

RAYBHAN JADHAO: A DYNAMIC ACTIVIST IN AMBEDKARITE MOVEMENT**S. Meshram¹ and A. D. Fulzele^{2*}**¹Department of History, R.T.M. Nagpur University, Nagpur.²Department of History, Dr.Ambedkar College, Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur.²avi.fulzele@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

In Maharashtra, many people significantly contributed for building and strengthening Ambedkarite movement in Maharashtra. These people strengthened the base of this movement with great efforts. The work of Raybhan Punaji Jadhav is significant among all. As an activist of Ambedkarite movement, he played significant role in disseminating the thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar among marginalized people. He belatedly participated in the social and political spheres. Despite of this belatedness, he left a due imprint on the people within short span of time and came into the limelight as an ardent activist in Ambedkarite movement. In 1942, Dr. Ambedkar established Schedule Caste Federation. Jadhav joined the party as the time of establishment. Thereafter, he journeyed through the remote areas and organized the Ambedkarite party. Taking the cognizance of Jadhav's work, Dr. Ambedkar offered the candidature of Schedule Caste Federation from C. P. & Berar Province in 1946 from Buldhana. In this election, he was the only candidate of S.C.F. who won the election from Maharashtra. Though he was the only candidate of SCF from Maharashtra in the C. P. & Berar legislature, he strongly raised the issues of Ambedkarite community in the House. This remarkable works of Jadhav is the reflection of an ideal activist. The new generation has completely forgotten his valuable works. Therefore, present research article endeavours to illuminate his works to forthcoming generation as well as to position his as an ardent activist in Ambedkarite movement.

Keywords: Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth-Seekers' Society), Puna Pact, Dalit Labourers, Untouchability, Dr. Ambedkar.

Early Life

In 19th century his father Mr. Punaji had allowed untouchables to fetch water from their two wells. In the year 1907, his father and elder brother had started Chokha Mela Boarding at Chikhlin Buldhana district with own expenses and without taking any help from others. They provided food grains to this boarding which was cultivated in their own farm. They ran that boarding till the year 1919(Jadhav, 10/8/1956, p. 1).Then they handed over that boarding to Mr. Ganesh Akkaji Gawai and Mr.L.S. Bhatkar and appointed them as the secretaries of that boarding. Mr. Raybhan was born on 1 January 1888 in the self-sacrificing farmer's family at Chikhli in Buldhana district. He was not highly educated. He took up the job in forest department. Initially, he was influenced by the work of Satya Shodhak Samaj (Truth-Seekers' Society) and started working for it while serving in the forest department. He tried to convince Dalits that they should not eat the meat of dead animals, they should pay attention to cleanliness and they should get educated. He had started hostel for untouchable students at Chikhli in 1938 with his own money(Paswan, 2002, p. 190).There were 15 to

20 students in the hostel. He ran that hostel for nearly five years on his own (p. 190). Mr.Raybhan retired from forest department service in 1941 and actively participated in the social work.

Contribution in Scheduled Caste Federation Party

He joined Scheduled Caste Federation Party in 1942. Later he became the President of the Buldhana district unit of the Party(Kshirsagar, 1994, p. 229).During the period of four years beginning in 1942 to1946, he took efforts to strengthen the party and for that he had travelled all over Buldhana district. That's why in the divisional election of C.P. & Berar, he was the candidate of Scheduled Caste Federation Party. He won that election by defeating veteran untouchable activist Mr.L.S. Bhatkar who was the candidate of Congress(p. 229).At that time in 1946, only two candidates of Scheduled Caste Federation Party won the election. Mr. Raybhan Punaji Jadhav was one of them(p. 229). He had put forth the problems of untouchables in C.P. & Berar divisional Assembly and tried to give them justice.

