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<p>	<p>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 (<i>adhika masa</i>) 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 <i>Kavyaratnavali</i>, 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 <i>Manoranjan</i> of January 1906 in another obituary note. Thus, by all calculations, it is certain that he was born in the year 866, though the date is not definite. Srimati Vijaya Rajadhyaksha. In her detailed note on this subject in <i>Satyakatha</i>, 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.'</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>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, 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.</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>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 <i>Keshavsutanachi Kavita</i>. This wrong date was later corrected by Sri Parasharam Chintamana Camle, a nephew of Keshavsut, in the fourth edition. So 7 November 1905 may be taken as the correct date of Keshavsut's passing away.</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>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 Vilaage' is almost like Walane, and the references to flora and fauna therein are</p>	</p>

	authentic; and so is the reference to 'many a boat and ship floating in the sea.'	
<p>	The Damles were Chitpavan Konkanastha Brahmins who were originally from the village Kolambe near Ratnagiri. Keshavsut's father Keshav Vitthal, alias Kesopnat 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 famous 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 meager, 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.	</p>
<p>	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.	</p>
<p>	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.	</p>
<p>	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 Shandesh district.	</p>
<p>	About his childhood very little is known except for the fact that he was physically	</p>

	<p>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' :</p>	
<p>	His face is glum, but by Providence he may sign such new poems	</p>
<p>	which will make the whole world and the people happy!	</p>
<p>	From this glum face and mouth, in future would flow	</p>
<p>	Beautiful and ever-gladdening nectar of literature.	</p>
<p>	If not you, your children will be happy drinking it,	</p>
<p>	Nobody would ever ask, 'How was the poet's face!' (1886)	</p>
<p>	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.	</p>
<p>	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.	</p>
<p>	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 Sanskrit 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.	</p>

<p>	<p>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, <i>Gyanodaya</i>. Tilak was an old contributor to <i>Gyanodaya</i> and was himself baptized 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 <i>Gyanodaya</i> 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 <i>Ratnakar</i>, 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 somber and even. Tilak admired Keshavsut so much that he wrote a poem on the latter in his lifetime and he wrote two elegies on the death of Keshavsut in <i>Kavyaratnavali</i>, January 1906, and in <i>Manoranjan</i>, February 1906.</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>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 Keshavsut. 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 <i>Sudharak</i> (Reformer) after Agarkar. In the poem on Patwardhan Keshavsut wrote these lines :</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>In the stars in the space</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>Poets see souls,</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>People see through glass,</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>Poets see through stones.</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>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.</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>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</p>	</p>

	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.	
<p>	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, modeled on Scott, mostly on historical subjects like 'Akbar', or 'Krishnakumari'. 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 <i>Subjugation of Women</i> by John Stuart Mill. The Kanitkars, Apte and Keshavsut contributed poems and articles regularly to monthly <i>Manoranjan ani Nibandhachandrika</i> . Thirteen poems of Keshavsut were published in this magazine from 1888 to 1890.	</p>
<p>	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 <i>Golden Treasury</i> and Mackay's <i>A Thousand and One Gems of English Poetry</i> . But he must have read much more; e.g., Macmillan's <i>The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson</i> , since he quotes many passages from Emerson in his private letters. He must also have read Toru Dutt's <i>A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields</i> . 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 <i>Five Marathi Poets</i> that Keshavsut had also drunk deep at the fount of Sanskrit poetry; but some other critics dismiss this claim, as records show that he did not do well in Sanskrit in his matriculation examination.	</p>
<p>	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 <i>Nibandhamala</i> of Chiplunkar had started calling learning of English as drinking the milk of a lioness, Tilak was roaring in the columns of <i>Kesari</i> and Agarkar was heralding the era of social reform in his <i>Sudharrak</i> . 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	</p>

	reformers and politicians. He stuck to his own medium of verse and hoped like Shelley—	
<p>	Drive my dead thoughts over the universe	</p>
<p>	Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!	</p>
<p>	(Ode to West Wind)	</p>
<p>	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 <i>Gyanaprakash</i> and <i>Rashtramat</i> , 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.	</p>
<p>	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 <i>Gyanodaya</i> , the Christian magazine of the American Mission. He was later a teacher at the Dadar New English School. Sometimes he had to supplement his meager income (he never got a salary of more than twenty to twentyfive rupees per month in his lifetime) by private tuitions, 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 Commissariat. 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	</p>

	teacher at Savantavadi for six months.	
<p>	<p>When he was about to settle as a teacher in Bombay he met Kashinath Raghunath Mitra, Janardhan Dhondo Bhangale and Govind Balkrishna Kalelkar, three young literary men and editors. Keshavsut wrote many poems for the magazines, <i>Vidyarthi-mitra</i> and <i>Masik Manoranjan</i> (est. 1895. Mitra and Bhangale both knew Bengali and Gujarati well. Bhangale had translated Bankim Chandra's novels and a novel from Gujarati. <i>Anand Math</i>, the famous novel by Bankim, was translated in Marathi as <i>Anand Ashram</i> in 1894. it contained the well-known national anthem of those days—<i>Vande Mataram</i>. Keshavsut borrowed from this song the epithets <i>sujala</i> and <i>suphala</i> 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 Brahma 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.</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>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.</p>	</p>
<p>	<p>In Khandesh he came to know the editor of <i>Kavyaratnavali</i>, 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 <i>Harapale Shreya</i> (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</p>	</p>

	three times. But he was too shy to communicate'. (<i>Kavyaratnavali</i> , end of 1905).	
<p>	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.	</p>
<p>	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 <i>Manoranjan</i> . A crack in the heart! But, alas! Where is the restorative?'	</p>
<p>	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.	</p>
<p>	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 :	</p>
<p>	'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.'	</p>
<p>	He also commented on the state of Marathi poetry then, in another letter to a friend :	</p>
<p>	'Please tell ... that I request him to undertake <i>a long poem</i> 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 therefore hate myself and don't like others who attempt only small things.'	</p>
<p>	These excerpts from personal letters written by Keshavsut are in his own English.	</p>

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