
EPILOGUE

The forces that took Indians to the political awareness leading to united attempts culminating into the foundation of political organization like the Indian National Congress were many and were of complex nature. No doubt, the western civilization of 19th century that was introduced in India by the introduction of English rule proved to be an irresistible force of social change among the Indians whose social traditions and social values were very much archaic and static. More than their defeats in the hands of the East India Company, it seems that it is the socio-political Institutions like the modern English education, modern system of communication, uniform pattern of administration based on the rule of law and above all, the Christian missionary work to convert the Indians to Christianity through beneficent social service that introduced pressures indirectly that operated on the mind of thinking man in India. This produced a sort of social convulsion.

The changes brought about by the Company Government in the land system and in land revenue which was the main source of income for the Government, throughout the 19th century created much unrest among the peasants. Unfavourable trade for Indians and unfavourable situation for indigenous home and cottage industries were another area of unrest generating awareness towards India's economic problems. Dadabhai Naoroji's drain theory is an example of India's economic unrest and the kind of awareness created thereby. In the latter half of the 19th century even before the founda-

tion of the Indian National Congress, there arose some associations and organizations of political nature with a view to raise people's grievances to the Government through petitions and appeals. Bengal British India Association (April 1851), Bombay Association (August 1852), Madras Association (1853) and Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (1867) were the notable examples of it. These political organizations which worked in isolation for some years did not fail to suggest the merger of all into one national organization, particularly after 1875-77. Following the Council Act of 1861, Indian public opinion particularly among the English-educated Indians represented unrest over the problems of Indian nation. British government in India, reading the signs of change, noticed that some kind of measures to give representation to Indians, were needed. The Vernacular Press Act of March 1878 was an indication of the changed atmosphere. Vernacular Press Act stated the following:

" In March 1878, the Vernacular Press Act was put on the Statute book. Act IX of 1878, an Act for the Better Control of Publications in Oriental Languages, empowered a magistrate to call upon the printer and publisher of any vernacular newspaper to enter into a bond undertaking not to publish anything likely to excite feelings of disaffection against the Government or antipathy between persons of different races, castes or religions among Her Majesty's subjects. The magistrate also could demand security and forfeit if it contravened the regulations. If the offence re-occurred the equipment was liable to be seized. No appeal against the magistrate's action could be made to a court of law. However, vernacular newspapers could get exemptions

from the operations of the Act if the printer submitted proofs of the paper to a Government censor".¹

This was a cautious step to control Indian growing public opinion against some of the British calculated policies of pro-British and anti-Indians. The political participation of Indians in legislative measures was another position of absolute need that Indians were taking slowly in their stand as that could have solved most of their economic problems which were of squeeze by the imperialistic British Government. This need was bringing enlightened Indians together for a common purpose. This was a politico-economic nationalism in the making.

Another important and equally dominating factor was the social reform movements that were started right from early years of the 19th century. Champions of the reform movement were socio-economic and political thinkers. They opened tirade against the Hindu caste system and women's slavery. They also raised voice against the economic exploitation of the peasants. Men like Mahatma Jotirao Phule even organised the workers into Union and proved to be pioneering labour unionist in India.

By the end of the third quarter of the 19th century, there were social reform movements launched in almost all provinces in India. They also championed the cause of education of the masses, particularly of women and started schools at various places where they were needed most. Above all this, their most important contribution is that they attacked the evil social practices and traditions and

1. Grover, B.L. : A New Look on Modern Indian History, Delhi, 1983; pp.277-78.

at times, succeeded in prevailing over the Government for passing laws against those. Laws against Sati, against child marriage, against infanticide, against bonded labour, against human sacrifice, were important ones. Brahma Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission in Bengal, Arya Samaj in Punjab, Prarthana Samaj and Satya Shodhak Samaj in Maharashtra, Theosophical Society in Madras, etc., were the important organizations that worked for social reform. Some of these organizations had their branches all over the country. For example, Arya Samaj had its branches throughout India. The programme of reform that they worked out over some of the social issues was far more penetrating as the programme was tenaciously carried on using much effectiveness to propagate. This was done seriously throughout the second half of the 19th century. Knowing the importance of social reform in Indian society, some of the Congress men initially advocated that the programme of social reform should also be accepted by Congress and carried out simultaneously with political demands.

