
CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PHASE OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
SOCIAL REFORMS VERSUS INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Indian National Congress was founded in December, 1885. The main objectives of the Congress were:

1. Promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the earnest workers in our country's cause in the various parts of the empire;
2. Eradication, by direct friendly personal intercourse, of all possible race, creed or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of our country, and the fuller development and consolidation of those sentiments of national unity that had their origin in their beloved Lord Ripon's ever memorable reign;
3. Authoritative record, after this has been carefully elicited by the fullest discussion of the matured opinions of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing of the social questions of the day;
4. The determination of the lines upon and methods by which during the next twelve months, it is desirable for our nation's politicians to labour in the public interests.¹

This shows that one of the aims of the Congress was to eradicate race, creed or provincial prejudices and also the other social evils.

The first Indian National Congress conference was held at Bombay in Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College. The congress

began its session at 12.00 noon on 28th December, 1885. It was a very colourful gathering. The total number of members attending the congress was 72, of which 39 were lawyers, 1 a doctor, 14 journalists. Among the participants were Dadabhai Naoroji, K.T.Telang, Pherojeshah Mehta, D.E.Wacha, B.M.Malabari and N.G.Chandavarkar from Bombay; M.G.Ranade and G.G.Agarkar from Pune; Diwan Raghunath Rao, P.Rangiah Naidu, P.Anand Charlu and S.Subramanai Iyer from Madras; W.C.Bannerjee and Narendra Nath Sen from Calcutta; Lala Baijnath from Agra; Allan Octavian Hume from Simla.

The congress, at this initial stage, was a political organization. Analysing the political views of the congress, we find in the first place that it was thoroughly loyal to the British Government. The members of the first congress were "almost more concentrated with insisting on their loyalty and the blessings of British rule than calling for progress and reforms".²

W.C.Bannerjee, in his presidential address, referred to the various blessings of British rule in India, Dadabhai Naoroji, speaking at this congress, observed, "Britain is the parent of free and representative Government, and we, as her subjects and children, are entitled to inherit the great blessing of freedom and representation".³

Congress was a Political Organization, not a social body.

Congress was a political organization and not a social body were the statements of the early congress leaders like

Bannerjee and Dadabhai Naoroji.⁴ Most of the congress leaders were themselves the social reformers but it seems that for political considerations, they drifted away in course of time for the social reform.⁵ In the congress session held in 1886 at Calcutta, president of the session, Dadabhai Naoroji, affirmed that congress was a political body and social reform stands outside its scope.⁶ Opinion of some congress leaders was that, "There were different social problems among different communities, castes, creeds and races in different parts of the country and at various stages of development. These problems could be tackled at their own levels. In their own way, congress leaders were working for social amelioration. Dadabhai Naoroji, for example, the son of a Parsi priest, had started a journal 'Rast Goftar' for social reform".⁷ But they wanted to avoid any matter which might be detrimental to united political action.

Congress Attitude towards Social Reform.

Indian National Congress was established, the original intention of Ranade and his associates, who founded the I.N.C. including A.O.Hume, was to provide a platform for the discussion of social as well as political issues which were on the minds of Indian nationalists.⁸ K.T.Telang, a secretary at the first congress session, explained that because the representatives began to disperse by the third day of the session, there was no time to discuss publicly and pass resolutions on matters of social reform, but that "Raghunath Rao, General Secretary of the Conference and M.G.Ranade gave addresses to the congress on social questions".⁹

The clear-cut attitude of the congress leaders was to eliminate social reform and it was firmly decided by the leaders. Dadabhai Naoroji's presidential address at the second congress in Calcutta provided the frank reasoning behind the congress decision to omit discussions of social reform. Naoroji asked why a purely political body should be required to take up social problems. He further says, "A National Congress must confine itself to the questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation, and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms, and other questions, to class Congresses".¹⁰

