



### MAHARSHI DHONDO KESHAV KARVE'S CONTRIBUTION IN LIVES OF WIDOWS

Miss. Suvarna Deshamukh

Student

Shree Siddhivinayak Arts and Commerce College

Email Id: [suvarnap.2012@gmail.com](mailto:suvarnap.2012@gmail.com)

#### Abstracts

Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, an Indian social reformer, and the pioneer of widow education, has been a prominent figure in improving the status of widows in India. Not only did he assist in breaking the age-old stereotypes by advocating widow re-marriage, promoting education facilities but himself married a widow. Likewise, he also established Maharshi Karve Stree Shikshan Samsta, an Indian Education Society, in 1896 Indian Education Society to promote Women's education. In the same year, Karve started "Home for widows" and a school for widows in a small village named "Hingane" in Pune. He was also accorded with the highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna, in 1958 by the Government of India.

In this context, the research paper focuses upon the glimpses of Maharshi Karve life as a social reformer, his struggle in advocating widow education and their remarriage in a regional texts, *Himalayachi Savali (The Shadow of Himalayas)* by Vasant Kanetkar and *Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve* by Dr. Neela Pandhare. Being an adaptation of Karve's life, both the texts depict the conflict between Karve's ideology and the constraints of social entanglements. The paper attempts to explore the transformation of the protagonist who breaks the stereotypical shackles from a feminist standpoint.

**Key Words:** Widow, Widowhood, Feminist.

**Copyright © 2022 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial Use Provided the Original Author and Source Are Credited.

Manarshi Dhondo Keshav Karve (alias Annasaheb) was born on 18 April 1858 at Sherwali village in Khed taluka of Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra, in a lower middle-class Brahmin family. He was a social reformer in India in the field of women's welfare. In his childhood, he was very shy and silent speaker. In his primary education, he was influenced by his teacher, Soman Guruji. Guruji always encouraged him to learn new things. Mathematics was his favorite subject. Annasaheb Karve got his primary education at Murud, first in a Shenvi school and then in a government school. In those days, if a person wanted to become a teacher in a primary school, he had to pass the Sixth Standard examination. Annasaheb passed this examination at the late age of 18. Simultaneously, he also received the traditional Indian education. For two or three years he could not do anything. Then he came to Bombay and joined the Robert Money School. While in the seventh grade of matric English, Karve got acquainted with Narhar Balkrishna Josh. Introduction turned into friendships. This affection affected his life. Narhar was brave by

nature. Staying with him and listening to discussion on various topics helped him to gain knowledge. In his company the traditional ideas fell behind and he started leaning towards progressive thinking. Passed Matriculation in 1881 at the age of 23. Passed Previous from the Wilson College and B.A. from the Elphinstone College (1884). He stood first at the First B.A. in Mathematics. He taught that subject for one year in the Elphinstone High School. From 1888 to 1891 he taught Mathematics in the Cathedral Girls' High School, the Alexandra Girls School and the Maratha High School, Bombay. He joined the Fergusson College, Poona, as Professor of Mathematics in November 1891.

Annasaheb was married twice. When he was fifteen, he married Radhabai, a woman of his own village. After her death in 1891, he married a widow Godubai in 1893. All the while Karve had a soft corner for widows. He was aghast to see their miserable plight. He was a votary of widow remarriage. So, when his first wife died, he decided to marry a widow, if at all he was to marry again. He was of opinion that widowers should marry only widows. That is how his marriage to a widow took place. It was a very bold step considering his orthodox background and the prevailing social conditions. During those times (ancient time) widows were victims of such superstition and such backward social attitudes. The practice of sati was very much prevalent, and widows were forced to burn themselves alive at their husband's funeral. They were asked to shave, wear white clothes, and avoid eating almost anything good, and to abstain from almost all good works. While Annasaheb Karve was studying in school, a widow named Venubai from Murud was remarried. His teacher Soman Guruji and his friend Shri. Bal used to read and discuss the articles in Induprakash. This influenced the progression of such evolutionary views. A poem describing the plight of widows in *Kesari* of 12 June 1883 also had effect on his mind. He had memorized this poem in his college life, and he used to recite it in front of his friends. His childhood friend Rambhau Joshi had boldly remarried his widowed sister against the wishes of his parents. After Radhabai's demise, the idea of widowhood began to creep into Karve's mind, with all the background behind it. In *The High Cast Hindu Women*, Pandita Ramabai gave a touching account of the plight of Hindu upper caste widows. So, despite the opposition of society and relatives, they dared to marry widows, and such an ambience inspired them to work for widows.

In this context, Maharshi Karve's life as a social reformer, his struggle in advocating widow education and their remarriage in a regional text, *Himalayachi Savali* by Vasant Kanetkar and '*Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve*' by Dr. Neela Pandhare has been depicted in this paper. Being an adaptation of Karve's life, both the texts depict the conflict between Karve's ideology and the constraints of social entanglement. They explore the transformation of the protagonist who breaks the stereotypical shackles which consider widowhood as a curse in the society.

