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Keshavsut

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The name of Keshavsut evokes in the mind of a lover of Marathi poetry the same feeling which a Tamil-speaking person would have for Subramanya Bharati or a Gujarati for Narmad. They are pioneers of modern poetry in their respective languages—important landmarks in contemporary Indian literature. Their career illustrates how national awakening reacted to western cultural influences.

It has been aptly said that he 'achieved for Marathi poetry what Hari Narayan Apte did for Marathi novel—endowed it with creative power'. Like all great pioneers, he too passed through a period of apprenticeship and experiment. But when he discovered his true mode of expression, he created a new age in Marathi poetry.

This monograph was first published in 1966 as Sahitya Akademi's tribute on the centennial of Keshavsut. Though he wrote in Marathi his legacy belongs to all India.

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KESHAVSUT

by

PRABHAKAR MACHWE

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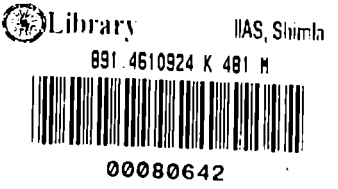

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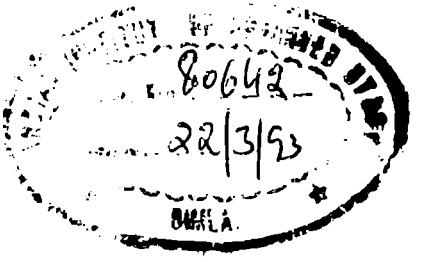

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Contents

Introduction

THE name of Keshavsut evokes in the mind of a lover of Marathi poetry the same feeling which an Urdu-speaking person would have for Hali, or a Bengali for Michael Madhusudan Datta, or a Tamil for Subramanya Bharati or a Gujarati for Narmad. All these great poets were pioneers of modern poetry in their respective languages. More than mere music-makers, they were breakers of new ground—not only in poetic language and diction, but in turning away from the worn-out tradition and pointing a new way. These poets are important landmarks in the history of Indian literature at the turn of this century; their career illustrates how national awakening reacted to western cultural influences.

In the history of poetry there have been many instances of great poets who died almost unknown and unrecognised, and about whom we know very little. The date of Kalidasa is still undecided, the complete Rubais of Omar Khayyam are not yet unearthed, the place where Homer was born is still a matter of dispute among seven or nine cities. Keshavsut is a recent poet and yet there is no unanimity of opinion even about his birth-date. What is left of this great Marathi poet is a slender volume of 132 poems, published posthumously.

For a general estimate of Keshavsut as a poet, it would be appropriate here to quote from the late Kusumavati Deshpande's *History of Marathi Literature:*

'Keshavsut achieved for Marathi poetry what Hari Narayan Apte did for Marathi novel—endowed it with a truly creative power. Keshavsut's was a voice in a world of echoes—echoes of distant voices; indigenous and foreign. He too passed through a period of apprenticeship and traditionalism. But

when he found his true mode of expression, it created a new age in Marathi poetry.

'The earliest poems of Keshavsut are not available. It is said that from an early age, he used to write good verse in the traditional metres and in a conventional descriptive or didactic vein. His first available poem, written in 1885, is a translation of a piece from *Raghuvamsa*... His love poems of that period reveal an influence of the concept of Sanskrit *sringaric* poems. His style and imagery are also moulded by Sanskrit poetry and traditional Marathi poetry with its highly Sanskritised diction, its mosaic metres and sensuous, concrete imagery... Later, he was also bold enough to use words of everyday usage which would be, and still are, considered unpoetic and harsh by the orthodox. He gave a new power to the shloka structure by organising the poem into a well knit, continuous whole on the pattern of an English ode. The greatest change which came over his work, however, was that of the upsurge of the subjective element... There is a new confidence in his imagination, a new strength in his assertion of the role of poetry, an unusual sincerity in his expression. In fact, a new lyric has taken birth.

'This change was brought about, to a great extent, by the influence of English poetry. The work of Kunte, Mahajani and others had already opened out channels of that influence in Marathi poetry. But it had not seeped into the soil. It remained at the level of translation or unassimilated imitation. Keshavsut also translated some English poems... Some of these are adaptations rather than translations... But his study of English poetry, whatever of it he could lay his hands on, seems to have transformed his own approach to poetry and his style.

'Coming across a poem by him, in an issue of a contemporary poetry periodical like *Kavya-ratnavali* is like finding a rare flower in a wilderness. These poems spring out of a personal experience—the sudden surge of memories of home, the sight of a friend's locked door, separation from the loved ones, or musings about the nature of poetry. There is a new feeling

about Nature... The poetry of Nature, according to him, expressed in the song of birds, the music of the rain, can never be equalled by the words of any poet. Its beauty is everlasting in its freshness. This consciousness and the capacity to lose himself in it, enables Keshavsut to create a mood and an atmospher in his individual poems in a few strokes even when they are not directly descriptive. A feeling of Nature informs the best poems of Keshavsut... Many of these poems are Wordsworthian in their simplicity and contemplative vein.

'Keshavsut also imbibed, perhaps through the influence of Agarkar, a strong feeling of equality of men and the urgency of the need of social reform. He wrote most poignantly of the untouchable boy and the starving labourer. *Tutari* (The Trumpet), one of his most powerful and well-known poems, is a clarion call for casting away all the lethargy of social obscurantism and hidebound traditionlism. Equally effective in its directness and sweep is his "New Soldier".

'The greatest poems of Keshavsut are in a contemplative vein. They seek to probe into the mysteries of creative activity. They communicate a feeling of loneliness and a search for a spiritual haven. They are filled with a deep urge towards the unknown, the inexpressible. 'Zapurza' is the title of one such. The word in a syncopated expression seeking to imitate the hurried rhythm of girls absorbed in playing the traditional game of Zimma. The poet seeks to describe the creative state of the mind, the regions of experience it soars into, its kinship with the universe beyond even the stars. *Harapale Shreya*—the lost ideal—voices the feeling of being lost in a strange world and an unquenchable yearning for the creative abode. It bears a deep impress of Wordsworth's "Ode to Intimations of Immortality," but it is by no means a mere imitation of it. The philosophical poems of Keshavsut reveal a synthesis of Western poetic thought and Indian philosophical concepts.'

Thus Keshavsut combines in him the three important strands of Indian renaissance which began in the nineteenth century and culminated in Tagore: a pantheistic attitude towards

Nature, a passion to free the motherland, an urge to break down the shackles of social injustice and to emphasise humanism, even in poetry, at the cost of being called didactic. Wordsworth, Shelley and Browning were the pole-stars of this interesting ship which claimed its ancestry from Upanishads and Kalidasa.

Life

THE birth-date and even the birth-place of Keshavsut are matters of controversy. His first biographer was his own younger brother Sitaram Keshav Damle who, on the basis of a horoscope in his possession, gave the Indian date, Phalguna vadya 14, in Shaka era 1787, corresponding to 15 March 1866. Several objections have been raised to this date. Some say that the horoscope is defective, others take into account the extra month (*adhika masa*) in Indian calendar system and find fault with the correspondence of dates. According to some authorities, Keshavsut was born on 7 October 1866, though the obituary notes published in the December 1905 issue of the *Kavya-ratnavali*, the magazine devoted to poetry which regularly published his poems, said that he was 'born in March 1866', and the same was repeated in the magazine *Manoranjan* of January 1906 in another obituary note. Thus, by all calculations, it is certain that he was born in the year 1866, though the date is not definite. Srimati Vijaya Rajadhyaksha, in her detailed note on this subject in *Satyakatha*, March 1966, concludes that there is no certain evidence of any birth-date having been authentically recorded, and comments, 'probably the poet himself did not know his own birth-date.'

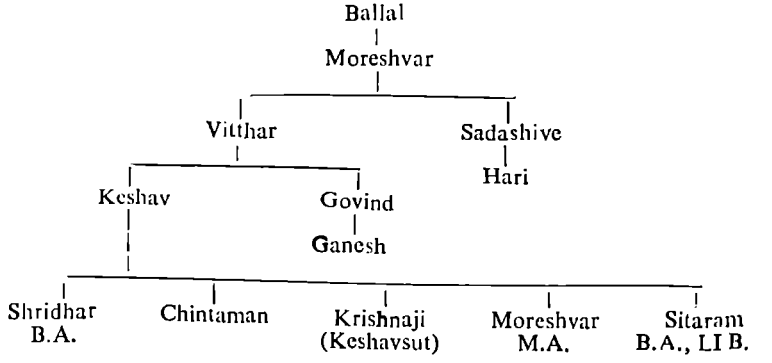
The same kind of controversy centres round his birth-place, as also the date of his death. Though many biographers think that he was born in the village of Malgunda near Ratnagiri in the Konkan district of Maharashtra, an entry in his own hand in one of his school-records gives Walane, a village in Dapoli district, as his birth-place. Recently, when the Government of Maharashtra convened a meeting to discuss the raising of an appropriate monument at the place of his birth, the authenticity of the house where he was reported

to have been born was seriously questioned.

