

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION OF YESHWANTRAJI CHAVAN

The present state of Maharashtra came into being on 1st May, 1960. Before and after its creation it has produced a large number of eminent personalities who have left their indelible mark on various fields of human development. In the galaxy of great personalities of Maharashtra Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj occupies a top most position. He established the secular Hindavi Swarajya in medieval times by getting over innumerable internal and external odds. In modern times, Justice M.G.Ranade, G.K.Gokhale, Dadabhai Navroji, Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, Vasudeo Balwant Phadake, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Principal G.G.Agarkar, Karmaveer Vithal Ramaji Shinde, Maharaja Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, Bhaskarrao Madhav, Keshavrao Jedhe, Com.S.A.Dange, Saint Gadge Maharaj, Saint Tukadoji, Vinoba Bhave, Swatantrayaveer V.D.Savarkar, S.M.Joshi, Baba Amate, Anutai Wagh, Kirloskar, Walchand, Lata Mangeshkar, V.S.Khandekar and so many others have tried to make not only Maharashtra - their homeland but India modern and powerful in so many fields. In their

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early lives most of these personalities had to face a good deal of horifying challenges. However, by dint of their firm aim, unflinching faith, selfless sacrifice, ceaseless efforts they could achieve their goals. Yeshwantrao Chavan, who has been regarded as the second Shivaji or the architect of modern Maharashtra also occupies an enviable and eminent place in the galaxy of great sons of Maharashtra. In this Chapter an attempt has been made to throw light on the facets of the early life and education of Yeshwantraoji Chavan.

Yeshwantrao Chavan was born on 12th March, 1914, in Deorashtre, an obscure village, typical of the semi-human conditions that prevailed in the India of those days. It is about 10 miles from Karad, a small town in the District of Satara.¹ His father Balwantrao was a simple farmer of Vite, a small village in the Taluka of Khanapur, Dist. Satara. His mother Vithabai, came from village Deorashtre. Her father was Ravji Shidoo Ghadge, a farmer. She was married at the age of eight and the couple gave birth to seven children - Dnyanoba, Radhabai, Shripati, Khashaba, Ganpatrao, Yeshwantrao and Pandurang, of which only four children survived viz. Dnyanoba Radhabai, Ganpatrao and Yeshwantrao². Balwantrao -

Chavan, cultivated his own land of about four to five acres and wrested his livelihood from it by working on his own as well as by co-operating with others. As the land was dry and depended mostly on rain-fall, he could hardly meet the expenses out of its produce. So he used to sell the surplus milk and ghee from his cows and buffaloes to a sub-judge of Vite. In due course of time, his precarious finances drove him to request the Sub-Judge to give him a job. The Sub-Judge, being sympathetic towards Balwantrao got him appointed as his bailiff in his Vita Court. In this context Yeshwantrao in his Auto-Biography entitled " Krishnakatha " states that " The names of his grand-father was Waghoji Chavan who had two children : Ramchandra and Balwantrao. Since Ramchandra had some education, he left agriculture and started working as a Government Bailiff. Balwantrao continued with agriculture since his father, his grand father - Ranoji and his great grand father Baloji were all simple farmers. But subsequently, after a few days it became obvious that only agricultural activities were insufficient for family maintenance. So Ramchandra tries his level best and got a job of Government Bailiff for Balwantrao. His appointment used to be in Vita

Dahiwadi and Karad alternatively. When Yeshwantrao was born his appointment was at Karad. He worked at Karad for many years. Thus the two brothers Ramchandra and Balwantrao worked as Govt. Bailiff³.