Dadabhai Naoroji was earlier a Parsi social reformer and he had participated in the Bombay Student Literary and Scientific Society, fostered female education and worked on two reform journals, 'Stri Bodh' and 'Rast Goftar', both of which appeared in the 1850's. But his name is not to be found among the sponsors of the various reform crusades later in the century, probably because of his pre-occupation with political affairs and his long sojourns in England. "Naoroji understood the immense task of uniting even English-educated men by their adherence to all India ideals and programmes and he judged that a unity on political issues was all that could be expected".¹¹ Before the founding of the Congress, Naoroji might have taken a different view, "it might well have appeared that English educated men could as easily agree on social as on political aims. But in 1885 and 1886, Malabari's campaign was already splitting Hindus into pro- and anti-social reform factions and Naoroji and others feared the extension of that controversy into the Congress".¹²

**Third Congress - 1887 Madras
President Badruddin Tayabji.**

The third session of the Congress was held in Madras in 1887 under the presidency of Badruddin Tayabji, who said,

Now, gentlemen, one word as to the scope of our action and deliberation. It has been urged - solemnly urged - 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 of 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 Mussalmans 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".¹³

Many of the representatives at the Calcutta Session appeared to disagree with their president and had urged for discussion on social reform and this can be judged from the cheers initially heard when Naoroji broached the subject. Later Congress Sessions took up the question anew and a debate continued well into the

1890's over the wisdom of excluding social reform from the Congress resolutions. Perhaps they began avoiding social problems, thinking that the Indian society cannot stand united socially.

Naoroji's stand was clearly premised not on the incompatibility of social and political advancement, but on the infeasibility of working out a national social philosophy, acceptable to all those who agreed on a national political philosophy. Other Congress supporters, notably Ranade and Raghunath Rao, rejected that premise, but not by openly challenging Naoroji. Instead, at the third Congress session in Madras in 1887, they formed an adjunct body to the Congress for social reform discussions, the National Social Conference. It is not unlikely that the platform provided by the Conference for pronouncements on public issues separate from the proceedings of the Congress constituted a special boon to Ranade and Rao, because both of them were government servants and were thereby inhibited from taking openly critical stands on official policies. Ranade was a member of the Bombay Legislative Council and a Judge. Rao was the Deputy Collector of Madras. However, a larger consideration influenced these two men and several others, who wished to create a close alliance between the political and social reform movements. Ranade, the organiser and sustainer of the Conference, argued the case at the second annual session thus,

We are, in a sense, as strictly national socially as we are politically. Though the differences are great for purposes of immediate and practical reform, yet there is background of common traditions, common religion, common laws and institutions and

customs and perversions of such customs, which make it possible to deliberate together, inspite of our differences".¹⁴

From the earliest years when the Indians were propounding the new ideas of nationalism, many of the social reformers had been under attack and ridicule because of their seeming distaste for certain aspects of the Indian social and religious life. However, in the 1880's, the revivalist nationalist position from which such criticisms originated, had few adherents among the liberal all India nationalists. Within the confines of the English educated group, there were a few serious objections to the designation of social reform activities as truly nationalist.¹⁵ Social reforms were thought by most nationalists to be as devoted as any one else, perhaps more so, by virtue of their year-long activities for the creation of India's national unity and strength. For a decade after the founding of the Congress, spokesmen for the National Social Conference could unself-consciously ignore, atleast from the national platform, the few Indian leaders who expressed doubts about the social reformers' adherence to the nationalist principles. A political nationalism which was based on western political ideals. There was little agreement on the methods and the pace of social advancement. Naoroji's reference to the special problems which social progress faced in each community and region reflected an honest scepticism about reaching any national consensus on specific issues. With this scepticism in mind, Ranade carefully began his work of organising the social conference.

lism' growing strength was a warning to the reformer to avoid linking his social programmes with religion, and in any case, Malabari's crusade demonstrated that the case for social reform was stronger without the support of religion.