About his death too, while it is now certain that he died of plague at the early age of 39, at Hubli, on November 1905, at noon, and his wife died eight days later on 15 November 1905, a wrong date, 2 November 1905, was given in an obituary note by Sri N. S. Rahalkar as well as by Keshavsut's biographer-brother, who was twelve years younger and wrote the first biographical sketch as an introductory note to the second edition of *Keshavsutanchi Kavita*. This wrong date was later corrected by Sri Parasharam Chintamana Damle, a nephew of Keshavsut, in the fourth edition. So 7 November 1905 may be taken as the correct date of Keshavsut's passing away.

There are two references to his birth-place in his poems : 'Nairutyekadeel Wara' (Wind from the South-West) he sanskritises the name of his village Malgunda into Malyakuta. Some critics think that the village described reminiscently in his poem 'A Village' is almost like Walane, and the references to flora and fauna therein are authentic ; and so is the reference to 'many a boat and ship floating in the sea.'

His family-tree has been given by Sri P. C. Damle, as under :



The Damles were Chitpavan Konkanastha Brahmins who were originally from the village Kolambe near Ratnagiri. Keshavsut's father Keshav Vitthal, alias Kesopant Damle, completed his Marathi schooling and preferred school-teacher-

ship to the hereditary farming. At the age of fifteen Keshavsut's father had to take up a teacher's job. In the government educational service he rose from his initial salary of rupees three per month to rupees thirty. He did not keep good health and so he retired on a pension of rupees ten or eleven. He then looked after the land at Walane of Vishwanath Narayan Mandalik, a fomous leader and landlord and a family friend of the Damlels. Keshavsut has noted the name of this village, in a poem, 'Simhavalokan' (Retrospect), written in the style of Wordsworth's 'The Prelude'. Though Kesopant's earning was meagre, he lived happily without incurring any debt, and was well-known for his discipline, straightforwardness and strength of will. Keshavsut has expressed his great respect for his father in his poems. Kesopant died in 1893.

Keshavsut's mother hailed from the Karandikar family of landlords of Maldauli. She was the only daughter of her father and died at Ujjain in 1902. Keshavsut inherited from his mother sensitivity, theism, broad-mindedness and a liberal humanism. He wrote an elegy on her death.

Keshavsut was the fourth offspring, he had five brothers and six sisters. The eldest brother was drowned at the age of eleven. The next was Shridhar, who was a brilliant student and won the Jagannath Shankarshet Scholarship standing first in the High School examination at Ratnagiri. He passed his B.A. from Elphinstone College in 1882 and was appointed Professor of Sanskrit in the newly opened college in Baroda. But within a year he died of typhoid in January 1883.

Keshavsut's early education was somewhat neglected. He had his primary schooling with his younger brother at Khed in Ratnagiri district. For further education in English both the brothers were sent to Baroda. Both were married, according to the custom prevalent in those days, at an early age—Keshavsut at the age of 15 and his younger brother at the age of 13. Keshavsut's wife, Rukminibai of the Chitale family, was eight years old at the time of marriage. Not much is known about her, except that she was very kind and hard-

working—and not very attractive looking. Both husband and wife were shy and unsocial by nature. Keshavsut had three daughters : Manorama, Vatsala and Sumati. Keshavsut refers to his second daughter in one of his poems 'Mahtari'. Keshavsut's father-in-law, Keshav Gangadhar Chitale, was the headmaster of a Marathi school in Chalisgaon in Khandesh district.

About his childhood very little is known except for the fact that he was physically weak and ever-grumbling. He could not take part in more virile or active games due to his poor health. He liked long lonely walks and was very chary of words. His mother said he was a little whimsical. Though no evidence is available as to how he looked like, some of his friends have noted that 'his face was pensive and serious' (Kirat). 'He used to look down when he talked with others, but whenever he raised his eyes, their brilliance was penetrating' (Vinayak S. Karandikar). 'He grew to five feet and even more' (Gadre). He was fair, of round face, and his forehead was always full of wrinkles. Once his teacher admonished him for such a weary face. Keshavsut writes in his poem, 'Glum-faced' :

> His face is glum, but by Providence he may sign such
> new poems
> which will make the whole world and the people happy!
> From this glum face and mouth, in future would flow
> Beautiful and ever-gladdening nectar of literature.
> If not you, your children will be happy drinking it.
> Nobody would ever ask, 'How was the poet's face!'
>
> (1836)

Connected with this fact was his aversion to get himself photographed. Though today photographs of his brothers are available, there is no photograph or sketch of Keshavsut done in his lifetime. Once when the family reunion took place at Ujjain, where his elder brother was a professor of philosophy and it was proposed that a group photograph be taken, Keshavsut did not join in.

His early education must have been a chequered and tortuous experience. From one of his poems it is learnt that teachers used to beat and punish the boys severely. This must have left a deep wound in his mind, which was never healed.

In 1882 he went to Baroda to his elder brother Shridhar Keshav, who had graduated with distinction and was serving as a professor of Sanskrit and mathematics. Unfortunately Keshavsut could not stay with his elder brother for more than eight months, as Shridhar died of typhoid at the young age of 23, one year after his graduation. It was a great shock to the family. Keshavsut had to continue his education at his maternal uncle's, Sri Ramchandra Ganesh Karandikar who was a pleader in Wardha. In those days there was no proper arrangement for English education in Wardha. So Krishnaji and his younger brother Moropant went to Nagpur. But his parents could not afford to pay for their education, nor did the excessive heat in Nagpur prove conducive to Krishnaji's weak health. In the seven months' stay, Krishnaji contracted friendship with the famous Marathi poet Reverend Narayan Waman Tilak and also got acquainted with Prof. Patwardhan, in whose praise he has written a poem.

It was the contact with Reverend Narayan Waman Tilak that instilled into Keshavsut a love for writing poetry. Tilak writes of this contact : 'Keshavsut and myself were very closely associated. I can trace the development of the Muse in him. We were together for two or three months in 1883 at Nagpur, in 1888 and 1889 at Poona, and in 1895-96 at Bombay.' In Poona when they met, Keshavsut was preparing for matriculation in New English School, and in Bombay he was on the staff of the Christian magazine in Marathi, *Gyanodaya*. Tilak was an old contributor to *Gyanodaya* and was himself baptised on 10 February 1895. Keshavsut's near relations were afraid that he, too, might be converted into a Christian, as he was intimately connected with *Gyanodaya* and Rev. Tilak. Keshavsut loved reading the Bible, and he once even told his younger brother Sitaram that he was inclined to

embrace Christianity. (V. S. Karandikar in *Ratnakar,* February 1926). Though Keshavsut and Tilak were friends, their poetry was very different. Keshavsut was more virile and had sudden flashes while Tilak was more sombre and even. Tilak admired Keshavsut so much that he wrote a poem on the latter in his lifetime and he wrote two eleges on the death of Keshavsut in *Kavyaratnavali,* January 1906, and in *Manoranjan,* February 1906.

During his brief stay at Nagpur Keshavsut came to know another interesting social reformer Sri Vasudev Balwant Patwardhan. He composed a long poem addressed to him in 1888. It seems that Patwardhan's ideas about poetry deeply influenced Kashavsut. Both were progressive in their views, but loved solitude and shunned crowds. Patwardhan later became a life-member of Deccan Vernacular Society and the editor of *Sudharak* (Reformer) after Agarkar. In the poem on Patwardhan Keshavsut wrote these lines :

In the stars in the space
Poets see souls,
People see through glass,
Poets see through stones.

Some critics have seen the influence of Emerson in these lines. Actually it was Emerson who was influenced by Vedanta, and Keshavsut reflects the One-soul-in-All theory indirectly and unconsciously.

In 1883 Keshavsut left Nagpur and lived in his village, Khed, in Konkan, for one year. He went to Poona for further education. There is an entry in the records of the New English School that Keshavsut joined this school on 11 June 1884. He lived in Poona till 1889, and passed his matriculation from this school—rather late, at the age of twenty-four, having been plucked twice earlier, once for not getting sufficient marks in English. One reason attributed to his failure was his very slow pace of writing! Once he forgot to go to the examination hall, busy in a poetic discussion.

