CHAPTER-V

CONGRESS ORGANIZATION IN MAHARASHTRA
DURING the days of national freedom movement, especially in Gandhi era, Maharashtra became a powerful Congress stronghold. A big share of credit for this should go to Keshavrao Jedhe. He tried in a number of ways to consolidate the Congress and thereby furthered the course of nationalist movement in Maharashtra. Besides participating in the political agitations launched by the Congress under Gandhi’s leadership, he carried on the Congress propaganda campaigns, mobilized the rural peasant masses to the Congress and increased its membership tremendously. It was because of his leadership that the Congress in Maharashtra could win astonishing success in council elections of 1934, 1937 and 1946 and capture ten out of eleven District Local Board bodies. However, towards the end of the freedom struggle political situation in Maharashtra changed drastically. World War Second ended in August 1945 and soon political change occurred in Great Britain. Political situation in India too began to change rapidly thereafter. In 1946, India's independence became a writ large on the wall. As a result of these developments there started a game of power politics in India and it inevitably gave rise to faction politics in the Congress organization. Maharashtra was no exception to it. In 1946, Congress ministry led by B.G.Kher
was brought to power in Bombay province without consulting forwardly even Congress leaders like Keshavrao Jedhe, N.V. Gadgil etc. On this background Keshavrao Jedhe was elected as president of the provincial Congress committee in May 1946 for the second time. This time he worked as the P.C.C. chief for about two years i.e. from 1946 to 1948. This period was characterized by conflicts between the Congress ministry and the party wing in Bombay province. As he thought that the Congress was rapidly passing under the capitalist influence, Keshavrao Jedhe left the Congress in 1948 and founded with the help of his trusted colleagues the Peasants and Workers party in the same year. However, he was disillusioned in that party too within six years. So he re-entered the Congress in 1954 and continued to work as a true Congressman till the end of his life in 1959. An attempt has been made in this chapter to review his work in the Congress organization in Maharashtra between the years 1946 and 1948 and 1954 and 1959. Keshavrao's total contribution to Congress organization in Maharashtra has also been evaluated in the light of the views expressed by other eminent Congressmen.

In 1946, the Congress won a massive victory in the Council election in Bombay province. Keshavrao's contribution to the Congress victory was no less significant. However, after elections Shankarrao Deo, without taking into confidence his senior colleagues like Jedhe and Gadgil discussed only with the Congress high command the issues of choosing the leader of the Congress legislature party and ministry formation.
Shri B.G. Kher was elected as leader of the Congress legislature party. Thus Kher ministry came to power in Bombay province in 1946. Somehow Keshavrao did not like the choice of B.G. Kher as the chief minister and his formation of ministry. He was at the view that as attainment of national freedom was a clear writing on the wall, the Congress government should implement the various welfare schemes for the benefit of the peasants and workers. He also believed that party leadership in the legislature should be passed on to somebody belonging to the masses and representatives of the masses should be given more representation in the cabinet. When he saw that his views were neglected by his party-men in the government, he started openly criticizing the inefficient Kher ministry.

Soon after formation of ministry Jedhe group captured the provincial Congress committee and Keshavrao Jedhe was elected as its president in May 1946. This time he defeated Shankarrao Deo and Rausaheb Patwardhan in the election. This was Keshavrao's second term of office as the provincial Congress chief. He worked in that capacity for more than two years. He used to call frequently the meetings of the provincial Congress committee with a view to maintain unity and keep the party unit active. He used to acquainted the party workers with the working of the organization. As Congress president he tried to solve people's problem and awaken them. For this purpose he extensively toured the different parts of Maharashtra and thereby increased contacts.
Keshavrao Jedhe had profound faith in Mahatma Gandhi. It appears that Shri Jedhe worked as per Mahatma Gandhi’s directives given to the Congress workers from time to time since 1930. He was completely involved in the work of Harijan upliftment, public awakening and mobilizing the people to the Congress agitation, spread of Khaddar, organization of peasants etc. He, in collaboration with other eminent Congressmen like Gadgil, Deo, Deogirikar, V.P.Limaye, G.A. Deshpande, R.K.Khadilkar, Prema Kantak, Devkinandan Narayan, S.P.Patwardhan, Dastane etc. held hundreds of public meetings for bringing about popular awakening without expecting any post in the government. Jedhe devoted himself to the constructive and social work.