The attitude of the Congress leaders was totally against the discussion and the work of social reform in the sessions of Indian National Congress. This is the cause of the emergence of the National Social Conference.

National Social Conference & Indian National Congress.

Mahadev Govind Ranade was born in a Brahmin family at Nasik in 1842. He was educated at Kolhapur English School and Elphinstone High School, Bombay. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1862 and began his career as a teacher and a free-lance writer. His association with journalism continued till the end. After a few years, he was appointed a Government reporter on Marathi literature. He successfully competed for a judicial post and in 1871, was appointed a Sub-ordinate Judge at Poona. Because of his scholarship, hardwork and administrative capacity, he gained promotions quickly, and was Law Member of the Bombay Government for three terms.

"Ranade was actively associated with numerous public bodies including the Indian National Congress, but his chief interest lay in the sphere of education and social reform. Ranade utilized the opportunity presented by the visit of the Brahmo leader

Just as Congress decided to exclude social reform from its annual agenda, in order to avoid unnecessary clashes among its supporters, so also the National Social Conference carefully excluded religious reform from its purview. Conference members included representatives of several reformed religious groups (Brahmo, Prarthana and Arya Samajas) and various caste associations, and for those men, the Conference could create a common front on social questions, provided their religious differences remained in the background. At the time of its founding, therefore, the Conference could not be properly regarded as an outgrowth of the earlier social reform movements, most of which developed from religious reform movements, but was understood as a component of the nationalist movement, with intellectual roots identical with those of the Congress. Although religious and social reform retained their conjunction in the Samajas and in the minds of many Indians, the "all India social reform movement was based on a secular ideology, nationalism. For Ranade, whose own ideas of social reform rested on personal religion and morality, the social conference was an organization which had an intellectual integrity only insofar as it stood for national regeneration".¹⁶ Belief in national progress was, for him, the proper philosophical foundation of the conference; it was a belief that could be shared by all the reformers with or without theistic convictions. The importance of the non-religious approach to social reforms was made particularly clear to the founders of the Conference by the outburst of the religious revivalism in the Age of Consent Bill controversy, which had social reformers as its chief target. Reviva-

— K.C.Sen to Bombay for inspiring the individual reformers to unite and mobilise their strength under one organization, as a result of which, the Prarthana Samaj was established. On a similar occasion in 1875, he arranged the reception and the lectures of Dayanand Saraswati to — rouse popular support in favour of social reforms".¹⁷

Mahadev Govind Ranade had joined A.O.Hume and others in founding the Indian National Congress with the intention of utilizing the Congress as a platform for discussing social issues".¹⁸ Kashinath Trimbak Telang and Raghunath Rao co-operated with Ranade. But other leaders in the first session wanted it to be mainly a political organization. "In the second session in 1886, however, many delegates showed interest in discussing social issues. But because of the apprehension that there would be considerable differences of opinion on social problems, showing a sign of weakness in the national body, and that much time would be consumed in such debates, the majority of the delegates were opposed to keeping social matters on the agenda".¹⁹ Ranade and Raghunath Rao were, however, of contrary views and for discussing questions relating to social reform, they started the National Social Conference as a subsidiary organ of the Congress during its third session in Madras in 1887".²⁰

"The composition of the National Social Conference was broad-based and included adherents of Prarthana, Brahmo and Arya Samajists and members of different caste and reform organizations, to present a common front for reforming the society".²¹ There

was a tacit understanding among its members not to raise questions on their individual religious faith and the mode of worship. In fact, the Conference carefully excluded religious subjects from its agenda just as the Congress in those days left out the solution of the social problems from its programme.

Ranade's Philosophy of Social Reform.