In the New English School, he met Hari Narayan Apte, the famous Marathi novelist and later the posthumous editor-publisher of his first and only book of poems. Apte was not only Keshavsut's class-mate but a close friend. Here, in Poona, he also met poet-translator Govind Vasudev Kanitkar who was an advocate of female education and a lover of English literature. Kanitkar's wife was also a learned lady. Justice M. G. Ranade has praised Kanitkar's long poems, modelled on Scott, mostly on historical subjects like 'Akbar', or 'Krishna-kumari'. Kanitkar liked the poems of Mrs. Hymens, Elizabeth Barret Browning, and Toru Dutt; he translated the lyrics of Thomas Moore, Thomas Hood, Byron, Burns, Keats, and *Subjugation of Women* by John Stuart Mill. The Kanitkars, Apte and Keshavsut contributed poems and articles regularly to monthly *Manoranjan ani Nibandhachandrika*. Thirteen poems of Keshavsut were published in this magazine from 1888 to 1890.

It is interesting to note that the reading of English poetry influenced Keshavsut's muse and her making. Some say that his reading was confined to Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* and Mackay's *A Thousand and One Gems of English Poetry*. But he must have read much more ; e.g., Macmillan's *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, since he quotes many passages from Emerson in his private letters. He must also have read Toru Dutt's *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. He has translated poems of Drummond, Goethe, Poe, Longfellow and a few sonnets of Shakespeare. He even tried his hand at writing verse in English. Prof. M. V. Rajadhyakasha writes in his *Five Marathi Poets* that Keshavsut had also drunk deep at the fount of Sanskrit poetry ; but some other critics dimiss this claim, as records show that he did not do well in Sanskrit in his matriculation examination.

Though eminent teachers like Agarkar and Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak were there in the New English School, it seems that Keshavsut was not much inspired to take interest in the subjects they taught or cherished. The one teacher who

impressed him more was Agarkar, the social reformer. While Keshavsut doodled in the class-room and drew caricatures of his teachers like Lokmanya Tilak, he was impressed by the orators of that period. Those were stormy days in Poona. From 1880 *Nibandhamala* of Chiplunkar had started calling learning of English as drinking the milk of a lioness, Tilak was roaring in the columns of *Kesari* and Agarkar was heralding the era of social reform in his *Sudharak*. Marathi stage was in the making with Kirloskar and Bhave ; Marathi fiction was being moulded by Hari Narayan Apte. But Keshavsut was a shy person and did not like joining the bandwagon of social reformers and politicians. He stuck to his own medium of verse and hoped like Shelley—

> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth !
>
> (Ode to West Wind)

Here a mention must be made of the indirect influence of his two brothers on his life. His younger brother Moro Keshav Damle (1868-1913) was a graduate of Bombay University with philosophy and history as his subjects ; he served as a professor of philosophy in Madhav College, Ujjain, from 1894 to 1907, and later as a teacher in Nagpur City School when the College at Ujjain was closed in 1908. His life was cut short by a railway accident in Poona in 1913. He wrote the first scientific Marathi grammar in 1911, a comprehensive volume of 900 pages which, however, did not prove to be very scientific to Sanskrit scholars like V. K. Rajwade. He translated Burke's speeches and wrote the earliest books on Inductive and Deductive Logic in Marathi. The other brother Sitaram Keshav Damle (1878–1927) was a journalist, novelist and patriot. He worked on the staff of *Gyanaprakash* and *Rashtramat*, and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for taking part in Mulashi Satyagraha. The Damles were a remarkable family of gifted members, all of whom had unfortunately a very short span of life. This underlined the

tragic note in Keshavsut's poetry.

After his matriculation, Keshavsut, due to poverty, could not pursue his education. He went to Bombay in search of a job in 1890. He had the disadvantage of having no higher degree, but added to that was his strong sense of self-respect. He did not like to make any use of his family friends placed high up in the social ladder like V. N. Mandalik or others. He was at first employed as a teacher in a mission school, and later worked in the office of *Gyanodaya*, the Christian magazine of the American Mission. He was later a teacher at the Dadar New English School. Sometimes he had to supplement his meagre income (he never got a salary of more than twenty to twentyfive rupees per month in his lifetime) by private tutions, or sometimes he had to go away to his village as he had nothing to fall back upon. His unsteady course of life, full of vicissitudes, was not liked by his father, who insisted that Keshavsut should not move about like a floating log, but get established at one place. So, very reluctantly, he tried to get settled in 1893 in Bombay. In his autobiographical poem 'Retrospect' there are references to these clashes in the family. He worked at Kalyan in an English school as a teacher in 1891. He also served as a clerk in the Commissariet. But when he was transferred against his wishes to Karachi, he resigned on this issue. He also tried to learn the Morse codes. In 1893 he was a teacher at Savantavadi for six months.

When he was about to settle as a teacher in Bombay he met Kashinath Raghunath Mitra, Janardan Dhondo Bhangale and Govind Balkrishna Kalelkar, three young literary men and editors. Keshavsut wrote many poems for the magazines, *Vidyarthi-mitra* and *Masik Manoranjan* (est. 1895. Mitra and Bhangale both knew Bengali and Gujarati well. Bhangale had translated Bankim Chandra's novels and a novel from Gujarati. *Anand Math*, the famous novel by Bankim, was translated in Marathi as *Anand Ashram* in 1894. It contained the well-known national anthem of those days—*Vande Mataram*. Keshavsut borrowed from this song the epithets

sujala and *suphala* for Mother Earth in his poem 'Kaviteche Prayojan' (May 1899). During his stay in Bombay, he also came in contact with poets like 'Madhavanuja' (Dr. Kashinath Hari Modak, 1872-1916) and 'Kirat', and Sri Gajanan Bhaskar Vaidya, who was later known as Hindu Missionary. The latter's brother made a pencil sketch of Keshavsut from memory. Keshavsut was fond of attending lecture in Prarthana Samaj (the Maharashtra counterpart of Brahmo Samaj in Bengal), Arya Samaj, Christian missions and so on But in 1896 Bombay was in the grip of a plague epidemic, and Keshavsut had to leave the city for Bhadgaon in Khandesh. He wanted to keep his wife and daughters safe at Chalisgaon where his father-in-law was a headmaster. The father-in-law advised him to apply for a teachership in A. V. School at Bhadgaon, and he was so appointed on a salary of fifteen rupees a month.

From 1897 to March 1904 Keshavsut lived in Khandesh where he served at first at the Municipal School in Bhadgaon. But as the pay was insufficient and there was no provision for pension, he appeared in 1898 for the governmental S.T.C. examination which he passed. In 1901 he was appointed headmaster at the Faizpur English School where he taught English. Unfortunately, plague broke out at Faizpur also in the following year and the school was in danger of being closed down. Meanwhile Keshavsut's independent spirit and free thinking brought him in collision with the authorities and he applied for transfer. In April 1904 he was transferred to Dharwar High School as a teacher of Marathi.

In Khandesh he came to know the editor of *Kavyaratnavali,* a magazine entirely devoted to poetry. The editor, Narayan Narasimh Phadnis, who was a great connoisseur of poetry, wrote about him: 'Keshavsut was one amongst the five best gems of Marathi poetry our magazine was proud of. His *Harapale Shreya* (Lost Ideal) was the last poem we published ... He was a poet of free thought. One is pleasantly surprised to see the sublimity and range of thoughts in his

poems. His nature was very unpractical and almost leaning towards mental imbalance. We met him two or three times. But he was too shy to communicate'. (*Kavyaratnavali*, end of 1905).

The other important friend Keshavsut made in Khandesh was the famous nationalist poet 'Vinayak' (Vinayak Janardan Karadinkar, 1872-1909). They met in 1891-92 in Bombay. Keshavsut called him 'the Byron of Maharashtra'. Both had many things in common, particularly a spirit of revolt against social tyranny and political serfdom. These last days of Keshavsut's life were comparatively more comfortable. He could get the necessary natural surroundings and sufficient books to read. He pondered over the nature of poetry and corresponded with his friends in English on serious subjects. A streak of mysticism became more apparent in his writings now.

Keshavsut lived in Dharwar for one and half years from April 1904. Here he seems to have meditated over the ephemeral nature of life and its inevitable tragic end. Probably he had foreboding of his early death. Writing about his last poem written in Chiplun on 25 May 1905, he wrote to a friend: 'You can guess my state of mind from my piece in the last issue of *Manoranjan*. A crack in the heart! But, alas! Where is the restorative?'

Indeed, there was no way out. He went to see, at the end of October, his ailing distant uncle, Hari Sadashiv Damle, at Hubli, taking with him his wife and daughter. After a stay of four or five days, he was to return to Dharwar. But plague overtook him on 7 November, and he died. Eight days later his wife also fell a victim to the same disease. The funeral rites were done by his uncle and the three daughters were sent to Konkan. One of them died soon after. The other two were married, and not much is known about them.

Thirty-nine years of Keshavsut's tragic short life! The best comment on it would be his own words. He wrote to a friend in a letter about poetic gatherings:

'As to the idea of an annual gathering of poets—practical

men meet periodically for practical purposes. Poets as dreamers should sit aloof, listening to the ethereal voices of silence and trying to render them into their uncouth vernaculars, whenever the Muse favours them. Some two or three congenial spirits may at times come together ... but more would certainly spoil the flavour.'