The aims and objectives behind the foundation of Indian National Congress were to bring about cohesion and unity among the Indians. It means that it was not a body turning its back absolutely to social reform. No reference to social reform programme was made in the first session of Indian National Congress at Bombay. On the contrary, one of the objectives of the Congress was to develop personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the earnest workers in our country's cause in the various parts of the Empire. The majority of founder-members of the Indian National Congress themselves were the social reformers.

The second annual conference of the Indian National Congress was held at Calcutta in 1886. The issue of social reform was raised by the President of the second Congress in Calcutta. Dadabhai Naoroji categorically declared that, "Congress is purely a political organization and the social reform is the business of local organizations that were carrying on the social reform programme". This almost sounded the death bell of the social reform programme as far as the Congress platform was concerned. Why should Dadabhai Naoroji, who was himself a social reformer, advocate for non-indulgence of the Congress in social reform? The reasons behind this were further elaborated by the President of the 3rd Congress at Madras in 1887. The President Sir Badurddin Tayabji stated that, "One word as to the scope of our action and deliberation. It has been urged solemnly as an objection against our proceedings that this Congress does not discuss the question of social reform". He further said, "I must confess that the objection seems to me a strange saying that this Congress is composed of the representatives, not of any class or community, not of one part of India, but of all the different parts and of all the different classes and of all the different communities in India, whereas any question of social reform must, of necessity, affect some particular part or some particular community of India only, and therefore, gentlemen, it seems to me, that although, we Musalmans, have our own special problems to solve, just as our Hindu and Parsi friends have theirs, yet these questions can be best dealt with by the leaders of the particular communities to which they relate. With this explanation, we can only conclude of

any who persist in denouncing our political Congress because it is not also a social conference".

From this, it appears that the issue of social reform was raised in the Congress session by some of its members and the attempts were made to set aside the social reform programmes, declaring that Congress is a political organization of all creeds, sects and castes. In other words, it is a confession, indirectly, that the Congress cannot stand as a united organization if it advocates social reform too. In spite of this opposition, there were some members headed by Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade, who tenaciously pursued that social reform must become atleast an adjunct of the Indian National Congress. They, therefore, formed a new body called 'National Social Conference', which was to work for social reform. The composition of the National Social Conference was broad based and included adherents of Prarthana, Brahma and Araya Samajists and members of different castes and reform organizations, to present a common front for reforming the society. National Social Conference became a common front to discuss the social reform problems of common nature, this, they thought, is absolutely needed a sort of emotionally integrated society which can provide a solid ground for political strength. In the words of Ranade, a nation cannot be politically forward, if it is socially backward and vice-versa. This would mean that reform cannot be neglected at the cost of political movement and political movement cannot be neglected at the cost social movement. Knowing fully well the importance of social reform, the National Social Conference had at Madras resolved that:

Among other things, there was the necessity of holding annual National Conferences in different parts of the country to consider and adopt measures for the improvement of the social status of Indians and for the eradication of social abuses, some of the social practices like prevention of child marriage, encouragement of widow re-marriage and the marriages between sub-divisions of same caste.

Thus, the Madras National Social Conference laid down that like the Indian National Congress, the social reforms must also be National with its branches all over the country. The social reform is as important as the political and, therefore, it should not be set aside as was asserted by Dadabhai Naoroji in Calcutta Congress and to eradicate some of the social evils legislation is needed.

In the Social Conference of 1888 held at Allahabad, efforts to co-ordinate in the activities of the provinces were made by appointing 32 secretaries of different provinces. Ranade, the President of National Social Conference, emphatically stated that Indian society is National in spite of local variations. This would mean that reform programme of any province should have national connotation, even it was expected that Muslim community, which is also equally national one with its social problems, would go well in matters of working for social reform programme.