"According to Ranade, social reform was a means for the solidification and purification of the character of the nation. By the neutralization of unfounded prejudices and baseless superstitions, it was aimed to vitalize the foundations of the social and national character".²² Ranade laid stress on promoting social evaluation. As a student of history, he had the insight to observe that the desired social change could be brought about by slow absorption and assimilation and not by proselytization or revolution. Thus, both K.T.Telang and Ranade, subscribed to the organic, historicist view of social evaluation and reform. Ranade wanted to eliminate the following basic flaws of the Hindu society:

- 1) Aloofness from contacts with the external world;
- 2) Submission to external authority and not to the voice of conscience;
- 3) Maintenance of social subordination, social distance and caste arrogance;
- 4) Passive acquiescence in the perpetuation of evil; and
- 5) Reluctance to excel in the secular departments of life.

Foundation of National Social Conference.

The first meeting was held at the time of Madras Congress in 1887. Two eminent Madrasis, Sir T. Madhava Rao and Diwan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao, gave Ranade the local support that he needed in 1887. Madhav Rao, a former Dewan in Travancore and Baroda, was named the first President, and Raghunath Rao, General Secretary, of the Conference; the latter retained his position for many years although his age and illness kept him from assuming an active role. Neither men, however, attended the Allahabad Session the next year. Ranade was vice-President (and later a Joint Secretary) and henceforth assuming full charge. He defined for the assembled reformers and delegates from local groups the purposes of the Conference. It is not to supersede the local reform bodies by undertaking action or propaganda of its own, nor was it to specify particular goals and methods which would be binding locally. In view of the diversity of the local associations, centralised planning was impossible to achieve; that was the chief way in which the Conference was intended to encourage local reformers by giving to their work its proper national recognition and by drawing them together annually for mutual inspiration. It appeared possible that some common principles to guide a national reform movement could be agreed upon along with a general consensus on the methods to be followed. But the discussions and resolutions of the Conference were directed at providing no more than recommendations to local reform groups, which these latter were to take into their consideration and give effect to, within their own sphere, in such directions as they deem convenient or necessary".²³

Social conferences were arranged by Ranade and others for stimulating the movement of social reform. Congress was a purely political organization, so the leaders of Congress were not considering the same point. Only the National Social Conference played an active role for the social reform. Non-religious approach to social reform made the role of the Conference more significant during the Age of Consent Bill agitation when the Hindu nationalist sentiment ran high and opposed the Bill. The resolutions of the Conference at this period made it abundantly clear that social reform was most urgent and important that it could be carried on despite religious differences and without support from religious institutions. The humanist character of the activities of the Conference was the gift of Ranade, who assumed its full charge in 1888 until he died in 1901.

The Nationalist Social Conference encouraged all types of social reform bodies and allowed their members to join its ranks. It supported the foremost Parsi reformer B.M. Malabari and welcomed the participation of the Muslim reformer Badruddin Tayabji in its activities. The immediate result of such a broad base without any control on the activities of its members; the result was that some amount of looseness of discipline crept in,²⁴

For example, "the first President of the Conference Sir T. Madhava Rao opposed the Age of Consent Bill (1891) and Tilak sided by Khaparde in western India, when Conference itself supported

Malabari and gave its opinion in favour of the Bill. Strangely enough, in 1891, it elected Khaparde, who had opposed the bill, to preside over its session, and in 1894, allowed K.Subramanya Aiyar to speak from its platform against remarriage of widows".²⁵

The National Social Conference met for several days each year, with only one exception, after the Congress sessions had concluded. In the early years of the National Social Conference, atleast several hundred persons might be expected to attend, almost all of them delegates to the Congress as well as interested inhabitants including students. Ranade ordinarily took charge of the local arrangements and sent out the invitations to reform associations to send delegates. The choice of present, nearly always a prominent local figure, and decisions on the agenda and even the wording of resolutions were made by Ranade and a small group of supporters. That group, although varying in composition, was made up of leading reformers from major religions, including Conference officials, Although of great importance in the western Indian reform movement, the Parsis of Bombay took little part in the social conference, regarding it, sometimes with sympathetic interest, as a loosely organised beginning of a much needed Hindu social organization. "Malabari, the leading Parsi reformer, was often at odds with the compromising Ranade, who in turn, resented Malabari's coolness towards the Congress's political agitation".²⁶ Muslim leaders generally avoided the conference, which they too considered a Hindu organization. The participation in the Conference of Badruddin Tayabji, a Bombay Muslim

reformer, provided the only exception to the important conclusion of S.Natarajan that "the Hindu and Muslim social reform" streams never came together at the Conference".²⁷

Social Reforms in the Caste Movement.