He also commented on the state of Marathi poetry then, in another letter to a friend:

'Please tell ... that I request him to undertake *a long poem* and not to waste time in writing short ones only. A century has passed without producing a long Marathi poem worth the name; and it is for geniuses like ... and ... to wipe out the disgrace. I am sorry I am a dwarf and don't show any sign as yet of out-growing. I therfore hate myself and don't like others who attempt only small things.'

These excerpts from personal letters written by Keshavsut are in his own English.

Nature

ONE need not agree with Seneca that 'all art is imitation of Nature' or the extreme opposite of this statement in Oscar Wilde that 'Nature imitates art'. What we find in Keshavsut's poetry is a sad, lingering attachment to nature as a resort where poetry finds echoes of his yearnings, a hide-out for his lonely, melancholy hours. V.S. Khandekar refers to his poems like 'A Village' or 'Wind from South-West', where his nostalgic attachment to idyllic Konkan landscape is repeatedly described. In 'A Village', Keshavsut wrote:

> The temples there are not very tall
> But there are huge mountains
> The brooks sing non-stop hymns
> The winds accompany them with their sound.

There are only two poems of Keshavsut which could be described as pure poems of nature: one addressed to 'Rains', the other named 'Diwali', in which the first half describes the season. In the poem 'Rains', which is only of twenty lines, one is reminded of Kalidasa's *Ritu Samhara*. The poem opens with such graphic realistic description:

> Parched earth in summer is burnt black,
> Cattle search in vain for grass, dust in eyes,
> If there is some shade, some water, with foaming mouths
> Cattle gather there, travellers too panting.
> In such condition many days have passed, O Rain,
> Come now soon, hurry up, come from Ceylon.
> To welcome you frogs at the bottom of wells
> Repeat full-throated invocations, whole night.

In the poem 'Diwali' there is a touch of the classical in the

description of Sharat-Sundari. Keshavsut calls this season later as a cowherd in the morning, as a holy mendicant offering water in the noon and as a tired peasant in the evening. There are many poems addressed to a flower or a butterfly, using both as symbols, not describing so much their multicoloured splendour, but using Nature as a pretext to philosophise on the human predicament.

Keshavsut, it seems, had read Emerson's essay on 'Nature' wherein he had said, like an ancient Rishi of the Aranyakas, 'In the woods is perpetual youth, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Nothing divine dies. All good is eternally reproductive. The beauty of Nature reforms itself in the mind and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his nature.' So the poet finds solace in Nature; in his poem 'Going alone far away' he says—

Enough many disillusionments in life
Dead are many hopes.
Searching them, let us go to a forest
Playing on the one-stringed instrument,

To Keshavsut Nature appeared sometimes as a mentor and at others as a wild companion, never in 'red claws and teeth.' He said in his poem 'Whirlwind':

Why stay here
What is that which binds me
I feel that I should move round and round
And get lost in this whirlwind's gyration
In *Satchidananda,* Eternal Bliss.

In his reflective long poem, 'Lost Ideal', written in his last years, he is in deep despair, as even Nature does not satisfy him fully:

Wherever there are brooks and forests
My mind dwells there.

Because there I get the revelation
Of Life's Ideal.
So I came again and again to these forest-paths
So I remember them freely
But it too gives me a glimpse of its presence
And the next moment it vanishes.
Then I cry out in the wilderness
I never get back my lost Ideal.

Keshavsut sees the 'Miraculous' and 'the Supremely Sublime' in walking on the banks of these rivers. He suddenly realises, like Hazlitt 'from the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being and revel there'.

Keshavsut's romantic attitude to Nature can best be judged in the background of traditional Marathi poetry, which was based on Sanskrit mannerisms and used Nature at best as a backdrop or as stimulus. Amongst his contemporaries, Reverend Tilak is called a poet of 'flowers and children', Balkavi Thomre was almost a child of Nature, and it is only in post-Keshavsut poetry that one comes across the bitter struggle between Man versus Nature, in later romantics like Gadkari or even 'Bee'. For Keshavsut, Nature appeared for the first time as a personalised experience, a divine and transcendental presence. This was something very different from the earlier enumeration of stylised details in describing a season or a morning or evening scene. Keshavsut's evening is a different picture:

Evening : sun descending on sea
His beautiful face will kiss the waves
Just as the flower fallen on ground turns to dust
The round will be lost in the curves.

* *

O lovers bless the evening happily, I don't
Envy you, is there no passion within me?
I have left my home and far away, am I so
Melancholy in the evening? What else could I be?

ideas like 'Nature is God's poetry', 'God lives in Nature', etc. did not appeal to Keshavsut. Fortune had never shone on him and so he could conceive of such a cruel Creator. Keshavsut's close friend Kirat has written, "It did not seem that he had any faith in the existence of God. It seems very recently [this article appeared in the magazine *Manoranjan* in January 1906, which were the last years of the poet], in the last one or two years, his opinion is slightly changed as he writes at the top of his letters "Sri Ram". Once he told me that he hears a mysteriously sweet inner music, such as is referred to by many Bhaktas and as mentioned by Shakespeare in *Pericles*. So I told him, "As you have started hearing this sound, the same, sound will one day turn you into a Sadhu like Tukaram and you will become a full-fledged theist." Keshavsut replied, "Just as I passionately love poetry now, maybe I would love him." '

It seems from Keshavsut's poetry that he was caught on the horns of a pantheist's dilemma: if God is Nature and All-Love, why so much sorrow in life? Swearing by Sankara's formula of calling the world and Nature as Maya and by Poet's lines—

> All that we see or seem
> Is but a dream within a dream

is also not very helpful. If a poet is an atheist he has to turn into an iconoclast and a rebel—which Keshavsut was to some extent. But a poet of the age and in those times could not whisper of *Vana-Vani* (the Voice of the Forest), the beckoning within him and his aesthetic sensibility prevented him from being a complete cynic or a sceptic. He clung to some kind of vague faith—and probably, like Tagore, he too heard the whispers of *Vana-Vani*, the beckoning of the Eternal!

Love

SRI A. R. DESHPANDE 'Anil' paid his tribute to the love-poetry of Keshavsut in a talk in Marathi broadcast from Nagpur, published in *Tarun Bharat* in these words:

'I think Keshavsut is the herald of love-poetry in Marathi. Apparently his poetry has much likeness to English poetry, but in a way he re-established the link in poetry with Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti. In the medieval period many centuries had completely deadened the social structure in India. The natural and pure love between young men and women and the culmination of such mutual attraction into love-marriages were almost unknown to Indian society and were banished from literature. But with the re-establishment of individual's freedom and importance, social ties were also broken. Keshavsut's poetry is the "Hymn to the Dawn" (Ushah-sukta) of such poetic feelings...

'His first love-poem "Remembering the Beloved" has a subjective tone. The love between the husband and wife is conceived here differently from the traditional manner. Love idealised and epitomised is seen in the poem "To a young woman standing near the railing of a steamer watching the ocean," wherein Keshavsut writes:

> Yet there
> if our love is stronger
> You shall be the woman,
> I shall be your lover
>
> Or maybe, I the woman
> And you will be the lover
> We shall hold one another in embrace.

For Keshavsut conjugal love and love for an ideal are equally

abstract and Platonic. When the friend asks—'Shall we move?, the poet answers—

> The friend asks—'Are you so much absorbed?'
> I said—'Ask yourself.'
> He asks—'Is poetry obstructing you'
> 'No, Love charms me, it does not move me.'

In another poem 'Love and Thyself', Keshavsut has confessed 'I cannot think of anything but Love and Thyself'. And in the poem 'Telling of Love' he has the sad realisation—

> How can the inner core of that which is beyond matter,
> Be held in the limited action of these material hands?

Keshavsut's love-poetry has a mystic undercurrent, which gives it a rare charm of its own. It rambles into fantasy, like Baudelaire's, though it does not have the sensuous imagery of Keats or the blood-element of Byron. A.R. Deshpande calls Keshavsut's mysticism as a kind of romanticised neo-mysticism, as it is very different from the traditional 'touch of the unseen and unknown' Acharya S. J. Bhagavat called him 'a philosophical poet who thought deeply about life and ventured to test the experience of life.'

One third of the bulk of Keshavsut's poetry is devoted to different shades of love. This love, as mentioned above, is mostly non-physical. There are hardly any references to caressing or copulating. Sanskrit poetry was richly amorous, Marathi folk-poetry *Lavani* of the pre-Keshavsut period was almost voluptuous. But in Keshavsut one finds suddenly a change to an ethereal kind of love, its rainbow hues born out of a thin veil of sadness. Keshavsut seems to argue in his poems on Love: Love is divine and heavenly. Its seeds fall in our hearts. They flower and the garland is meant for the beloved. Love begets love. Love is not to be found in the market. It is not a commodity which can be bartered. Here, unconsciously, Keshavsut seems to echo Kabir who said in a *Doha :*

Love is not grown in garden,
Love is not sold in bazaar,
King or commoner who loves
Gives his head and takes it away.