By 1917, Balwantrao Chavan was transferred to Karad. Hardly had he settled with his family in Karad when the terrible epidemic of Plague was spreading throughout India. It also broke out in Karad. Consequently, Balwantrao sent his wife and children to Deorashtra and himself stayed behind as he could not take leave of his service. Plague affected his health and finally he died of it, when Yeshwantrao was just about four years of age. About the sad demise of his father, Yeshwantrao remembers, " I remember very distinctly how my father came to our village from Karad. He came with fever, walking from the Railway Station which is about three miles away. In those days, there was no road transport in my area. The road passed through hilly areas. I saw him coming and I went upto him. He said to me, " Son, don't bother me. I am not well. " And he went inside the house. A few days later he passed away.⁴ "

Now, with the sudden demise of Balwantrao,

everything looked dark for the bereaved ~~fa~~ ones in the Chavan family. Yeshwantrao was unfortunately deprived of fatherly love and security at the tender age of four. His further life became devoid of his father's love and care. Many of Yeshwantrao's admirers, however, believe that his mother's love and care thus doubled. Defacto after his father's death they have literally become orphaned. At this juncture, the only ray of hope was his grand mother and maternal uncle. Yet Vithabai worked hard for four to six months and gave her children the rare courage and strong will to survive in adverse conditions. Vithabai was (a old) peasant woman who did not have any education. Though the Chavan family was poor, the mother Vithabai felt that she should impart education to her children. She had make a difficult ~~4~~ choiece of whether she should stay with her brother at Deorashtra or go to Karad for the sake of her children's education. Since her husband had worked at Karad, and the town offered better facilities for education, she preferred to move to Karad. But since her husband's death, she had nothing to fall back upon. She had a difficult time as she had to bring up her children and to educate them.

Vithabai, however, could manage to get her husband's job of Bailiff for her elder son Dnyanoba who was

18 years old. Dnyanoba could get the job because of the kindness of an English Dist. Judge of Satara. Many of his husband's bailiff friends used to come and sympathise with her. Since Balwantrao was an honest and sincere person one of the Munsiffs at that time in Karad called Vithabai and consoled her by saying that he would try and get Bailiff Job for his elder son. Mr. Shingate, another bailiff friend of her husband took them to Satara to meet the Dist. Judge⁵. To go to Satara they had take the night train from Karad to Koregaon. On reaching Koregaon at dawn they took the 'Chakada' (Bullock Cart) to Satara. They ~~meet~~ met the Dist. Judge at the Satara Dist. Judge Court which is housed in the palace of Satara. As per his instructions they returned to Karad and within one to two weeks Dnyanoba got the appointment order to join his father's post (of bailiff.)

But the post of bailiff did not provide enough to keep ~~merely~~ nearly half a dozen mouths going. While his father had supplemented his pittance with grains from Vita, Dnyanoba could do no such things at his tender age. His job was small, his income meagre. At that time many a low income Govt. servants in Karad lived in an expensive way. These people thought themselves a cut above the common man. They

formed their own exclusive areas. The Chavans, however, chose to dwell in the peasant locality. Dnyanoba, his wife and his mother betrayed no such gratesque organisation⁶.

Yeshwantrao's maternal uncle Daji Ghadge was a man of easy circumstances. He took Yeshwantrao away with him to his house in the village of Deorashtra. The boy entered primary school at Deorashtra. Since he was born here, the house and the village were nothing new to him. He was quite at home in the present milieu. Deorashtra, a small enchanted village in present Sangli Dist. is an imborn Godly village on the border of Khanapur, Walva and Tasgaon Talukas which lived and prospered on the Banks of the beautiful streamlet/Sonhira. Yeshwantrao was born on this soil in a mud house near the house of a weaver. To the R West a house of Ramoshi and to the South is the village road. Nearby is an old, besolate 'Wada' and near to it is an old house of 'Kulsundidi'. His uncle worked with a copper smith and hardly earned enough to feed the family. As a boy he was more interested in sports and games than in studies. He used to ~~bath~~ bunk school some times and bury his books and slate in the sand on the bank of Sonhira. His friends were Gopinath Salunkhe and the children of the Ramoshis and Muslims staying next to his maternal uncle's

house. He would play with 'Viti Dandu' etc. and swim for hours in the Sonhira stream. They organised wrestling, bouts of youngsters in the garden of Kamalu Mahinda. Yeshwantrao and his young friends used to go for bathing in Kamalu's well pick mangoes, along with his mother, maternal aunt, and his sister Radhakka and then go to the market at Kundal to sell the mangoes and earn a rupee or so. When Yeshwantrao went to Deorashtra to hold a meeting he reminisced about his childhood, " I used to run away through Sangar alley after plucking Tamrinds of Govandi - wash my clothes on Tukai and pick up 'Avalas' from Dajiba's orchard. Such is my village. When I come here, even the stones of this village talked to me'".