The leaders of the National Social Conference acknowledged the caste associations as social reform societies and several caste leaders became prominent in conference proceedings. "Caste associations, as existing in India, does not seem to have been inspired by the Social Conference", said Lala Baijunath, the Vaishya leader.²⁸ An important minority of social reformers always urged that the proper and most effective vehicles for reform were the established religious and caste leaders in any Hindu community. The traditional institutions of caste leadership, for example, caste panchayats, were also not the most convenient vehicles for social advancement, although limited social reform measures were often introduced under their auspices. Most of the new caste organizations which were established in the late 19th century drew their leadership and their following initially not from the traditional caste leaders but from western-educated caste members, men who were of the social reform movement and for whom, advancement of their castes implied adoption of modern social ideals.

In 1888, Ranade welcomed at Allahabad, the representatives of 'the great Kayastha Conference', which had met in that city two months earlier. At the subsequent Social Conferences, representatives and reports were acknowledged from other caste

and sub-caste bodies, the Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha and Sabhas and conferences of the Vaishya, Jat, Bhargava and Sarins (the Punjabi Khatri) communities of Northern India, the Nayar community of Malabar, the Khalsa (Sikh) and the Jain Sabhas, more localised caste organizations, such as the various Brahmin castes and Prabhu and Oswal communities in Bombay and the Kunbis in Berar. Ranade and other reformers began to recognise certain deficiencies in that manner of social advancement. Ranade observed that, "for certain purposes, these caste organizations are very valuable, but they have their own weakness. They cramp and narrow the sympathies of those who belong to them and the sphere of action is restricted within a very defined limits".²⁹ "As regards conference work generally, it may be noted that caste conferences are the order of the day in parts of India",³⁰ he admitted two years later. Indeed, they already were, and were to become by the early 20th century, the mainstay of the secular social reform movement.

National Social Conference and its Achievements.

Ranade presented to the Conference yearly summaries of the progress made throughout the country. Admittedly meagre efforts in relation to the contemporary social condition of India's nearly 200 million Hindus, the progress reports illustrated, nevertheless, the range and intensity of the new ideas about society which were spreading through the large and small urban centres. Improvement in the Hindu family and in society was the most general concern

among reform associations throughout the 19th century as the response to Malabari's "Notes" had already established. Groups from Madras to Sind urging marriage reform, some of whose members were pledged not to marry their daughters below a certain age, found that they too faced similar problems, despite their regional differences. The Conference discussed and passed resolutions favouring, raising marriage ages (from 12 to 18), prohibition of imprisonment for women in conjugal rights cases, discouragement of marriage in which differences in ages between the parties exceeded thirty years, reduction in marriage expenses, remarriage of child widows, prevention of disfigurement of child widows and other improvements in the condition of widows, inter-marriage between castes, which inter-dined, discouragement of the customs of paying a bride-price, discouragement of polygamy and Kulinism and support of female education".³¹

Local Efforts for Social Reform Movement.