Love for Keshavsut is in 'the language of flowers'. He would prefer a desert with his beloved. In his poem 'Prosperity and love', he says:

I would cut the brambles, kill the wild animals,
I would build a castle for her,
I would even stake my life to make her happy,
We would entwine each other like creepers,
At that place an inferno would be turned into heaven!

Keshavsut's love is made of idealised, romantic dream-stuff. He says that the beloved would pardon him by remembering these flowers offered to her. He prefers to describe the inner nuances, the psychological viscissitudes due to love His concept of love is not confined merely to the paramour and the passionate pursuer. His love includes in its purview children, dew, stars, old memories, village urchins, the lingering evening hues, the rose-bud and even Leigh Hunt's 'Jenny kissed me'.

Keshavsut's love-poetry has an undercurrent of pathos. It seems that he repeatedly refers to some early disillusionment in love. His love-poetry is not without its expression of pangs of separation. Though the poem is based on Edgar Allen Poe's 'Raven', in Keshavsut's 'Owl' he has written some poignant lines, like:

Go away! Let me cry,
Let my heart overflow with sorrow,
But let not your sound fall on my ears
That which burdens my sad mind with such heartlessness.
Do not sear my wounds
You get away from here.
'No, No' hoots the evil bird echoing my feelings
Dejection has fully surrounded me.

The owl does not budge an inch from my window,
The hooting sound, the hooting sound, the fearful
continuous hooting goes on!

Keshavsut compares the peacock-throne and the Tajmahal, two creations of the same Emperor, and prefers love to exhibition of material power. The original sonnet written on 13 November 1892 runs thus:

This emperor did two good things: one the peacock-throne.
He sat bedecked on it which cost him six crores.
Kings bent with folded hands in front of it,
And trembled at the thought that their heads were in his hands.

There on the serene Yamuna bank, for his beloved
He built a temple of love, spending three crores.
Vandals ran away with the throne, still remembered
Is the wonderful palace standing there still!
Your creations always meet such fate,
O mad confused man! however, much incense you may burn
Before the selfish nature—you keep this in mind
Always—the smoke will vanish from this world.
One small incense-stick if you offer to love
Its fragrance will spread over the world and satisfy you!

Keshavsut is also a pioneer in Marathi love-poetry in this respect: he is free, and frank in expressing his physical attraction ornamented, or too bawdry and loud. Keshavsut introduced to a woman. Before Keshavsut, it was either too indirect and lyrical delicacy in this genre. Some of his poems, dealing with remembering his beloved from afar, have been the best of the early love-poems in modern Marathi poetry.

Social Protest

SPEAKING at the Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya on 27 March 1966, Smt. Charushila Gupte remarked that even if Keshavsut had written no more than three poems—'New Soldier', 'The Trumpet' and 'Exuberance', he would have been immortal. These poems were, according to her, like 'three scriptures' to New Maharashtra. No doubt, these three poems, of which translations are given at the end, are very powerful, and breathe a spirit of rebellion, hitherto unknown to Marathi poetry. They also reveal that in Keshavsut there was an ever-vigilant humanist who wanted to fight all sham conventions and rusted customs. He was against any differentiation between man and man on basis of caste, creed or community. The greatness of his achievement is to be judged in its proper historic perspective.

When Keshavsut was born, a decade had passed after 1857, which saw India's first spontaneous revolt against British domination. No more did the Indians believe in the British Empire as a divine boon. Various movements had started all over Maharashtra, making the masses conscious of their thraldom. When Keshavsut came to Poona for his schooling, the atmosphere was charged with slogans hailing, 'My country, my religion, my language!' All this did leave a deep impression on his formative mind. His patriotic poems are mainly written before 1890. We do not see any direct involvement with politics in Keshavsut after that date, neither in life nor in his writings. This was the time when poets and thinkers in Maharashtra were expressing their burning nationalism through history, most of them sang undiluted praise of the glorious past. Keshavsut did not indulge in this revivalistic self-deception. As far as social inequities were

concerned, he was pained and shocked and raised his voice to end them at any cost.

Critics in Marathi vary in calling him a poet of revolution or evolution. Some think that he was much too ahead of his times and others estimate him as 'one who had fallen in a revolutionary process, and was not a maker of it' (Patwardhan), still others call him merely a reformer. Though he did advocate liberty, equality and fraternity in his poems, he was far from a political poet. He reacted to his milieu in a non-conformist manner. He knew too well that as a poet his effect on society was tangential and feeble.

Social protest started with the criticism of the defective system of education, which believed in 'spare the rod and spoil the child.' In a sonnet written in April 1889, entitled 'A teacher spanking a child', he expresses his righteous indignation at the bully :

Who the fool has given you, O cruel ! this teachership ?
Why did you not become a butcher ? You would have
fitted there better
Why are you speaking and beating this kid so mercilessely?
Tell me what sin has he committed ?

Keshavsut had a bitter experience of schools and school-teachers, and protested against them.

He was constantly aware of the condition of India in those days. He expressed his anguish in a poem 'An Indian Speaks', written in 1886 :

Just as this sun rises, did not once
The sun of our glory rise high ? Tell.
But He went from here to enjoy the West,
The dark night of decline came to trouble us.
O creepers ! Are these lovely flowers nothing to us ?
O birds ! Your songs may be sweet but what are they to us ?
We have no eyes to see because of slavery
We have no ears to hear because of slavery.

He goes on, in this long poem, in this strain and concludes the poem thus :

O God ! When will this dark night of slavery be over
When will be bright sun of Freedom dawn again ?
When shall we get out of this cage, O God,
When shall our nation reach its nationhood again ?

Little did the poet know that, seventyone years later, what he dreamt would come true.

Another significant poem extols the virtues of village life and its simplicity. It underlines the importance of contentment with one's poor lot and warns against the temptations of the glamorous west. Some lines from this long poem, written in 1887 and entitled 'A Village', are given below:

No beautiful palaces these,
Only simple huts.
There are diseases in palaces,
How can disease dwell in a hut ?

Disease is a snob
It loves to lie on cushions
How can it survive
on a rough blanket in a hut ? . . .

In that small village, in huts,
Good farmers live
They work hard on farms,
Lead straight and simple lives.

Had I a thatched hut in such a place
I would not have been poverty-stricken,
I would not have been dubbed less-educated
I would not have bothered about fame. . . .

Fame is just a feather
which reaches people's heads
After the bird has faced cartridges—
And that feather would also fall, one day!

If a guest came from a distant land
I get wonder-struck to hear his tales
'Is this world so big and wide,
Are there such luxuries and shows ?"

I tell them in wonderment,
I never compare my lot with the world's
Does the Earth stop its movement
Pinitng for riches in Heaven?

The poem has the charm of 'The Deserted Village' and the simplicity of 'Prelude', and a high seriousness of its own.

Sri Dinkar Keshav Bedekar writing about the philosophic background of the cultural renaissance in Maharashtra in the modern period writes : 'Ranade and Agarkar had an important difference : Agarkar had an intense poetic devotion to Nature which was never realised by any ancient or modern philosopher and which was also unknown to Ranade. This intense and intoxicating love of Nature found in the poetry of Keshavsut, and later all the more intensely in Balkavi (1889-1918), is a very important matter from the point of view of Maharashtriya philosophic quest. If Agarkar's essay on "Viewing Nature" is carefully read, one can see many things in it.' (*Maharashtra-Jivan*, edited by G. B. Sardar, p. 60).

In a way this was the beginning of what was seen later in Gandhi's call of 'Back to Village' and which was so well expressed in Tagore's 'Matir dak' or in Hali's famous poem 'I am tired of this world's noisy atmosphere. I want to go to a quiet place in the country.' The poets in the first decade were searching for a nest, which would have given them spiritual satisfaction and solace. In a way it can be called romantic escapism. but, as Aldous Huxley has said in his *Ends and Means*, 'every escape is also a fulfilment'

And yet Keshavsut was aware of all the pressures of urbanisation and breakdown of the feudal order. A very interesting point emerges from an intensive study of the two drafts of his 'Trumpet'. In the earlier draft there were references to 'female

education', 'protest against child marriages', 'protest against the shaving of widows', 'widow remarriage', and 'removal of untouchability.' But he avoided all such direct references in his second draft. The poem still remained didactic and moralistic in its tone' but it was not an essay in verse on social change. B.S. Pandit writes that 'Keshavsut's "Labourer" is not a Red comrade. When he wrote this in 1889, the name of Karl Marx was not familiar to any Indian.' So the poems of social rebellion reveal the basic urge in the poet's mind, to see that the nation advances in all fields. His allegiance is primarily to aesthetic and poetic values, but as a citizen and a commoner, he had not shirked from the responsibility of fighting the odds. Credit should be given to him that he did not fall a prey to obscurantism or chauvinism. He resisted the temptation of writing a 'nationalistic' poem, which would have easily given him immense popularity and even a better social status. But he remained true to his Muse.

