,
(October 1834)

Mountstuart Elphinstone, the first Governor of Bombay retired in 1827. The public of the Bombay Presidency generously contributed a sum of about Rupees two and a half lacs to commemorate his name by constituting the 'Elphinstone Professorships Fund' which was to be utilized for importing higher education in western literature and science to the advanced students of the Bombay Native Education Society. But this scheme practically developed in April 1834, when Government agreed to add Rs.22,000/- per year to the same Fund and laid down certain conditions. Accordingly, an institution to be called Elphinstone College was established.³²

The first Professors were to be selected by Mountstuart Elphinstone himself and thereafter by the Managing Council of the institution. In pursuance of this scheme, Elphinstone selected two scholars by the middle of 1834 : A.B.Oriebar, M.A., as Professor of Mathematics and Natural

Philosophy, and John Harkness, M.A. as Professor of English Literature and Philosophy. But they actually arrived in Bombay in March and July 1835, after a long voyage-round the Cape of Good hope.³³

Meantime, Bal Shastri had been appointed as the Senior Assistant Professor on Rs.150/- per mensem before October 1834. Accordingly Bal Shastri left Akulkote to join this new situation and reached Bombay in November 1834.

As the idea of the Elphinstone College was not very clear in the minds of its promoters at the beginning, the Native Education Society had already imported two excellent Scottish School-masters - John Bell, A.M. and William Henderson, A.M. - on Rs.300/- per mensem, in November 1834 to meet the needs of the higher classes in its Central English School. The abler students having been already well-provided with scholarships could not be induced to join the college. In the result, the newly arrived Professors had to remain practically idle for the first three years - there being only three students to attend their classes.³⁴

This peculiar situation, however, immensely helped the young Assistant Professor Bal Shastri to enlarge his own Mathematical attainments in particular, under Prof. Oriobar.³⁵ As a result, he was offered a salary of Rs.300/- per mensem in the year 1837.

Now, with a view to recruiting more pupils for the College classes, a college school was founded on 1st April 1838, with Bal Shastri as its head.³⁶ Bal Shastri conducted this school with his usual zeal and marked ability.

Unfortunately, during this period internal rivalry increased between the Central English School and the Elphinstone College i.e. the two ambitious scottish school masters on one hand and the two learned Elphinstone Professors on the other hand. This tussle went on for two more years which hampered the progress of the institution. Under such circumstances to avoid such rivalry and to achieve objects of higher education, union between the two institutions-i.e. the Central English School and the Elphinstone College- was effected in the middle of the year 1840. Thus, the college as a separate institution was suspended, while the school, and the Professorial classes were united under the title - 'Elphinstone Native Education Institution'.³⁷

As Government was contributing far more than the society towards the total educational expenditure, it created a new 'Board of Education' in the year 1840. This Board managed all the funds of both Elphinstone Professorships and the Bombay Native Education Society. And the Elphinstone Professors, now appointed by the Government, were also to act as Superintendents i.e. Educational Inspectors of schools in the mofussil, in close touch with the District Collectors. In this way, Government through the board and the board

through the Professors, directly controlled the Elphinstone Institution as well as public and aided schools - English and Vernacular - in the Bombay Presidency.³⁸

The Board of Education created a committee in the year 1841 to look after the internal management and discipline of the Elphinstone Institution.³⁹ This Committee consisted of the two Professors as *ex-officio* members and three members nominated by the Board. Those nominated members were Assistant Professor Bal Shastri, Ibrahim Muckba and the Society's Secretary Dr. Bird who also worked as Chairman of the Committee. Thus it is to be observed that Bal Shastri was the only Indian Assistant Professor working in the Elphinstone Institution till 1841.

Educational Superintendent :

The Board of Education divided the Government District vernacular schools of the Bombay Presidency into three Divisions : (1) Deccan and Khandesh, (2) Northern Konkan and Gujarat (3) Southern Maratha Country. Mr. Eisadie (Head Master of the English School at Poona) continued to Superintendent over the 1st Division, Professor Orlebar had been requested to inspect in the 2nd Division and Bal Gangadhar Shastri, Assistant Professor, to perform a similar duty in regard to schools of the 3rd Division.⁴⁰

Thus, it is clear that as soon as the Board of Education was created, Bal Shastri happened to be the first

Indian to act as Superintendent (or Educational Inspector of later years) in charge of one of the three main Divisions of the whole Presidency, along with the two leading European educationalists of the day, which was certainly a unique honour for such a young man. He was thus in charge of the schools in the Southern Maratha Country and Konkan for four years (1841-1845) carrying on his annual inspection for about four months at the end of the year, after working during the rest of the period as Assistant Professor in Bombay. The Reports of the Board of Education for all these four years are full of laudable references to his zealous exertions in the cause of education, and his own annual reports are highly important as being the oldest records of the social and educational conditions of the Districts.⁴¹

'Dig-Darshan' A Marathi monthly :

During this period, while working as Assistant Professor in Elphinstone College, Bal Shastri decided to bring out a Marathi monthly magazine in Bombay entitled as- 'Dig Durshun'. It was the first of its kind not only in Marathi language but also in any of the vernaculars of the Presidency. The first number of the magazine was published on 1st of May 1840. We can not say how long did it exactly continue? But with the help of available sources, it appears fairly certain that it was in existence for some four years if not more.

Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy :

Bal Shastri Jambhakar served as Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy for two years i.e. from 1842 to 1844 in Elphinstone Institution. Prof. Bal Shastri was versatile and capable enough to instruct the pupils in Arts as well as Science.

Eminent scholars have accepted the fact that his mathematical talents and attainments were of such a high order that he could have been duly equated with a senior Wrangler of his time.⁴² Naturally, he was appointed as Acting Professor of Mathematics in place of Prof. Orlebar, who proceeded to Europe on sick furlough for two years i.e. from April 1842 to April 1844.