Priority to Peasant Problems

Shri Keshavrao Jedhe gave first priority to solve problems of the peasants. The main part of his social service was to the peasants and the workers. He devoted all his life for welfare of the peasants and workers since 1915. He organized and awakened the peasants. At that time he attended and addressed a number of peasant conferences. One of them was convened in the Udoji Maratha Boarding at Nasik. Under the presidency of Krantisinh Nana Patil a workshop of about two hundred farmers was going on there. Shri Jedhe paid a visit to it. There he spoke on various aspects of the peasant problems. He advised the farmers to try to eradicate
illiteracy and their backwardness when they returned to their villages. In those days though farmers were debtors they used to celebrate pompously their daughters' marriages by mortgaging or even selling their landed property. Keshavrao Jedhe opposed such practices. Not only this, but in his presence and under his guidance, marriages of two farmers were also celebrated at Shivthar in Satara district. Before the actual celebration, he expressed his views on social problems. He told that farmers should celebrate any of the functions only as per their means and they should not celebrate festivals by borrowing loans. He further stated that the country cannot register true progress without achieving farmers' progress. 4

Keshavrao Jedhe by his constant tours maintained good contact with different sections of the society. He associated himself with Præma Kantak's work of women awakening. In May 1946 Præma Kantak had organised women's symposium in her Ashram at Saswad in Pune district. Shri Jedhe presided over the valedictory function of symposium. That time he was accompanied by Tatyasaheb Deshpande, the secretary to the P.C.C. 5

Harijan Satyagraha

Throughout his life Keshavrao Jedhe struggled against casteism. He himself tried to abolish caste distinctions and eradicate untouchability. Similarly supported the Harijan masses in their struggle against slavery. He took part in Harijan Parishad and Harijan Satyagraha for establishing social
equality. He organized various meetings to solve this problem. At a meeting held on July 19, 1946 in the Congress House, Poona, N.V. Gadgil, Keshavrao Jedhe, S.D. Deo, G.H. Deshpande spoke on the Harijan Satyagraha. Jedhe, who presided, was of the opinion that schedule castes were justified in revolting against caste Hindus who had repressed them for generations and he appealed to Deo to make an approach to the leaders of the Satyagraha campaign in order to effect a settlement.

Keshavrao Jedhe also tried to solve the problems of artists working in Dramas and Tamashas. In 1948, he presided over the first session of the 'Maharashtra Tamasha Parishad' which later on flourished.

National Week

In the year 1948, Congress observed the national week. It was celebrated on a large scale in Maharashtra. National week celebrations revived the Congress activities and answered the criticism made on the Congress. During the national week the following view was propagated. An appeal was made that all should unanimously work to preserve the newly attained independence and it should be made stronger by extending our loyalty to it. It was further stated that Congress alone could safeguard independence and give strength to the people. At that time Shri Jedhe in the capacity of provincial Congress president visited Wai, Satara and toured other areas while provincial secretary Shri Tatyasaheb Deshpande awakened people by his tours to Satara, Jalgaon, Nira and other places.
The Maharashtra Congress Seva Dal was established with a view to spread the Congress activities and to serve the people. Shri Bhausaheb Raut, Bhausaheb Hire, A.T. Dandawate, G.A. Deshpande, Keshavrao Jedhe were actively associated with its work. It appears that Keshavrao Jedhe frequently gave his counsel to it as its president.

Appeal to Congress Workers

After Mahatma Gandhi's association Indian National Congress resolved to raise Gandhi Memorial Fund. According to a resolution of the All India Congress Committee, a committee to collect Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Fund in Maharashtra was appointed. Its executive council was formed. Shri Shankarrao Deo was its president while 1) Keshavrao Jedhe 2) Bhausaheb Firodiya 3) Bhausaheb Hire 4) Babasaheb Warad 5) Madhavrao Bagal 6) Appasaheb Patwardhan 7) Mrs. Ranisaheb Nimbalkar 8) Annasaheb Vartak etc. were its vice-presidents. Keshavrao Jedhe tried his level best to collect Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Fund. Maharashtra liberally responded to it.

Attitude towards princely states

In the Pre-Independence era there were eighteen big and small princely states in the Southern Maratha Country region. As a result of intense nationalist struggle in British territory, nationalist awakening was caused among the states'
people on a large scale since 1935. The Congress resolved in 1940 to support the popular agitations going on in the princely states for getting democratic rights and responsible government. However, after the attainment of national independence in August 1947, the Congress favoured the outright merger of the princely states in the Indian union.

Shri Keshavrao Jedhe was president of the provincial Congress committee at the crucial time when the problem of future of the Southern princely states was being discussed openly. So naturally his views on this issue acquired importance. The following discussion will enable us to understand his attitude towards the Southern princely states. Shri Jedhe strongly opposed the privileges of the native princes. He was of the opinion that it was not at all necessary to maintain the institution of king after independence. The states should be administered according to will of the people.