Translation

KESHAVSUT not only borrowed from western literature such forms as the lyric, the ode and the sonnet, but one also comes across in his poems many literal translations of phrases and epigrams from English, e.g., 'reading the face' or 'what man has made of man'. Of his total output of 132 poems, 25 poems are translation: four from Sanskrit and the rest from English.

In his translations from Sanskrit, Keshavsut does not show any originality or brilliance. They are more or less exercises in verse-to-verse rendering. He started his poetic career with a translation of the fifth-to-twelfth slokas from the seventh canto of *Raghuvamsha*. There was already a complete poetic translation of *Raghuvamsha* done by Ganeshshastri Lele. Keshavsut has missed some original nuances and at places added his own interpretations. His other translation is of 26 slokas from the first canto of Bharavis's *Kiratarjuniyam*. This is better than the first attempt. He also translated two miscellaneous quatrains from Sanskrit, one of them a semi-humorous ditty.

Of the English translations six are sonnets: William Drummonds's 'Doth then the world go thus?' and 'The Lessons of Nature'; Mrs. E. B. Browning's 'Work' and Shakespeare's three sonnets: 'Blind Love', 'Since Brass, Nor Stone' and 'Post Mortem'. The other poems are Thomas Hood's 'The Deathbed", Edgar Allen Poe's 'Dream within a Dream', Emerson's 'The Apology', Scott's 'Jock of Hazeldean', John Lyle's 'Cupid and Campaspe' and Leigh Hunt's 'Rondeau' There are three poems from continental poets which Keshavsut rendered into Marathi through English: Goethe's 'A little Rose on the Heath', Theophile Gautier's 'The butterflies as white as snow' and Victor Hugo's 'Napoleon le Petit' (two French poems from Toru Datt's English renderings).

There are, besides, three longish poems which are not translations but adaptations or poems based on the following three English poems: H. W. Longfellow's 'The Old Clock on the Stairs', E. A. Poe's 'Raven', and John Dryden's 'Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music'. The basic ideas and structure of the original poems are maintained in these trans-creations, but the locale, the metre-arrangement and the atmosphere are altogether changed.

According to some critics like Dr. Madhavarao Patwardhan and Prof. R. S. Jog, these translations are not all good or of even quality. They mainly serve to show how Marathi poetry was being influenced not only by western patterns of thought, by pantheistic belief and liberalism, but even verse-forms alien to the language that had been adapted. The introduction of sonnet in Marathi by Keshavsut is an interesting subject worth studying. He wrote the first sonnet in Marathi entitled 'Mayur-asan ani Tajmahal' (The Peacock Throne and Tajmahal) on 13 November 1892. It was published in *Karammuk* on 13 May 1893, and was called *chaturdashak,* or *chaturdashpadi* and later *suneet*. 'Glum-faced' is another such sonnet-like poem by Keshavsut, having 16 lines instead of 14. Keshavsut has used both Shakespearean and Miltonic forms of sonnets and kept their rhyme-pattern too. In the beginning he used one stanza-from for the first twelve lines and another for the last two. But later he kept the same form intact, using a uniform metre.

Thus Keshavsut's translations reveal the catholicity of his mind. He was prepared to accept and adopt and assimilate the western verse-froms and metrical arrangements. The sonnet, once adapted to the Marathi prosodic framework, remained to stay. Several poets after Keshavsut wrote sonnets and some of them even wrote short epics in sonnet sequences. For the great popularity gained by western poetic form like ode or sonnet or 'Skylark'-like long strings of mixed metaphors, credit should be given to Keshavsut, who was the real pioneer. What he did out of love as as a hobby, was the real pioneer. What he did out of love or as a hobby, was later imitated and became a fashion and even a rage.

Innovations

No poet is deemed great unless he has successfully experimented either with language or versification or other techniques of communication. Prof. Jog has devoted an entire chapter to Keshavsut's experiments in composition. According to him, Keshavsut preferred *matric* to *akshar* metres. He broke the old convention of stanzas of two or four lines; instead he wrote poetic pieces of five, six or seven lines. He even wrote long and short lines in the same stanza. The Hindi metre *doha* was used by medieval poet Moropant and by one else later until Keshavsut revived it. He almost wrote very near *vers libre*. The one thing he never did was writing blank verse.

Before Keshavsut some verse-forms were traditionally associated with certain emotion-provoking stock-responses. Keshavsut broke the convention and used forms previously and generally associated with Bhakti or religio-mystic poetry, for realistic social protest. He also took liberties with the Sanskrit verse-forms and used some of the *vrittas* as *jatis*, that is instead of sticking to the traditional three-lettered syllabic moulds, he used them on the basis of *matras* or the short and long values of the letters. In some of his lyrics, he even went beyond mertical uniformity and deliberately chose to repeat a burthen of a song, or to elongate a stanzaic piece to suit the emotion depicted. He also experimented with rhymes: rhyming three lines continuously followed by a long line with a different rhyme is a familiar design used by him in poems like 'The Trumpet', 'Owl', 'Zapurza', and so on. He even went a step ahead and, like some modern English poets who use rhymes which would have been dubbed 'feminine' in the past, did not desist from rhyming: *shing* with *phunk* or *hasya* with *manas*. He cared more for the vowel-values than the consonants in such rhymes. Instead

of the traditional couplet-rhymings, he took to the Persian form of ab, ab, couplet rhymes.

In brief, Keshavsut was prompted to experiment consciously with the from of poetry, not because of a blind urge to imitate western models, but because he felt that the burden of the traditional prosody was stifling free poetic expression. Thus he established new conventions in Marathi poetry and many poets after him wrote long odes and lyrics in the same form; even the odd and even rhymings in ghazal-like couplets became a fashion, later exploited by poets of Ravi-Kiran-Mandal.

Madhavarao Patwardhan has criticised Keshavsut as a peot who paid too much importance to words'. This can be a compliment. The poets do something with words which no one else can do. Therein lies the magic which poets possess and that is the point where poetry is considered untranslatable. Some of Keshavsut's writings are primarily involvements with words: he tries his best to squeeze out the stale and the familiar out of them, in his concern to charge them with new meaning. In this respect he was a great innovator.

Critical Evalution

KESHAVSUT was a high-strung poet, very tense and almost devoid of humour—though he was not incapable of appreciating humour in others, as for example in his translation of Boileau's lines:

> This world is full of fools, and he
> who would not wish to see one must
> not only shut himself up alone,
> but must also break his looking-glass.

In his tribute to the poet published in *Rashtravani* (March-April, 1966, p. 354), Prof. S. K. Kshiragar writes: 'Keshavsut, in reality, changed the subject of worship for the Maharashtriya man. This common man was pining earlier either for the Vithoba of Pandharpur or wept for the dead heroes or old sorrows. Older poets either wrote about Rama or Krishna or expressed their real or false longing for God. The commoner's everydays life was considered a non-poetic subject. Some poets in imitation of western poets, tried to write such poems. But they were tame and lifeless. More effort than genuineness was seen in them. Keshavsut alone was the first poet whose feelings were vivid, varied and rang a true poetic note.'

Some critics life M. T. Patwardhan have charged Keshavsut with morbidity, abnormality, artificialilty, conceit and far-fetchedness in his rhetorical devices. It is true that his earlier poetry is not without some immaturity and hence unnatural obsession with 'striking an effect'. But the same is not true of his work as a whole. Such personal critism as that Keshavsut had not much reading to his credit or that he remained always a teacher do not hold much water. The same may be said of Sri Tatke's charge that Keshavsut does not make the reader

'forgetful of oneself', a criticism too subjective, or that he used many 'anglicisms' in his Marathi and coined new words, or that he was a pessimist. Such charges hardly apply to the bulk of his work. Prof. R. S. Jog in the last chapter of his work, *Keshavsut*, replied to these critics in detail and proves cogently that many of these criticisms are prejudiced and not to the point.

No critical appreciation of Keshavsut will be complete without referring to the inclination towards the Infinite and the mystic longing expressed in his poems. Though he was a kind of agnostic, since his poems do not directly refer to any god or goddess, there is a deep spiritual yearning pervading his verse—due, no doubt, to the influence of Brahmo-Samaj and Parthana-Samaj. Such influence was something new to Marathi poetry. Keshavsut poetised the philosophy of this neo-humanism which combined Buddha's compassion with an egalitarian homo-centric scheme of things. Poetry no more remained theo-centric or ego-centric, but found its moorings 'here and now'. And yet the wagon was hitched to a pole-star; this 'devotion to something afar', from the sphere of one's sorrow, is what makes Keshavut's poetry so significant and universal.