After four years of school in the primary level at Deorashtra Dnyan Mandir, the urchin was back home in Karad. His interest in study was enhanced and he went further up and passed his Marathi VIIth Std. He went to the Tilak High School in Karad in 1927 for further education. Yeshwantrao was one of the fortunates whose life began to undergo a radical change because of the opportunity of getting English Education. For this, the credit does to his brother Ganpatrao, who was greatly influenced by the social revolutionary idealism of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1927 to 1890). He was convinced of the

importance of English Education and readily showed Yeshwantrao the path of new Education despite being poor⁸.

At that time, to get freeship for economically backward students required recommendations from a reputed person. For this reason, yough Yeshwantrao went to a rich and reputed person of his village. The concerned person was well acquainted with the Chavan family and knew how poor they were. Instead of sympathising with the young Yeshwantrao and giving him the necessary letter of recommendation, the concerned person humiliated him. This small incidence hurt the self respect of Yeshwantrao and he ~~ex~~ henceforth decided not to take any help from any person for further education. However, he decided to continue his studies despite various obstacles and adverse conditions. The aforesaid incidence must have left a very telling effect on Yeshwantrao's mind, because as soon as he came into power in future, one of his important decisions was to impart complete free education to the economically backward students of Maharashtra. Maharashtra was then the first step to take such a progressive measure in free India. This incidence also helps us to show how sentimental and self respecting Yeshwantrao was in his young days too.

During this period most of the Maratha population was scattered in the villages and their life was dependent upon agriculture and agricultural labour. Most of them were uneducated, poor, ignorant and were being exploited. The English Education in those days was open to all. But it could be acquired by a few Brahmin and white (collar) persons. Even through the Maratha elites could have educated their young people, they had neglected this important aspect. That is why the rift between the Brahmin and Non Brahmin went on widening. Most of the respectable Govt. jobs went to the educated Brahmin class and the poor neglected village based Marathas were overlooked. Even the Britishers as per their policy of " Devide and Rule " encouraged the existance of such a type of society. Thus, the whole of social life in Maharashtra was in shreds. The same condition was also found in the Muslim Community. Only the previlaged and elite section of the society were financially and educationally sound. The condition was such that only the elite from Parsi, Muslim, Brahmin and Maratha communities were involved in political and social struggles and currents and undercurrents. Rest of the masses were aloof from this. Yeshwantrao observed this state of

Society when he was taking his education at Tilak High School. Once a School Inspector asked the students who they would like to be. Some of the students said that they would like to be Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, some aspired to be Mahatma Gandhi, others ambition was to be Jyotiba Phule. But Yeshwantrao said, " I to-day's Yeshwant would be known as Yeshwantrao Balwantrao Chavan when I am old ". This was indeed a prophecy that came true. While still in School he plunged himself into the freedom movement. Shri. B.M.Gogate and Yeshwantrao used to sit on the same Bench. A grand procession giving slogans against the British regime ~~were~~ was proceeding. The Principal had warned the students not to leave their sits. But as the procession approached, the School, Yeshwantrao signed Gogate and himself rushed out of the class. He took the 'Tricolour' from one of the persons in the procession and hoisted it on the top of a Neem tree and gave the slogan ' Inkilab Zindabad : LONG LEVE INDEPENDENCE⁹! . X