The Marathi play *Himalachi Savali (Shadow of Himalayas)* by Vasant Kanetkar, is loosely based on the life of Karve. The character of Nanasaheb Bhanu is a composite character based on Karve and other Marathi social reformer of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The play itself depicts the tension between Bhanu / Karve's public life as a social reformer and his family life due to the social backlash and economic hardships his children and wife had to endure. In the play, the story revolves around Nanasaheb a professor deeply committed to his ashram that works towards the upliftment of young widows. It describes what it feels like to live in the shadow of a great man. Furthermore, it delves into the complex dynamics of a family- one where all the members want the best for each other but differ greatly in perspectives. Nanasaheb is so deeply involved in his charity that he often ends up

neglecting his home and his family in the bargain. Many a times during the play, Nanasaheb's children struggle to come to terms with being neglected by him, in favour of his loftier goals.

Similarly, in *Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve* by Dr. Neela Pandhare, the writer describes the whole life of Annasaheb Karve. He devoted their whole life for widows and their education. He himself married with a widow and he always was in favor of widow remarriage. In a stereotypical and traditional set up, confronting with age old norms has always been difficult and Karve also faced strong opposition. After his marriage with a widow, he visited his own village, but conversely, they were literally thrown into sand. Murudkar confirmed three things about him that- No one should sit in a meeting with Dhondopant; Second was they (people) should not go to the meeting where he participates, and third his own brother Bhikajipant should be boycotted if he welcomes him in the home. The next day after they had gone to Murud, the villagers convened a meeting and decided that no one should invite them, and that if his brother took his family into the house, all his family would be boycotted. The punishment of staying away from his mother and brother became unbearable for Annasaheb. About the crime of marrying a widow and consistently encouraging widow's marriage, Annasaheb Karve had to endure strong opposition from the society. He was even isolated by his own relatives. Even during his mother's severe illness, no one told him about it. It was only after her death that he reached Murud. At that moment he uttered a heart wrenching exclamation, he said, "ordinary superstitious vampires, what chains have you thrown at this Hindu community". No one is ready to break the norms and traditions that have been accustomed for centuries. The very idea of widowhood was shocking to the society of that time (Pandhare, 34-35).

In 1893, he had already founded the *Vidhava Vivahottejak Mandali* (Society for the Promotion of Widow-marriages) which helped the needy children of widows and looked after their education. In 1895 the name of the institution was changed to *Vidhava Vivaha Pratibandh Nivarak Mandali* (Society for the Removal of Obstacles to Widow-marriages). In 1898, he started the '*Mahilashram*' (Widows' Home) in Poona; in 1900, the Home was shifted to Hingne which is still active with full vigour. In June 1900, a leaf hut was erected at Hingane. At that time eight widows were living in the Ashram. Apart from that, two unmarried girls also stayed there to do the chores of the Ashram. Karve was living in a white man's house in Pune for some time. After college work, he would eat at home in the evening and go to the Hingane. He used to return to Pune at 8 in the morning after teaching woman folk and then went to work at the college. Naya Karve had to take care of the house and children. In rainy season it was very difficult for him to go there but he understood the responsibility and never tried to do so. That time widows had to shave their head but Annasaheb encouraged them to grow their hair. He started the Mahila Vidyalaya' in 1907 and in the following year the 'Nishkam Karma Math', a self-sacrificing institution to train workers for the widows Home and the Mahila Vidyalaya. In 1916, he founded the Indian Women's University, in 1917 a Training College for Primary School Teachers and in 1918 the *Kanya Shala*. In 1936, he started the Maharashtra Village Primary Education Society with the object of opening schools to teach the three Rs' in the villages which had no schools run by the District Local Boards. During his tour of America, he delivered lectures at many places on women's education and social reforms in India. He also visited the Women's University in Tokyo. During this world tour, he collected Rs. 27,000 for his Women's University. He returned to India in April 1930. In December 1930, he left for Africa. He visited Mombasa, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar,