Another haunting quality in Keshavsut is his childlike innocence. Wherever he describes children or their sense of wonderment, one comes across a very freshing image. Not that he was not aware of the corroding violence all around and the 'shadows of prison-house gathering around him', yet he does not despair. His sense of beauty is firm and steady, he does not unnecessarily juxtapose Love with Death, or Compassion with Cruelty. He is a poet who loves the green earth below and the blue heavens above and does not want anything more. He does not complain of his personal penury or his sad lot, but is more concerned with the sorrows of others.

I cannot again resis the temptation of quoting the late Kusumavati Deshpande: 'Keshavsut was given to thinking about the problems of poetic creation. He would watch the turns and twists of his own poetic moods; he would mourn over

the loss of the power of expression of words, their fossilisation through cheap and vulgar everyday use. He would contemplate over the role of poetry and ways of pleasing the Muse. Out of his total output of 132 poems, twenty are devoted to such topics. He was the first of the Marathi moderns to cogitate over these problems and give poetic expressions to them. He was also a pioneer in experiments in versification and poetic structure. He adopted the mosaic metres to his use by using lines of varying lengths; he gave up the traditional four-line stanza and created many new types... The work of Keshavsut is contained in one slender volume. But it has created a remarkable volume of criticism and controversy. Indeed, even a variorum edition of Keshavsut's poems would be justified and feasible. His work has found some of the most sympathetic and understanding critics, like Rajwade and Rahalkar. There have also been critics, who looked down upon his meagre reading and craftsmanship. Others have found him too self-centred, melancholy and pseudo-sentimental. But, the innate quality of Keshavsut's work has asserted itself again and again. The power of his best work, its genuine originality and deep pensiveness have been universally acknowledged. About all, he is admitted to be the originator of modern Marathi poetry. From him springs the stream of subjectivity—its untramelled expression of personal reactions to life, its free depiction of reality, its social seriousness and also its mystic vein. Keshavsut is today acknowledged as the fountainhead of a revolution in the form and content of modern Marathi poetry.'

To give a feel of how he wrote, a selection of his well-known poems is presented in the form of approximately literal trlanslations. This apology is needed as the writer of these lines is fully aware of his limitations and has no claims to any poetic achievement in this form. But it is sincerely hoped that to those who do not know Keshavsut at first hand, this might serve as a next-to-nothing sort-of substitute. The pages following are to be taken as such, not as poetry in English or as poetry

for modern ears, but a documentation of what a person, deprived of education or good things in life, could achieve by sheer force of talent, seven decades ago. They should be read in that historical context and perspective only.

New Soldier

I am the new soldier
with new spirit
of the new age.

Who dares bind me!
Neither a Brahmin, nor a Hindu, nor of any any sect,
the fallen circumscribe the universal.

Insatiable my hunger,
no crumbs will do.
I am not a frog in the well,
my land shall be without fence,
who dares bind me!

I have brethren everywhere,
and everywhere signs of my home.
Go anywhere—grass-covered land is below
Go anywhere—the blue sky is overhead
Chubby children in shade
gay flowers in the sun,
a joy to the mind all this.

They are mine, I am their—
the same flow runs in us.
I am the new soldier
with new spirit
of the new age.
Whom do I worship?

Myself—
I see the universe within me
I worship the universe,
I am for myself.

Not for me the small men
Who deny their 'I-ness'
and start troubles for nothing.
Small or great I do not know,
good or bad, these opposites disappear.
near or far, the distance dissolves—
All is great and good and near and I am filled in All.
Like sugar crystals in *halwa*,*
matter covers the Urge within,
inside the seed *sans* quality, outside qualities like
sugar-crust.
more and more granular like thorns pricking others.
Within and without
how will the conflict end?
This anxiety gnaws me within.
Time is for the kingdom of Peace,
I am its prophet—the brave soldier
of new life!

8 March 1898

The First Question of the Untouchable Boy

The children of untouchables,
poor, gay, playing on the roadside—
A Brahmin came from far
to the simple kids what should he say:
'O you brats of *Mahars*, move away,
be gone! What are you playing at, you louts?
Run and give way to the Brahmin!'
The boys fled—who would dare stay!
One amongst them did;

*A Maharashtrian sweet preparation like sugar crystals on sesame seeds generally offered on the *Sankranti* day (14 January).

the wicked Brāhmin brandished his club and shouted,
'Ass! thy shadow must not fall on me,

get thee gone, or else this "sweet present"!'
The kid too slunk homewards,

musing—
'What if my shadow fell on him,
what's so wrong about it?'

At home he asked the question of his mother.
The poor mother said:
'We are low and they are high,
when you see them, you had better step aside.'
She said so—simply.

How would she know
that highness in this world is built
on sin and glory
on the degradation of others!

3 September 1888

Iconoclast

Break the icons, hurry,
hurry, break the idols!
and grab all wealth inside.
Of what use are offerings,

why rub your nose on the ground?
We are from the hills, rough and uncivil,
we want only wealth!

The sorceress crouches with a riddle—
fail to solve it and she will devour you.
We don't want to fall into her trap,
so let us beware.

We shall break open the idols
and then reassemble the bits.

But we shall not sell them—
those who sell the gods are bastards
they are the real thieves, not we!

(Last poem)

A Worker forced to starve

The sun-god has reached day's end,
colour lends beauty to the setting,
everywhere joy and fun—
why should sadness fill my heart?

The whole day I looked in vain
for a farthing to come my way.
I labour daily to fill my belly,
today no one hired me!

These mansions appear so beautiful,
Did not my father build them?
I die, today, of hunger,
the rich people dance in their mansions!

I do not envy their luck,
A dry and coarse bread is enough for me,
I am ready to die, O God! in hard work,
why do you kill me with starvation?

Lord! if all are equal in your eye,
why are you so callous to the poor?
To some you give delicious food,
why don't you give me one simple bread?

With blades of grass in their beak for the young ones
the birds happily fly to their homes:
Pointing to them
the wife says to the children:

'As the birds go to their nests
with grass for their young ones,
so your father, with food,
will soon come to you, don't weep!'

O beloved! O dear young ones!
How shall I show you my face again?
Why did I at all come to this earth?
Why was I not a still-born?

January 1889

Exuberance

Fill the glass brimful, let the foam rise!
Drinking let the colour of this creation change every moment!

We are fated to be called ever-bragging,
the world calls us drunkard, why care!
The knotted tongue-cords are loosened by this strong drink,
its heat mixes rapidly the melting heaven and earth

Then be inebriated,
bring anything to mind,
sing whatever you like.

Listening to their words, the slaves of custom will boil,
Fill the glass brimful, let the foam rise!

Soma-rasa was broiled by the Vedic rishis,
give its remnant to us thirsty people, soon!
Useless Reason and Properiety! Get away, this tragic
predicament has surrounded us and so we get drunk!

In the boats of fancy we would go across the sky-ocean,
we shall collect the stars and throw them to this poor earth!
If the gods block our way,
we shall give them a tough fight,
we shall not admit defeat by an inch.
Man has created gods and demons, let people realise.
Fill the glass brimful, let the foam rise!

Destiny has given met his iron-bar of verse in my hands.
We shall use it as a lever on the masses and topsy-turvy the world.
Raising aloft the flag of rebellion, everywhere turmoil—
Creating, let us break this injustice to pieces!
'Mahadev!' Har-hai! These war cries in the air
resound in our ears—'Those who sleep, died!'
Arise! get ready, pull up the girdles,
kill or get killed while fighting!
Let there be mass-invocation to the Awakening of Truth.

Our ways and manners are anarchic let them move the surprised world,
Fill the glass brimful, let the foam rise!

23 May 1896

Whither ?

'Whither?'—
'To purchase sugar.
A son is born to So-and-so,
and lots of sugar is needed
to distribute among friends.'

'Whither?'—
'To bring flowers.'

At So-and-so's there is a wedding,
and flowers are needed for garlands.'

'And where are you bound for?'
'Out marketing—
for the new home to be set up today.

'And you, Sir'—
'Rushing to fetch the physician.
The old man is hysterical!'
'Go, get a white sheet as well
for the funeral!'

A dead body was being carried—
'Well, Sir, where are you going now?'
The words fall as if from the air,

'I know not whither.'

12 June 1889

Glum-Faced

(In the classroom a teacher called me 'glum-faced,' and I thought—)

O Guru, my face is glum.
Yes, all who look at it are disappointed.
All know it, it is so obvious.
But why did you have to say it?

What pleasure did you get thereby?
'His face is glum, indeed, but who knows
providence might make him sing
new poems to make the world and people happy!'