Throughout India the Civil disobedience movement was effectly going on under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. However, in the then Bombay Presidency, the middle class elite Marathas and even the non-Brahmins in general were not joining the C.D.M. full fledgedly. Hence Yeshwantrao decided that he

should go to the masses and tell them in their own language about the needs to join the main stream of freedom struggle lodged by the Indian National Congress. Subsequently in 1930, Yeshwantrao got the opportunity to take an active part as a Satyagrahi in Civil Disobedience Movement. At the same time the follower of the Satyashodhak Samaj and the leader of the non-Brahmin party Shri. Keshavrao Jedhe from Pune and the great social reformer Shri. Vithal Ramji Shinde (1873 - 1944) who had spent decades of his life in the service of the Dalits had also joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. The entry of Shri. Keshavrao Jedhe had weakened the Non-Brahmin Party. Prior to this in 1927, when Yeshwantrao was studying in VIIIth Std. there was a big public meeting at the ground in front of Yeshwantrao's House in Shukrawar Peth, Karad. Regarding this meeting Yeshwantrao in his Auto-biography writes, " The famous duo-political leaders Shri. Keshavrao Jedhe and Shri. Dinkarrao Jawalkar held a wonderful public meeting. Specially the speech made by Dinkarrao Jawalkar was very controversial. His subject was " The Future of the Brahmins". He had severely criticised Shri. Lokmanya Tilak, While criticising the Brahmins which was not appropriated as per my thinking. I was perturbed that even at this tender age I could think about this complex problem¹⁰". This only indicates that Yeshwantrao from his

very tender age had a political awareness and an analytical acumen.

Yeshwantrao cherished a deep fraternal affection for this athletic brother Ganpatrao who had a penchant for ^ewrestling. He called him Ganpu. Ganpu had sporting encounters with some of the most famous wrestlers of the region. Yeshwantrao was injected by Ganpu's fascination for wrestling, and he became an expert himself in the art and science of the grapple. Though he did not have any wrestling bouts with any distinguished wrestler, he did participate in school matches and often emerged a winner. Yeshwantrao also had a great interest in drama. He used to participate in the dramas presented at the annual school gathering of Tilak High School. He also used to see all the dramas which were staged in Karad. There were a group of educated persons who had formed a drama association. One drama entitled "Bebandshahi" written by Aundhakar was very much appreciated by him. Shri. Sahastrabudhe, a teacher from the Tilak High School played the role of Sambhaji and Baburao Gokhale played "Kalusha Kabji". Yeshwantrao has written in his Diary that the drama was much more of a higher quality than those performed by the professionals. In one drama "Maisaheb" directed by Baburao Gokhale, Yeshwantrao

played the role of domestic servant. At the show of this drama stage at Kirloskarwadi, Yeshwantrao's role was greatly applauded¹¹.

In his Auto-biography entitled 'Krishnakatha' Yeshwantrao has mentioned that all their family members were highly obliged to Ganpatrao because of the hardships he tried to take on his young shoulders when he was studying in the matriculation class. He had known poverty and blamed it for compelling him to abandon his ambitions of higher education and a farm of his own. He felt that their ~~families~~ family's fate could be changed on their own capabilities. They were then staying at Mr. Baburao Dubal's house in Shikrawar Peth. This Baburao Dubal was an educated person. He involved Ganpatrao in his scheme of doing agriculture in the Indore state where uncultivated land was available. In spite of his mother's reluctance to let him go Ganpatrao left for Indore with Baburao. In this far off place also his fate did not favour him. The climate over there did not suit him either. He fell ill now and then and had to encounter serious difficulties regarding money and agricultural implements. In the mean time Mr. Dubal came back from Indore and enrolled himself in the Army. Ultimately Ganpatrao came back to Karad a disappointed man. His mother consoled him by saying that he had made a great mistake by going to Indore and it was futile to blame others because it

would create undue ill-feeling. He should rectify his mistake and start going to school again. Though he joined to school and tried hard to appear in the examination, however, he could not bear to see his mother work so hard for them. So he took up a local job and told Yeshwantrao that the maintenance of their family was henceforth his responsibility and that mother would not work hard any more. Now he would see to it that Yeshwantrao completed his education.