While shouldering the responsibility, during this period, Bal Shastri proved his abilities by preparing well known students in Mathematics like Atmaram Pandurang and Dadabhai Nowrojee. Not only this even Prof. Orlebar also expressed his utmost satisfaction at the manner in which the classes have been brought forward by Bal Shastri during his period of absence.

In this context a noteworthy testimony may be recorded here. In the year 1841, Vishnoo Nursinha Joshee, a competent Sanskrit scholar, who was appointed Professor-elect of Astronomy in the local Sanskrit College, Poona and who had received the 'Ottum'(Best) diploma in Astronomy, was

specially deputed to Bombay, with a view to modernising the 'Jyotish' or Astronomical Branch of the Institution, for about two years, to study under Prof. Oriabar and Bai Shastri the higher branches of European Mathematics and Astronomy. As a matter of fact, however, being ignorant of the English language, he received all his instruction directly under Bai Shastri. In this context, it appears pretty certain that as he had to teach these very subjects to the Professor - elect of Astronomy through the vernacular, Bai Shastri wrote and published his unique Marathi books on the Theory of Equations and the Differential and Integral Calculus, just about this time. Be it noted, therefore, to the lasting credit of Bai Shastri, that he actually produced excellent Marathi books on higher Mathematics more than a century ago, by coining a new terminology, while our learned scholars have been only wrangling for the last many years on the feasibility of using the marathi medium of instruction for higher studies.⁴³

Bai Shastri was a profound teacher of Astronomy as of Mathematics. While acting as a Professor of Mathematics in the Elphinstone College during the period between 1842 and 1844, he also discharged the duties of Astronomical Instructor. In that capacity, he was evidently in charge of the Meteorological observatory at colaba, where Kero Lukshman Chhatre his own old able pupil was working, and who later rose on to be a distinguished Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at the Deccan College of Poona.⁴⁴

Establishment of the Normal Class :

One of the main objects of the Bombay Native Education Society was the improvement of teachers for the vernacular schools, and there had been several unsuccessful attempts in that direction at various periods and at different places in the Bombay Presidency.⁴⁵ Therefore, a more systematic attempt was made by the Board of Education and accordingly, the Normal Class was opened in April 1845 at Bombay under the direction of Bal Shastri, to give a sphere of action to the talents.

Government started the Normal class, in the first instance, as an experiment for three years, relying chiefly on the recommendation and enthusiastic co-operation of Bal Shastri. This shows the high expectations the board of education had from the labours of Bal Shastri. To shoulder this new responsibility, Bal Shastri was relieved since 1845 not only of his teaching work in the Elphinstone Institution, but also of his superintendentship of the 3rd division. Naturally, he fully occupied himself in superintending the Normal class establishment and in the preparation of class books for the use of vernacular schools.⁴⁶

But unfortunately, he died all of a sudden at the end of the very first year i.e. on the 17th May 1846.⁴⁷ Accordingly, when it was decided to close the Normal Class in the year 1848, the Board of Education stated in its annual Report, 'above all from the untimely death of the able and

zealous Director under whom the class was originally placed' that 'the advantages expected from the experiment at Bombay were not realised'.⁴⁸

The Last Scene :

The last appointment held by Bal Shastri in his educational career was that of the Director of the Normal class, combined with the post of the Superintendent of the Government vernacular schools in a division of the Presidency. He himself had induced Government to establish the Normal Class- as he looked upon the profession of a teacher as one for which special training was necessary. The class was started from April 1845 as an experiment to be tried for three years. With a view to making it a success and qualifying the young men as - teachers- in the real sense of the term, he had gone through almost every work extant in the English language at the time, on the subject of Normal schools, 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 world not only as teachers, but also as pioneers of enlightenment. Accordingly, Bal Shastri tried to inculcate in the minds of his pupils this great idea of working like the Rishis of old- selflessly and zealously for the enlightenment and good of the people. 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.⁴⁹

But as fate would have it, Balshastri was suddenly removed from this earthly scene of his beneficent activity, while he was still forming plans for the future. A few details of his last illness can be gathered from the Bombay Times of the 20th of May 1846, wherein we are told that, - 'he caught fever (typhus) in a tour of investigation through the Konkan, where neither medicine nor medical attendance was procurable. He returned to the Presidency on Tuesday (12th May) in a very dangerous state, and gradually sank before the attacks of the malady which on Sunday afternoon (17th May) proved fatal to him.'⁵⁰ Mr. Bhawalkar, in his 'Fragment' furnishes one more important details of his last scene. He tells us that Dr. Morehead, the first Principal of the Grant Medical College and other famous physicians of Bombay did their best to save his precious life, but that all their efforts proved of no avail.⁵¹

All contemporary papers in Western India of the day-English, Marathi and Gujarathi made the most feeling references to the great tragedy in their obituary notices. 'It is with feelings of the deepest regret', wrote the Bombay Courier, the oldest English paper in Western India,

* that we announce the death of Bal Gangadhar Shastri, Esq., J.P. Assistant Professor in the

Elphinstone Institution,.... The deceased was second to no native of India in natural talents, and these have been highly cultivated. His acquirements were as deep as they were extensive, and his untimely death will be felt and deplored, not only by the native community, to whom he was an honour and ornament, but by every European who had the privilege of his acquaintance, or was cognizant of his worth."⁵²

We can thus easily imagine what a tremendous shock the very premature and untimely death of Bal Shastri must have caused not only to his own family, but to the whole community of Bombay and Western India.

Unfortunately, Bal Shastri died in the midst of his valuable career. He died too early at the age of thirty-three. Yet within his short span of life so many remarkable achievements were recorded to his credit.

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