Shri Keshavrao Jedhe attended a few meetings in some of the southern princely states, on 27th May, 1947, a meeting of the newly elected council members of the Budhagaon Praja Parishad was held at Budhagaon. Barrister Appasaheb Pant, Shri Jedhe and Shri Shikhare attended it as its special invitees. As the Maharaja had introduced new reforms Shri Jedhe communicated the names of Shri Jarimalaji and Shri Kodnoor for the ministership. The Maharaja gave his assent to these names. In the same year on 11th June, Shri Jedhe attended the meeting of the Phaltan Praja Parishad's parliamentary board. Shri Madhavrao Bagal had invited
Kakasaheb Gadgil and Keshavrao Jedhe to attend the meeting of Kolhapur Prajaparishad held at Gargoti on 24th May 1947. In it Keshavrao Jedhe said, "The sovereign power belongs to the people and not to the king. So the government should be of people's choice".12

Even when India attained her independence a number of native princes deferred the issue of merger with Indian territory and tried to from their federation. The Maharaja of Sangli and Phaltan attempted to form a federation of smaller states. Because of this some of the ambitions princes hoped to continue as the 'Rajas'. Their move was supported by some Congress leaders. This irritated Shri Jedhe. He opposed the princes and criticized those Congressmen who supported them. He issued a letter on 5th January, 1948 to that effect. However due to pressure of the popular demand and movement the Maharajas later declared that they were in favour of merger. Keshavrao Jedhe opined that as the people of the state are in favour of merger, the princes should respect their will. He further stated, "Shri D.B. Mutawalli (Miraj) deserves to be congratulated for his opposition to the federation of princes and his support to the agitation for merger. Since beginning I am of the opinion that there is no necessity of king I have always been stating that people are sovereign. I wholly support the merger of states".13

Later on, Keshavrao Jedhe extended his support to Vallabhbhai Patel and his policy regarding merger of princely states into Indian territory.
The Demand for Linguistic Reorganization

Keshavrao Jedhe was in favour of linguistic reorganization of states in India. In a meeting of the provincial Congress committee held under his presidentship on 7th March, 1948, Shri Shankarrao Deo moved a motion demanding reorganization of provinces on linguistic basis. The following committee was appointed to negotiate and deliberate if necessary with the adjacent states while creating the provinces on linguistic basis. The following were its members - 1) Shankarrao Deo 2) Keshavrao Jedhe 3) Shankarrao More 4) H.V. Pataskar 5) Bhausaheb Hire 6) Vyankatrao Powar (invitee). However in later period the Nehru government did not easily fulfil expectations of the people of Maharashtra regarding the creation of Sanyukta Maharashtra, for this purpose the people of Maharashtra had to put up a bitter fight.

Views on News Papers

Keshavrao Jedhe appreciated the role of newspapers in awakening the people. He very well understood the importance of newspapers. Jedhe was of the view that newspapers are servants of the people. On 15th May, 1947 at Pathak Hall, Satara, a newspaper named 'Jankranti' was inaugurated at the hands of the provincial Congress president Shri Jedhe. On that occasion he expressed his views about the role of newspapers. He said, "Newspapers are servants of the people. It is the work of the newspapers to solve difficulties
of the people and to give publicity to their problems. It is necessary that they should attract attention of the government towards the public grievances. It is one of the best means of public awakening".15

Keshavrao Jedhe maintained direct contact with the masses. He understood their problems very well and tried sincerely to solve those problems. He always pleaded the grievances of the common masses. Due to the firm mass base of his leadership, Keshavrao's influence as the Provincial Congress Committee Chief increased tremendously. Shankarrao Deo could not tolerate it. After the Congress was placed in a strong position in Bombay province, after having used Keshavrao for that purpose, the same Shankarrao Deo who once insisted upon Keshavrao's candidature for the 1934 elections, now began to play tactics for diminishing his influence and side-tracking him.

Keshavrao Jedhe was unhappy with the inefficient Kher ministry because it was not interested in implementing the progressive policies and programme of the Congress party. On more than one occasion he tried to explain his point of view to Shankarrao Deo, B.G.Kher and others but they did not take note of his views. When he realised that the Congress was drifting away from its original ideals and policies, Keshavrao Jedhe left the Congress in 1948 and played a leading role in formation of the Peasants and Workers Party of India. However, after having worked for the about 5 to 6 years in that party he realized that the objectives for which he left the Congress
and founded the PWP had remained unfulfilled. The PWP also believed all his hopes. On the other hand, it began drifting towards the communist line and its top leadership was engaged in faction politics. So Keshavrao left the peasants and workers party and reentered the Congress in 1954. But the situation in 1954 when reentered the Congress was not the same as in 1930 when he first joined the Congress organization.16