He and his brother Ganpatrao were closed to each other in the sense that Yeshwantrao was influenced by Ganpatrao though they often argued violently on political issues. They were brought up in an area which was known in those days for strong anti-brahmin sentiments and Ganpatrao was involved actively in the Satya Shodhak Movement which was a protest against the oppressive Brahmin domination. Yeshwantrao analysed the aims, merits and demerits of the Satyashodhak Movement. He even asked various questions about the various social and political developments in the country. That was the period when the Simon Commission was in India and the country was deadly against it. The political atmosphere in India was tense. Political prisoners carried on hunger strikes in jails. The Congress, the resolutionary and even individuals carried on continuous

fight against the British Government. All this made a deep impact on Yeshwantrao's mind who was still in school. His eyes opened up to a higher cause - the freedom of the country for which people could die. He wondered why people were involved in petty conflicts. He started reading Marathi News Papers like Kesari, Maratha, Dnyanodaya, etc. and whatever came to his smalltown. He wanted to know what was happening to the Congress leaders like Gandhiji and others. Gandhiji's Salt - Satyagraha (1) filled Chavan with enthusiasm. An urge in him to rebel against the oppressive Government soon manifested.

Mean while Yeshwantrao had joined the main stream of Nationalist Politics, the Gandhian Movement. He was only 18 then and highly obsessed with 'Satyagraha' and 'Prabhat Pheris'¹². In 1930, on joining the Civil Disobediance Movement Yeshwantrao was put in Jail for four weeks. After being released from the local jail in 1931 he was supposed to continue with his studies since he was in his Matriculation year. But after coming out of jail the impact of the National Movement, however, continued to perturb his mind. The people of Karad had unabatedly continued their struggle. In 1932, it culminated in Flag Hoisting on the building of Karad Municipal Council and distribution of bulletins became his work and for that again he had to go to jail for another

fifteen months. Because of this he had to ~~forage~~ forego his Matriculation Examination. He had passed his VIIth std. successfully but due to his being in an out of jail he could not complete his Matriculation Examination till 1933. However, after his release subsequently his teachers admitted him in the Matriculation class and after studying hard he passed his Matriculation in 1934.¹³

Yeshwantrao used to visit Deorashtra during his vacations. In his early childhood he had seen various people there and the intricacies of their character were very important from his point of view. In the village he visited some places and met some people, one of them was Babu Teli in his early fifties, who was ^a very fascinating character. He used to visit his place once or ~~twice~~ ^a in a day. This Babu Teli had a close relationship with his maternal uncle's family and they also treated him very lovingly. He had a Oil extracting machine(Ghana) at his place. While putting ground-nuts in the machine and going round it (after) the bullocks that (move) the machine he used to sing the songs. He also told Yeshwantrao who sat behind the (Ghana) a number of interesting and (commical) stories and (anecdotes) about the Deorashtra people which made Yeshwantrao/laugh (to know ends). Yeshwantrao also had a lot of fun and mischief with the boys

from the Ramoshi Galli on the Deorashtra ~~town~~ ground (Mal). In the afternoon they used to go to a hill about two to three miles from the village to eat berries. Though eating bery had little importance for him the company of the boys fascinated him. They all use to treat him with love and respect because at that time he was studying at a so called big place at Karad.

On one such visit to Deorashtra he recalls a conversation with a family friend Shri. Sakharan Mhaske. He would ~~also~~ always ask Yeshwantrao, " How much will you study ?" Yeshwantrao would answer " I will study as much as possible ". Mhaske asked again, " Will you study atleast to qualify for the post of Mamlatdar ?" Yeshwantrao answered, " Yes, that much I will definitely study". Then Mhaske's eyes filled with tears. He said again, " Yes, you become a Mamlatdar and on becoming one, you take a transfer to Vite and visit Deorashtra. The Patils and all the elites of the village will be there to receive you and in front of them you call me to your side. So that my position and respect in the village will be tremendously enhanced." ¹⁴. This showed the outlook of people then towards education and having a relationship with the person holding a Government post was prestigious from the social point of view. Subsequently, when he became a Minister he met Mhaske who was

very happy meeting him. But Yeshwantrao was unsure whether he was very happy because he had become a Minister and not the Mamlatdar. Some how he could not fulfill Mhaske's dream that of becoming a Mamlatdar.