Portuguese East Africa and South Africa. During the tour he collected Rs. 34,000. He returned to India in March 1932. On 18 April 1928, his seventy-one birthday, the Poona Municipality named the road leading to Yerandavne as Karve Road. He was awarded the D. Litt. by the Benares University (1942), Poona University (1951), and S.N.D.T. Women's University (1954), and LL.D. by the Bombay University (1957). The President of India conferred on him the title of Padma Vibhoshan to give 5% of his earnings to the 'Maratha Five Per Cent Fund' to promote the cause to education, and in 1888 he started the Murud Fund for the development to Murud, his home town. He donated Rs. 500 to the 'Murud Fund' for a scholarship to be named after his first wife. Karve stood for the abolition of caste and untouchability. He spent his life in working for the cause of widow-marriage and raising the status of women by providing educational facilities for them. He had a broad outlook towards religion. He had faith in the Supreme Being pervading the Universe. He was in favor of National Education. In his opinion, women should have the type of education useful to them in their lives. He felt that freedom alone was not enough; there should be social equality and a casteless society. He died at the age of 104 on November 7, 1962, after a brief illness. It was a long life of service to the society. He was a great social worker and an educationist. He led a quiet, ascetic life. He has his permanent place in the social history of the country. Bharat Ratna was conferred on him in 1958 as a mark of respect to the services he has rendered especially to the cause of women, the poor and the helpless.

There are some similarities between the play and the novel. In the play, the writer depicts that Nanasahab Bhanu as devoted to charity. Likewise, Annasaheb Karve also devoted his whole life for widow education and their marriage. Secondly, in the play Nanasahab was often neglected his family. Many times, during the play, Nanasahab's children struggled to come to terms with being neglected by him, in favor of his loftier goals. Likewise, Annasaheb Karve also neglected his family. The question arises as to how much communication he had with his wife. "They live their own lives do not care or often do not know what others are doing", has been very aptly highlighted by Iravati bai Karve, his daughter-in-law. Annasaheb's wife and children were always heartbroken.

Annasaheb completed his century in 1958. His fans and friends in Pune and Mumbai already prepared for the birth century celebration. Numerous alumni of Hingane Ashram had come together and inaugurated the ceremony on April 12. For this Governor Shri Sriprakash had come to Pune. Many dignitaries attended the main ceremony was his birthday on April 18 at the Brabourne stadium in Mumbai. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru also attended the ceremony, he said, "I have come here not to honor this son or India, but taking his blessings. I have to come to urge him to inspire us so that we can at least have a glimpse of their unwavering loyalty to the cause, his simplicity and the other qualities that make him great." (73).

Dhondopant's brother and mother had landed in Pune in 1902 on pilgrimage to Pandharpur. He visited the orphanage and expressed satisfaction over the work done there. After 12 years his brother visited the Ashram with his sister Ambabai. At that time, Anna's uncle and aunt, Wrangler Paranjape's parents also came to the Ashram. Seeing their contentment, Annasaheb felt that his work had paid off. Many great personalities like Governors, social workers, feudal lords visited the Ashram; Mahatma Gandhi was also among them.

Karve was condemned by the society for remarrying a widow. They were thrown into the sand. They initially had



to endure neglect and contemplate from society. But after realizing the importance of his contribution, the same society gave him the title of 'Maharshi'. In later life, he was appreciated by the society. "Simple living and high thinking" was the motto of his life. Nowhere in his autobiography, has he expressed dissatisfaction with his life or work or the contribution towards the society. He has also expressed his gratitude to the well-known and the unknown people who helped him and made him successful. A sudden opportunity to learn English at the age of 18, remarriage to a widow after the death of his first wife, hence the idea of setting up a widow's home, work as a teacher in Mumbai, leaving Fergusson college; tracing all these anecdotes of his life, he describes how all these turned out to be turning point of his life. He admits that being in the company of his friend Narharpat Joshi made him accustomed to thinking. Although he was over a century old, he did not get bored of life. His contentment with his life has been well expressed by Iravatibai who recounts a memory in that context. At the age of one hundred, Maharshi karve said, "I am very happy, Life is fun". Iravatibai was surprised that such an interview was given. He must be looking at these events with some neutrality. Although he reached century, but he did not think of retiring himself. It was not his nature to enjoy the family. When he died, in his condolence message, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Dr.Karve is no more with us today, but his long life is a glorious saga of overcoming and overcoming enormous difficulties. India is proud of him and his memory will live on forever. The flame of social work which he ignited is still burning today. Although he is not with us today but his work in the form of *Hingane Stree Shikshan Samstha* has become immortal".

In this way both the play and the novel focuses upon the life of Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve's life and his contribution in widows' education and their remarriage. Such ideologies and renowned personalities with profound insights have a positive impact on the society and can assist in the transformation of the society in the long run.

### References

- 1) Kanetkar, Vasant. (1972). *Himalayachi Savali* .Popular Prakashan.
- 2) Dr. Pandhare, Neela. *Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve*. Pune: Unmesh Prakashan.
- 3) <https://www.beaninspiner.com/dhondo-keshav-karve-the-great-indian-social-reformer-Who-pioneered-womens-education-in-India-and-set-up-Indias-first-school-for-widows-And-first-university-for-women/>

### Cite This Article:

*Miss. Suvarna Deshamukh, (2022). Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve's contribution in lives of widows, Electronic International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, XI (III) May-June, 249-253*