Even though the resolutions passed on female advancement and marriage reform are for the moment ignored, the remaining subjects on which the conference took stands reflected the parochialism of the local reform groups and the limited areas for possible common efforts among them. Resolutions were frequently passed whose purpose was not to identify a nation-wide social problem but to lend encouragement of the national body to a small, struggling group of reformers. Madras Reformers, for example, although surrounded by more basic hindrances to progress, undertook campaigns

against alcohol consumption and Nautch dancings and their work received growing support in certain north Indian provinces. Several resolutions were passed by the Conference on those matters. Other reformers, who deplored the "Saipa System of loud mourning and beating of the chest which prevails in Sind, the Punjab, the north-west Provinces and Guzerath".³² also found conference support, as did those (Arya Samajists) who wanted recognition of their efforts to re-admit to Hindu communities persons connected to other faiths, some reformers worked for improvement in the management of Hindu temple endowments, others for introduction of religious and moral education in conjunction with the government schools. Madras groups supported trepassing of the Hindu Gains of Learning Bill in the Provincial Legislature, the evils of prostitution and the desirability of inter-dining among sub-castes were the matters of concern to still others. In all, to those subjects, the Conference provided whatever support it could.

**Bengal
Province.**

From this part of India, the conference received very little backing due to the absence there of any "regularly constituted social reform associations".³³ As Dr. Bhandarkar said in his Presidential Address to the 1895 Conference, in Bengal "Social reform is now confined to Brahmos. The great body of educated Bengalees, who are not Brahmos, are indifferent or hostile".³⁴ A few Bengalis, however, among them Romesh Chunder Mitter, who opposed the Age of Consent Bill, and Surendranath Banerjee, did arouse themselves to protest against the treatment by high castes of

their members who had travelled overseas, Madras Brahmin and north Indian Kayastha reformers joined in this protest. The conference duly passed a proper resolution.

Towards the close of the century, which marked the end of Ranade's leadership of the Conference, he died on 16th January, 1901. Ranade's service to the social reform movement was in establishing its character as a national movement. After Ranade's death, caste question received greater attention and "Narayan G. Chandavarkar (1855-1923), who succeeded Ranade as leader of the Conference, challenged Ranade's policy of compromise and least resistance to rout caste system. Chandavarkar also proposed the formation of a permanent all India reform body, but in vain".³⁵

Much has been made of the Congress being a political organization as against a social body. This arose from the statements of the early Congress leaders like Bannerjee³⁶ and Dadabhai Naoroji. The former claimed that it was on his advice that the Congress leaders agreed to leave out social questions from the Congress movement and make it a purely political one.³⁷ The latter also declared the Congress as a political body.³⁸ A number of Congress presidents affirmed this opinion.³⁹ In 1888, at the instance of Badruddin Tayabji, President of the third Congress, a resolution providing that the Congress would not discuss any subject to which Hindu or Muslim minority community were a party.⁴⁰ It was not that the Congress leaders were not for social change. Rather, they wanted to avoid such problems as might create dissensions in the Congress.

There were different social problems and those could be tackled at their own levels.

In the Encyclopaedia of Indian National Congress, there are no references to the social questions discussed in the Congress session of 1889.

In the Sixth Congress session at Calcutta in 1890, Mr. Mano Mohan Ghose, an eminent Calcutta Barrister, who was Chairman of the Reception Committee, said in his speech, regarding social reforms,

Gentlemen, I feel I ought not to trespass much longer on your patience, but there is one other accusation to which I cannot help alluding, although it has been satisfactorily answered at more than one of our previous gatherings. I refer to the charge, so often repeated, that the National Congress, as a body, is opposed to social reforms. Such an accusation is based upon an entire misapprehension of the scope of and functions of the National Congress, whose object, as I have already explained, is to point out to the Government what we conceive to be the defects in the administration of the country and to ask only for such reforms as we are incapable of introducing without the aid of the Government, and in regard to the necessity of which, we are all practically of one mind.⁴¹

Now, the many questions of social reform which are, at present, engaging the attention of the educated classes throughout India, are the questions, the solution of which is entirely in the hands of of the people themselves.