Another memory of his early days, a pleasant one, is that of 'Sagarareshwar'. The thousand year old beautiful temple about a mile and a half from his village. As a young lad, Chavan accompanied his mother on her numerous visits to this Lord Shiva's Temple. He remembers this grand mother telling him one day, "During your birth, your mother had great pains. She even fainted. Since our's was a small village, there was no Hospital facility. The home-made medicines did not take any effect. I was very worried. Then I intensely prayed to Sagaroba to make me successful in keeping Akka (Vithai was called Aka) alive. And offered to keep the child's name Yeshwant in his remembrance. As Sagaroba listened I have kept your name Yeshwant¹⁵."

Thus, Yeshwantrao the maker of modern Maharashtra was born on the banks of the river Krishna from the North and the Koyana river from the South meeting each other and forming a confluence known as 'Priti Sangam' at Karad and then flowing Eastward. Karad is a very old town having a history to his effect. When Yeshwantrao was staying there the population was

9. about 15 to 16 thousand and almost everybody knew each other there. Though the town was small it had its own characteristics. It was an important commercial centre. There was a tradition of education and interest for studies. Even to-day when one visits Karad, one finds on the banks of river Krishna Brahmins settlements while on the banks of river Koyana the settlement of Marathas and the people of other communities.

During Yeshwantrao's times the commercial centre was in the heart of the town, 'Mandai' and 'Muslim Mohalla' on the table land. To the Eastern side there were Harijans settlements. Generally, everybody ^a ~~was~~ had some sort of relationship with each other. During Yeshwant's educational period in Karad, there was only one High School and one mediocre Public Library. This Library was an important ~~sector~~ centre of lectures, seminars and discussions. There were many people who met here to discuss their national feelings. Both father and son Altekar, Shri Pandu Anna Shiralkar, Baburao Gokhale, Ganpatrao Batanai, Kishanlal Premraj etc. were some of them. As a memorial of Lokmanya Tilak, some of these important persons started at English School at Karad. Today Karad is one of the important educational centres in Western Maharashtra. This small town also had a great fascination for politics. There were all types of political thinking groups having

active members. And in this cultural and political background was growing Yeshwantrao Balwantrao Chavan.

Thus, to conclude Yeshwantrao's early life and education is nothing but the beginning of his relentless struggle for noble causes in life. It is indeed a moving one. Starting with no advantages as we understand them and losing his father at an early stage of three years, young Yeshwantrao can truly be regarded as the architect of his own destiny¹⁵. With only an elder brother to help, he educated himself and started to be appreciated and getting noticed while still in his tender age. Though his mother was uneducated still she was well aware of the need for education and because of this she decided to make available all the possibilities she and Dnyanoba put provide to the two younger sons. In this context, Yeshwantrao says, "When my elder brother got a job, for some days he was in Karad. But afterwards, he left for Vita on transfer. My mother decided to stay back in Karad and complete the education of her two younger sons. It was an obsession with her"¹⁷. Thus, he had a very humble and meagre educational facilities at his disposal. He was in a real sense a proletariate who went on to become one of the most dynamic political leaders of post independence era in our country. His leadership was mainly a self acquired one.¹⁸

So in a way Yeshwantrao Chavan attended but one school . that was the school of life and sat at the feet of one teacher and that was the teacher of experience. Without any advantages of either richness or birth of patronage or favourable circumstances, he rose to an eminent position which was the envy of all.¹⁹ Thus as the morning shows the day, in a like manner Yeshwantrao's early life literally showed the glimpses of what was to come (in future). His inborn love for democratic socialism helped in a big way to lead India on the right path of secular democracy and socialism. His thoughts were moulded and shaped by the writings of Marx, Lenin M.N.Roy, Bertrand Russel, Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. His living faith in socialism arose from the poverty and misery of millions of his country men in rural India amongst whom he was born and brought up.

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