Did such a simple thought, for a moment,
cross your sophisticated mind, goodness gracious!

The pople whom you think as ants,
O Guru! they might fly like birds in the sky,
those who seem ash-heaps may have hidden embers,
to burn the whole world to ashes, who can guarantee?
From this very glum face of mine may flow in days to come
a stream, beautiful, ever-pleasant—
if not you, your children might quench their thirst drinking it.
Nobody then would ever ask, How was the poet's face?'

1886

Nature and Poet

Friend, when Nature sings with sweet soft voice
How can I, a mere human, sing before her?
When Nature creates such mellifluous bird-songs
why should I compose such dry lines?
When Nature cries so wildly in the form of rains
which mortal's poem can vie with those tears?
In quiet nights when she sighs so softly
which poets's muse can breathe in that tune?

Some stray Lines

How big is the world?
As big as one's head.

*

Where is the centre of creation?
In each one's heart.

* * * *

We were not our fathers,
why repent over it?
Why bring tears in eyes—
we shall die one day!

* *

In whatever the school taught
this footnote was implicit:
'Use all that in second person,
leave the first person singular alone!'

* * * *

Drink with closed eyes
your goblet of sorrow
whatever is felt as dregs,
throw it back to the world.
One man's bitter experience
may be another's nectar.

In the Beginning there was no Hunger, no Thirst

In the beginning there was no hunger, no thirst,
food and the mouth were at one place.
The object of sex was not far away,
man and woman were in one body.
There were then no limbs, no feet, no hands,
they had nothing to do in any case,
Heaven and Earth were one,
there was no sorrow, no worry.

1898

Who are we ?

Why ask "Who are you?"—We are the favourites of God,
He has given us the whole world to play in;
In this universe we freely move in our strength,
our insight can see through time and space.
All this paraphernalia and pomp are colourless to us;
it is the touch of our hand that makes things
glow with beauty, such magic dwells in these hands,
you only winnow the husk, we pick the grain.
Who established colonies of gods in empty space,
who tried to make this earth like heaven?
They are us whose creations shower nectar,
they are us who give you this auspicious shelter.
Omit us—the starry firmaments will become dark,
Omit us—this life will not be worth a farthing.

29 November 1901

Trumpet

Bring me a trumpet,
let me blow with all my life and soul,
and break through all skies—
with its long and shrill cry.
Bring me such a trumpet.

In the deserted spaces
the echoes, dumb yet,
would suddenly find voice
blowing into it mightly—
who will give me such a trumpet?

Sarangi, the beautiful *sitar,*
the *vina,* the *vin,* the *mridanga,*
the tunes of *shahnai,* the flute or pipe—
of what use are they to me?
Bring me a trumpet soon.

Fearful Ogresses's children:
custom and injustice would tear you to pieces,
is this sad hour for festive merriment? Ask yourself.
Beware, awaken to the trumpet!

Cloud upon cloud have gathered,
the sunrays are lost in gloom,
the mango-blossoms have fallen—
I see pests invading harvests,
still the world is in a stupor.

Miracles? 'Those myths and old tales
are so beautiful, fine and sweet!'—
'Whatever is modern is false!'—
Those who say so with bulging tummies
fie upon such fools!

In the old skies, there are fresh stars
this new greenery on the old earth
old oceans give birth to new diamonds
the new that is created from the old
is it not for the Good?

Let the old die its death
cremate it or bury it,
Beware! hear the future calling:
walk shoulder to shoulder!

The present is a vast mountain
cut beautiful caves in it
sculpt your names on stones
why do you increase your fat sitting idle?
Break some record, come on, let's go!

Why are you sitting, waiting for what?
The ancients said whatever they liked,
listen to it, easy with respectful heart,
but move forward without doubt—
always be ready to bid them adieu.

Nature is ruthless. She does not care,
nor waits for anything or anybody.
Her sport with Time
plays havoc with all
she can crush huge mountains into dust.

This challenge face, fight and struggle,
raise your *minars* high
why this chanting in a broken house!
Why sit cravenly, crying like children?
It's no manliness to go about begging!

In the base of Unity
a hundred schisms of custom have made rifts.
Let's fill them with selfless love,
jump into these ditches unflinchingly.

Life on the razor's edge!
Let the widows and orphans weep!
To wash away the sins of centuries
your blood is needed! Don't be shy, don't be effiminate!

When the very name is at stake,
you are become such soft lambs.
Ah, the darkness encircling all,
yet don't lose heart, don't falter,
the brave are encouraged by crisis!

Making much of religion
they are obstructing morality.
These fools forget—
wherever morality is not outstepped
there alone religion is stable.

So to attack hypocrisy, to attack revolt,
O you brave! Hurry up, come!
Raise aloft the flag of Equality!
Spread all over the proclamation of morality!
Along with the tune of this trumpet!

Laws are for men,
man is not for laws,
Know if it hits hard progress
throw it straight away.
Unfurl your new might.

Deadly, evil bondages—
Hurry to attack them forthright!

Raise aloft the flag of progress!
O brave men! Go ahead
Roaring an grily *'Har Har!'*

From ancient times till today
gods and demons fight bitterly.
Nowadays demons are rampant,
they are flying their flags over gods!
So, let us go to the help of gods!

28 March 1893
May 1887

Zapurza*

(Mahatmas bring out from almost nothing, things of value for the world. If this song is read with a view of the mental equipment of such Mahatmas, it will not be difficult to follow.)

Joys and woes gone down,
laughter faded,
tears fled,
pointed thorns blunted
feel like velvet texture;
nothing before the sight
light gone
darkness lost;
what is the name for such a condition?
Zapurza, O dear, Zapurza!

For those who see joys and woes of all
what do they understand?
What do they act upon?
Even if they laugh at us,
we are not afraid to say:
There is more meaning in meaninglessness.
It is seen by them
who are called mad.
What are the sounds of that meaning?
Zapurza, O dear, Zapurza!

From over the fence of the known
with patience
taking a leap
this lightning of the clouds of consciousness

*The title of the poem literally means nothing. It is an onomotopoetic imitation of a collective sound produced by girls playing in a round, and waiving their hair back and forth in a swinging dance-movement called *zimma*. The note is the translation of the original by the poet.

shines there dancing
it illumines dim shapes
they sing
mystic songs
the sounds of such songs are
Zapurza, O dear, Zapurza!

The land is good without ploughing
lot of such land
but the cultivator
rightful, who is there, tell?
One out of thousands!
So to bring a forest-garland
from thither,
there is no restriction.
Only go on singing this *mantram*—
Zapurza, O dear, Zapurza!

With the *Purusha* those very beautiful
eternal *Prakritis*
play and cajole;
the confluence of the sounds of those plays
to recognise, is the purpose of
knowledge; their beauty
to be conveyed
to the hearts
sing with love and affection now—
Zapurza, O dear, Zapurza!

Sun, Moon and Stars
all dance
in love
were they pluck the heavenly flowers,
if you have to go there,
hold a little aloofness,

sing and swing
move in circles
say in a dance of ecstasy—
Zapurza, O dear, Zapurza!

2 July 1893

On Looking at the Room of a Friend gone to the City

Here my friend dwelt
who lived only for friends
who tried to break all ties
who bound himself only to *swadesh*.

Nothing is there without tries.
Everything here is bound to something.
Once the beautiful stars leave their orbit
all their light turns to dust.

Why should Moon serve the Sun
by always remaining close to Earth.
If it is possible let the Moon
serve Sun independently.

My friend, leaving the ties of wife,
went to serve his nation.
My friend has gone to another city,
a lock on the door of his room.

We talked here so often.
Yes we talked and also studied.
The seed of friendship thus sown
the creeper that grew was nourished.

Talking about our nation.
we sat for hours, foregetting sleep.

Our sighs mixed with one another
his tears and my tears were one.

We spent nights till the morning sang
with myriad bird-throats
breeze blew, cool and refreshing
light effectively thawed darkness.

Then we said—'This long night
of degradation and slavery, when shall it end?
When shall Independence dawn?
When shall better days come?

Shall we, the unlucky ones, ever
see that morning with these eyes?
Or to hasten that morning
shall we too use our hands and do something?'

Let it be. Thus we asked each other
numberless qestions. We were pained.
We consoled each other with such hopes;
'Where there is a will, there is a way.'

Where should you be now, O friend?
What work must you be doing?
Are you encouraging someone else
to sacrifice all for the nation.

Seeing your room closed, O friend,
my soul is agonised with separation,
we might meet again here, here,
such hopes turn into tears.

After dusk, when the lotus watches it and says
'Tomorrow *mitra** will open it with his own hands
(or rays)'
As the bee goes murmuring with sad heart, away,
So I go back to my home, saying so, O friend!

May 1887

*Sanskrit word meaning both sun and friend

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