Consent Bill of 1890 strongly supported by Behramji Malabari, it seems divided the members of the Indian National Congress. The Bill aimed at raising the age of girls marriage from 10 to 12. The Bill was opposed by many members of the Indian National Congress.

There was not much opposition in norther India, but in western India, the Bill was opposed by Tilak and his supporters. R.G.Bhandarkar, K.T.Telang and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, supported the bill, quoting Shastras, though Tilak pleaded that foreign Government has no right to interfere in the religious customs of the natives. The real fact behind this opposition was his conservative disposition of mind. This has also sbeen revealed by his stand in the Indian National Cosngress of 1895 towards reforms. He and his supports not only opposed the National Social Conference to be a part of the Indian National Congress, but they even burned down the pendal erected at the place where the National Social Conference was to meet in Poona in the same year. This made the Indian National Congress purely a political body unconcerned with any kind of social reform. This also separated the social reformers from the Congress, atleast in case of using Congress platform for social purpose.

After Tilakites open opposition to social reform and National Social Conference in 1895, Indian National Congress almost closed its doors as far as social reform was concerned. A large section of the Congressmen, it seems, viewed that the issues of the social reform, if taken up, will weaken the Congress. Therefore, Presidents of Indian National Congress rarely referred to the social reform in their speeches at annual conferences after 1895. Congress after 1895 to 1917 was deeply involved into the economic problems that the country was facing and also into the political demands, that could solve those problems. In other words, Indian nationalism in that early phase had economic background for its steady growth.

The social background of Indian nationalism, which was one of the important factors in the foundation of Indian National Congress, lost its position until we come to the year 1917. Again, it is during this period (1895 to 1917) that orthodox reactionaries, to a great extent, dominated the Indian National Congress. In the first decade of the 20th century, extremist Congressmen, who were also religious reactionaries, succeeded in temporarily silencing the moderates who were prepared to accept atleast some moderate programme of social reform in the Congress programme. It is this period during which the communal tendencies seeking separate political concessions developed. Whether it is a failure of Congress to be secular or the British policy to encourage this section for seeking political concessions was responsible for the subsequent years' political tangles is difficult to assert. Perhaps, it is both that were equally responsible for the problems. Sections of the non-Brahmins that formed their own organizations, independent from the Congress in the second decade of 20th century, indicates that Congress yet did not succeed in making its movement a mass-movement. Its stand on the social reform will reveal much in assessing the overall political situation of this period in India.

In course of time, Indian National Congress got deeply involved into the constitutional problems that were to secure political rights to Indians. Social reform, more or less for them, became a personal affair rather than social or national. The World War I broke out in August 1914, in the wake of which, new winds began blowing in India. The Muslim League, which was growing

stronger day-by-day was taken cognizance of by the Congress. Congressmen began wooing it. As a result, in 1916, both the Congress and Muslim League met in Lucknow. Cordial atmosphere was created between the two, the result of which was the famous Lucknow Pact of 1916 by which the Congress recognised the Muslim community almost as a political entity. The next year came the famous August Declaration by Montague in which the next instalment of political concessions was assured to be granted to the Indians. It was also sounded that separate seats were to be provided to the non-Brahmins, backward classes, in addition to Muslims and Sikhs. This, at once, added a new dimension to the Indian politics. Social reform now became a political expediency to Indian National Congress. Therefore, in the Calcutta Congress of 1917, Annie Besant, the President of Congress, declared for the first time from the Congress platform that the practice of untouchability was a crime. Social reform movements that were carried on in different provinces by different sections of people were to be now incorporated into the programme of the Indian National Congress or were to be made a Congress programme outside its political platform. This was a problem awaited for someone to take up with wisdom. This historic mission was fulfilled by Mr.M.K.Gandhi, who then in subsequent years by leading the Congress very successfully became Mahatma for the nation.

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