Contribution as a Member of C.P. & Berar Legislative Assembly

The Scheduled Caste Federation Party had started passive resistance at Nagpur in 1946 against Pune Pact. Raybhan told untouchables, '... The reason behind this passive resistance was that Mahatma Gandhi had opposed the separate constituency for untouchables but supported separate constituency for Sikh and Muslims. Afterwards untouchables got composite constituency but it proved unfavourable for them. Therefore, by the time it was proven that the demand for separate constituency was right. Hence this passive resistance started to oppose Congress policy of separate electorate'(C P & Berar Government, 1948, p. 538).The government had imposed section 144 and curfew at Nagpur Assembly. On 3 September 1946, Mr.Raybhan Punaji Jadhav had supported the passive resistance of Scheduled Caste Federation Party and said that though this passive resistance was on the right track and the government imposed section 144 and curfew as well. While tabling resolution of Legislature adjournment, Mr.Raybhan said, 'The government of Central Province and Vidarbha was taking action against the passive resistance though it was justified for untouchable community. By imposing Section 144 and Curfew, government tried to curb peoples' rights. Mr.Raybhan had strongly put forth his opinion that Legislature should be adjourned as it is a public work' (Government of C P & Berar, 1946, p. 54).While explaining the importance of the resolution, he said, 'The Congress had also done passive resistance for independence. The untouchables were fighting for their rights but Congress could not bear it. Though the Congress demanded independence, it was trying to obstruct those who were helping the untouchables to get their due rights. Congress had opposed Scheduled Caste Federation Party and fielded its candidates against it. So this protestors in passive resistance started to protest against the Congress'(p. 54). Mr.Raybhan had also expressed his grief as the board of three ministers didn't pay attention to the problems of untouchables. At that time, Mr. Ruikar had suggested that he should launch passive resistance at London. On this suggestion,

Mr.Jadhav responded spontaneously saying how he could demand independence in London when reign was here in India. Mr.Ruikar was nonplussed by this argument (pp. 54-56).

Though the passive resistance of untouchables at Nagpur was going peacefully, police tried to suppress it. On 18 September 1946, police resorted to cane charge on untouchables. Mr.Jadhav had called adjournment motion in the Assembly against the action taken by police(Government of C P & Berar, 1946, p. 538). While justifying the motion, he said, 'The Composite Constituency was proved harmful for untouchable community. When Mahatma Gandhi went to round table conference he put the resolution that untouchables should not get separate constituency because he felt if the untouchables got separate ward they won't be dominated by Hindus. According to Mr.Jadhav, Gandhi felt if untouchables left the Hindu community then who will do the degraded works and who will work as conservancy workers, who will skin the dead animals and who will work as cobbler, if they abandoned Hinduism. Who will dispose the dead animals if Mahar abandoned Hinduism? According to Mr.Raybhan, Mahatma Gandhi had opposed separate electorate for untouchables as he felt that there would be no one to take up those degraded jobs. Mr.Raybhan had tried to explain his role of adjournment saying that untouchables needed only for carrying out the degraded works and when the situation comes to appoint them on leading position they are being ignored by the mainstream leaders...' (p. 538).However, the Assembly rejected the demand unanimously (Shirke, 1946, p. 2).Mr.Jadhav had played an important role in the Assembly by conveying the demands of untouchables through the passive resistance of Scheduled Caste Federation Party at Nagpur.

Though Mr.Raybhan Jadhav was not well educated, he had realised the importance of education. That's why he vehemently advocated that untouchables should concentrate on education. He strongly supported primary education. He requested the government to pay attention on the primary education of the children of Dalit, farmers and poor people as the educated people from these communities would be well settled (Government of C P &

Berar, 1947, p. 612). As the primary education was controlled by local board and district board, the teachers were transferred whenever deemed fit by these boards. Due to these abrupt transfers, students suffered a lot. So he demanded the government should make a law to regulate the transfers (p. 612). He alleged in the Assembly that it spends less funds on the students from untouchable and tribal community (p. 613). He continuously demanded in the Assembly that the government should spend more funds for these communities; the government should give them scholarships and concession in fees. There would be only few untouchables who earned Rs 1200. The government should charge fees to the rich among untouchable community and should give free education to children from poor families among untouchables, farmers and Muslims (Government of C P & Berar, 1946, pp. 372-373). At that time, the Congress government from C.P. & Berar spent Rs 10,000 on furniture at ministeries' residences. Mr. Jadhav had objected to it saying that the government could have spent the fund on the welfare of poor and on the education of their children (Government of C P & Berar Province, 1946, pp. 416-17). Mr. Raybhan believed that juveniles turn to criminal activities due to lack of education. Hence government should start livelihood or skill oriented schools for such children so that they could live happy life and would remain away from bad habits (Government of C P & Berar, 1947, p. 292). Mr. Raybhan always raised the issues of untouchables in the Assembly to get them facilities of education.