On 24th April, 1954 Jedhe resigned the primary membership of the Peasants and Workers Party. On that occasion men like Haribhau Bhandare, Appasaheb Koshti and Hari Zendewale etc. went to 'Jedhe Mansion' and appealed to Keshavrao to rejoin the Congress. On 1st August, 1954 he reentered the Congress. His old friends and former colleagues welcomed him in the Congress party. But due to the organizational changes in the Maharashtra Congress and the emergence of the new leadership, Keshavrao got only a secondary position in the party. Even then, he with his attitude of selfless service and without expecting any position in the power structure began to work for the party. During these days, he participated in the activities like Goa Liberation Movement and Sanyukta Maharashtra agitation. Shri Jedhe regarded service to the people more important than holding any position of power. While trying to solve problems of the people, he never hesitated to criticize even the Congress and its government. On 15th August 1959, he in his speech made in Nagar Vachan Mandir said, "As long as men like Morarji
Desai who are hostile to Maharashtra are in the Congress high command the border problem won't be solved. For that purpose all the parties must work unitedly". He continued, "the Congress Organization in Maharashtra is weak. Old leadership has reached its end but none has so far taken its place. There are people who praise Shri Chavan but they are also a congregation of sycophants". Shri Jedhe severely criticized those things that he felt were improper. Neither the Congress nor his colleagues and friends could escape his criticism.

While the agitations for Goa Liberation and Sanyukta Maharashtra were going on the Congress high command issued a statement asking the congressmen not to participate in such agitations. On account of this many congressmen withdrew from the struggles. But Shri Jedhe continued to take active part in those agitations.

After 1954, because of internal party politics, Jedhe had only a secondary position in the party. Yet due to his activities and greatness, he commanded high respect in the society. Therefore, in the 1957 elections when the big stars of the Congress were routed, Shri Jedhe won the election from the Baramati parliamentary constituency. After 1954, while in the Congress, Shri Jedhe continued his active participation in the agitations for Goa Liberation and Sanyukta Maharashtra till the end of his life.
In the history of Congress organization in Maharashtra, Keshavrao Jedhe's place is really significant while evaluating Keshavrao's contribution towards the consolidation of the Congress in Maharashtra. Madhavrao Bagal wrote, "It was Jedhe who got for the Congress some respectable position in Maharashtra and consolidated the base of Gandhiji's leadership here. Had not Jedhe been favourable to the Congress, the non-Brahman masses would not have been favourable to the Congress so easily."\(^{18}\)

Veteran Congress leader Y.B. Chavan, while explaining the significance of Keshavrao Jedhe's role in the history of Maharashtra Congress stated, "In 1930, Shri Jedhe listened to the call given by Mahatma Gandhi and came into the Congress and along with him for the first time, the peasant community of Maharashtra joined the Congress. Shri Jedhe has done a great work to strengthen the nationalist movement. Shri Jedhe has fostered the feelings of freedom and the organization in rural Maharashtra. We are greatly indebted to Keshavrao."\(^{19}\)

The facts that Shri Jedhe resigned from the Congress in 1948 and founded the Peasants and Workers Party and again reentered the Congress in 1954, do not reduce the importance of his work. When Congress was weak in Maharashtra, Jedhe made great effort to strengthen and consolidate it. It was largely because of him that Congress in Maharashtra became a strong
organization. While describing the significance of Jedhe's role in the Congress, Vinayakrao Patil, the former M.P.C.C. chief stated, "Tatyasaheb Jedhe accomplished the grand task of making the masses in Maharashtra Congress minded. At the time when Jedhe accepted Congress leadership and started making it a strong organization, the Brahman - non-Brahman controversy was going on here. Therefore there was a fear that the masses would hold themselves aloof from the Congress as well as the freedom struggle. At such times Tatyasaheb handled the reins of Maharashtra Congress and explained to the masses that Congress is an Organization of the masses and not of a particular class. Thereby he enlisted mass support for the Congress. It was due to Keshavrao's work that the masses developed a pro-Congress attitude. The late Tatyasaheb Jedhe's leadership of the Maharashtra Congress during its difficult times is like a lighthouse. He is an important factor in the progress of Maharashtra Congress. Hence both the Congress and Maharashtra can never afford to forget Tatyasaheb Jedhe's debts."}

In Maharashtra Keshavrao Jedhe tried to lead the Congress on the way paved by Gandhi. He held the Congress not only as a political organization but also as a movement for constructive and creative work and it is in this direction that he tried to lead the Congress. He thought that Congress should function for the welfare of the common among the commoners.
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