Mr. Mano Mohan Ghosh further said,

It is open to all of us to live as we like, or to eschew or alter at any time, any custom, which we may consider inconvenient or mischievous. The remedy being entirely in our own hands, we can apply it whenever we choose and on the majority of points, we are, unfortunately, by no means, of one mind yet. Besides, it should be borne by mind that the Congress is composed of diverse communities, each having its own religion and its peculiar usages, and it would be impossible for such a body to discuss the social customs of a particular community, based as they often are upon religious ideas, regarding which the members of another community professing a different religion have no adequate knowledge or information. But it by means follows that the promoters of the National Congress are not as keenly alive to the importance of social as they are to that of political reforms. The same educational agency, which has given life to the National Congress, has already helped to bring about enormous social changes throughout India. Half a century is but a day in the life of a nation, and anyone who compares the state of the Indian society of the present day with what was the case even thirty years ago, cannot but be surprised at the rapidity with which we have moved in social matters during that period.

There are movements of a very important character already afoot amongst different communities of our people, to promote the cause of social and religious reforms.

Mr. Mano Mohan Ghosh added,

In my humble judgement, we should be travelling

out of our legitimate province if we are to deal with such questions in this assembly. Those who know my own views will readily believe that I yield to no one in the country in attaching importance to the question of social reform; but at the same time, I cannot but feel that it is our duty, however keenly we may feel on this subject, to remember that any precipitate or inconsiderate action before the creation of a healthy public opinion in a community is often apt to retard progress and to defeat the very object we have in view. We ought to be thankful to our English friends for any suggestions they may be disposed to make to us on the question of social reform so long as those suggestions are made in a sympathetic spirit; but at the same time, we must ask them to bear in mind that it is impossible for an outsider or a foreigner to realise adequately the difficulties which the different Indian communities have to control against in the matters of social reforms.

Our English friends, whose kind sympathy and advice our social reformers are always delighted to have, may also be asked to remember that the decision of the question as to what reforms should or should not be introduced, must, from the very nature of the case, rest with the Indian people themselves, and that, therefore, the true remedy lies in educating the people and creating a healthy public opinion on the questions of social reform.

To my mind, this gathering itself must have, and indeed, already had, the effect directly and indirectly of giving a great impetus to the cause of social reform.⁴²

Guru Pratap Singh, one of the spiritual leaders of

the Sikhs, said that the results of the education now being diffused amongst us is not unnatural, but the fact is that western culture is destroying the moral sanctions of the indigenous creeds and as yet replacing them by no higher law. Social reformers, almost all of them, save those who as government servants, are debarred from this, good Congressmen as well, and pious votaries of many creeds are trying everywhere to stem the growing evil, but it is to be feared that unless some new and vivifying faith grows up in the heart of the nation, the almost wholly foreign and purely secular education now being poured into the country will give rise not only to the expected good fruit, but also to a dire and unexpected crop of noxious weeds. No doubt, political responsibility, if the government could be induced to concede it, and other reforms that we have advocated, would do a good deal towards raising the moral as well as the physical status of the people, but even the most sanguine cannot flatter themselves that these will adequately fill the void left by the extraordinarily rapid decay of religious belief.

In the Sixth Session of Congress in 1890, on Sunday, the Social Conference assembled in the Congress Pavillion and passed, after much discussions, various important resolutions in regard to matters of social reform. But the social conference will, as in former years, published its own separate report and nothing further need be said of it here. The matter is only mentioned because this year, for the first time, a few persons belonging to the old Conservative Party, addressed a number of representations to the President and the General Secretary; and to the delegates as a body, urging them not to permit the Social Conference to use the

the Congress Hall, and it is satisfactory to be able to record that not a single delegate was found willing to support this proposition.