Agriculture and business were the backbone of Indian economy. There were many difficulties in agriculture. Cotton was the main crop during that time but its prices were varying. So the C.P. & Berar government presented the bill in the Assembly to regularise the prices. At that time, Mr. Raybhan Jadhav stood by the side of farmers. He had tried to convince the government that the production cost of cotton had gone up due to the inflation and if the government couldn't take the cognizance of such situation and control the rate of cotton which was not beneficial to the farmers, they might be ruined (Government of C P & Berar, 1946, p. 697). He also said that the farmers

were cheated in the weights and measures. Traders took advantage of the situation. They would purchase cotton at low rate due to which farmers suffered huge financial losses. Traders and moneylenders ruined the farmers. In such situation, if the government fixed the price then the farmers would have lost their remaining hopes also (pp. 697-698). While alerting the government about the gravity of the problem, Mr. Raybhan Jadhav said, 'Despite hard work, farmer had become penniless. Like the special attention paid to the working children in a family, it was the duty of the government to take care of farmers since they work hard round the year. The government should formulate schemes to support farmers. The world would be happy if farmers are happy...' (pp. 697-698). So Mr. Raybhan demanded in the House that the government should give the fair price to the farm produce and make their lives happy. At that time, the bill regarding landlords was tabled in the Assembly. Mr. Jadhav supported that bill. While speaking during the debate of the bill, Mr. Jadhav said, '... If the government spent 0.5% of landlord's earning spent on the welfare of other farmers or poor, it would be beneficial for us. But the companies bigger than landlords and well established people, big industrialist like Tata and Birla had earned lot of money from poor people. Mr. Jadhav felt that the government should force the industries to contribute the share of their profit for social cause... before passing the bill, then landlords would definitely follow the suit' (Government of C P & Berar, 1947, p. 208). He felt that the government should support the farmers along with the industries. In this regard, he expressed his views in the Assembly, 'In the past, the manufacturing industry was thriving in the country. Several artisans made various artefacts. However, they never got the due remuneration for it. The raw material like cotton, leather was exported from India and the readymade goods were imported. Hence the entire profit was earned by the foreign industries' (C P & Berar Government, 1946, pp. 425-426). Mr. Raybhan tried to convince the government in the Assembly that it should encourage the industries like shoe making and leather works etc. He also opposed increased tax on farmers and expected that the

government imposed heavy tax on black marketeers and take strong action against them. He requested that instead of imposing tax on poor farmers, the government should give them exemption from tax (Government of C P & Berar, 1946, pp. 452-453). Thus he had always tried to help farmers by raising their problems in the Assembly.

On 21 September 1946, a discussion was held on Grampanchayat Bill in the Assembly. Mr. Raybhan Jadhav had opposed the bill. He said, 'At the time of primary elections, Mahars from Belgaum had to face lot of trouble as they didn't vote for Congress candidate Mr. Jadhav had clearly told that if the Grampanchayat Bill was passed the poor people would be ruined for sure' (Government of C P & Berar, 1946, pp. 434-35). His fear came true later. There were many incidents of bullying untouchables by other communities. One of the incidents occurred at Katol in Nagpur district. When three people from untouchable community had gone to a hotel for tea, the hotel owner denied them entry. On 23 October 1950, Mr. Raybhan Jadhav raised this issue before the Assembly at Question Hour (C.P. and Berar Police Department, 1950, p. 8). But he didn't get satisfactory answer. Mr. Jadhav didn't give up and always tried to help untouchables by raising their issues in the House.

On 22 March 1947, a discussion was held on C.P. and Berar Home Guard Bill in the House. The core of the Bill appealed Mr. Jadhav, but at the same time, he also expressed his fear that there are many religious and caste differences in our country. 'There are many Sect. There is a rat race for one up-man ship among the parties, castes and religions. Mahatma Gandhi had good intentions when he thought of getting freedom for our nation and it had almost become a reality but our Dalits brethren had to face the ill effects of Gandhiji's good intention. Similarly, the intention of that bill was nice, but our Dalit brethren might have to face its ill effects' (Government of C P & Berar, 1947, pp. 10-11). He had requested in the Assembly that the government should think over the bill seriously and give chance to Dalits in Home guard.

The Maintenance of Public Order Bill, 1946 came up for discussion in the C.P. & Berar Assembly on 12 November 1946. There were

many tough sections applied on the provisions of that bill. While explaining on the provisions of that bill in detail, Jadhav said, 'Due to different sections in this bill there would be restrictions on processions, public meetings and fare. According to him, the weaker sections of the society could not be strengthened, unless they mastered in Indian martial arts such as lathi-kathi and other self-defence arts such as wrestling, and overpower their enemies. The proposed Bill could be a major hurdle for minorities who wished to learn this arts' (Government of C P & Berar, 1946, pp. 855-56). So, he insisted that the government doesn't pass this act without taking opinion of the people. Not only that but he had suggested the government to make hand bills of that act and seek the opinion of common man.

The workers from Mahar community faced many serious problems in C.P. & Berar region. These problems couldn't be solved for several years. Their wages were miniscule as compared to the work load. Since their duty hours were not fixed, many of them had to work 24 hours a day. Their wages were reduced from Rs 10 to Rs 8 (Government of C P & Berar, 1947, p. 506). When the discussion was held in the Assembly regarding their wages Mr. Raybhan said, 'Earlier the government had agreed for the wage hike in proportion with the inflation. But it never saw the day of light. At that time, workers from Mahar community earned Rs 8 as wages and Rs 4 as dearness allowance. Thus they got a monthly salary of Rs 12. It was difficult to make both ends meet in such a low salary... The government should consider the demand on humanitarian ground. The working hours for Mahar community should be fixed and the government should put an end to the bonded labour system. Mr. Jadhav had requested the House that the salary of Mahar labours was brought at par with government servants' (pp. 506-507).

The Specified Commodities Bill, 1947 was tabled in the C.P. & Berar Assembly and discussions on it were held on 26 February 1947. During that discussion, Mr. Jadhav raised the issue of black-marketing of grains and demanded that the government to take immediate action against it. He said,

‘...Though government’s decision to control the grains was beneficial to poor but the poor were not actual beneficiaries. He further pointed out that it was expected that the poor will be benefitted under Section 93 in Congress rule. But it also proved to be the same and poor people continued to suffer. He had demanded that the government should forfeit the properties of black marketeers. The government should confiscate their stock and should distribute it among the poor people...’(Government of C P & Berar, 1947, pp. 94-95).Mr.Raybhan stressed that poor people would actually get the benefit under the Bill, if the government took strong measures to curb black marketing. On next day, 27 February 1947, C.P. & Berar and Municipality Amendment Bill 1946 came for discussion in the Assembly. During the debate on that bill, Mr.Raybhan said, ‘... The Bill was not at all beneficial for the poor when it came to their upliftment. No matter whosoever was their elected representative. They are forced to dance to the tunes of upper caste people. Hence the Bill was not at all beneficial for the poor and untouchable community. Though there was provision to nominate untouchable people to the Assembly, it was subject to approval from higher authority or government officer. The person belonging to that reserved community won’t get nomination. Though projected to be

for the welfare of poor and untouchable community, according to Mr.Raybhan Jadhav, it was actually against the interest of the untouchable community as the election of the candidate was completely at the mercy of the upper caste people and government officers...’(Government of C P & Berar, 1947, pp. 149-150).

Conclusion

Raybhan Jadhav disseminated Ambedkarite movement in the remote areas of Buldhana and other areas also. He strove hard to achieve justice for the commoners by raising their issues. In 1946, he was the only candidate of Schedule Caste Federation who won the general election from C. P. & Berar Province. It clarifies his popularity among Dalits. Though he was the only member of Schedule Caste Federation in legislature, he always moved with the principles and ideology of the party. He had assimilated Ambedkarism and worked accordingly. Thus Mr.Raybhan Jadhav had always tried to raise the issues and questions of Dalits in the House and give them justice. In 1956, Mr.Raybhan had taken ordination of Buddhism and devoted his life to spread the Buddhism in Buldhana district. Mr.Raybhan passed away on 22 October 1969 at the age of 81.

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