In the Eighth Session of the Indian National Congress at Allahabad in 1892, W.C.Bannerjee said about the social reform in his presidential address, "Some of our critics have been busy in feeling us thinking that they knew our affairs better than we know them ourselves, that we ought not to meddle with political matters, but leaving politics aside, devote ourselves to social subjects and so improve the social system of our country. I am one of those who have very little faith in the public discussion of social matters, those are things which, I think, ought to be left to the individuals of a community who belong to the same social organizations to do what they can for its improvement. We know how excited people become when social subjects are discussed in public. Not a long ago, we had an instance of this when what was called the Age of Consent Bill was introduced into the Viceregal Legislative Council. I do not propose to say one word as to the merits of the controversy that arose over that measure, but I allude to it to illustrate how apt the public mind is to get agitated over these social matters if they are discussed in a hostile and unfriendly spirit in public.

He further said that those who organized the Congress Movement had not lost sight of the question of social reform. "I may state that when we met in Bombay for the first time, the matter was discussed threadbare with the help of such distinguished social reformers as Dewan Bahadur Raghunath Rao of Madras, Mr.

Mahadev Govind Ranade and Mr. Krishnaji Lakshman Nulkar of Poona, Mr. Narednra Nath Sen and Mr. Janakinath Ghosal of Calcutta and others. The whole subject was considered from every point of view, and we at least came to the conclusion, with the full consent and concurrence of those distinguished men, that it would not do for the Congress to meddle itself, as a Congress, with the questions of social reform. At the same time, we also came to the conclusion that those gentlemen who were anxious in a friendly spirit to discuss their own social organizations, should have an opportunity of doing so in the Congress Hall after the business of the Congress should be over. The principal reason which actuated us in coming to that conclusion was that at our gatherings, there would attend delegates following different religions, living under different social systems, all, more or less, interwoven with their respective religions, and we felt that it would not be possible for them, as a body, to discuss social matters.

"It is impossible to get any common ground even as regards the members of the same community, be it Hindu, Mohammedan or Parsi, with respect to those matters. Thus, it was that social questions were left out of the Congress commenced and has since remained and will, I sincerely trust, always remain as a purely political organization, devoting its energies to political matters and political matters only. I am afraid that those, whether belonging to our own country or to any other country, who find fault with us for not making social subjects a part of our work,

cherish a secret wish that we might all be set by the ears as we are all set by the ears by the Age of Consent Bill, and that thus, we might come to an ignominious end. They mean us no good and when we find critics of that description talking of the Congress, as only fit to discuss social problems, I think the wider the berth we give them, the better.

SOCIAL VERSUS POLITICAL REFORMS

One of the most urgent question that the nationalist movement faced may be stated concisely should social reform precede political reform or vice versa. Among nationalists in the Congress and the Social Conference, this question was secondary in importance only to the question of what were the proper methods for advancing political or social objectives. After the 1880's, this issue of the proper priorities for social or political reform was an unavoidable subject of dispute, few leaders, in fact, failed to take a public stand on it, atleast at some point in their careers. The moderate founders of the Indian National Congress resolved the issue, in effect, by assigning political reform to the national arena for public discussion and recommendation and social reform to the local arena for private action".⁴³

"Ardent patriots in India, therefore, held that there could be no real social or economic progress, without the achievement"⁴⁴ of political progress. Not that they did not believe in social reform but that they thought the social prejudices died hard and

it would be long before the masses could be won over to the side of social reform. In the meantime, political progress must be achieved which would, in turn, facilitate the achievement of social emancipation. About the middle of the eighties, a great controversy arose regarding the relative importance of social reforms. The revivalists considered that the so-called reformers were a mischievous, though imbecile, set of men, who were playing into the hands of Mr. Malabari. for instead of adopting the true method of social progress by effecting "reform from within", they were seeking to force "reform from without" on an unwilling community. The reform party restored that reform-from-within was impossible and moonshine.⁴⁵

Malbari and his party's political views were very moderate, judging by the political norms of even those days. The 'Indian Spectator', for example, remarked that a few monopolists advocated the withdrawal of the British Rule in India in their favour towards the end of the 19th century. But neither the Shastras nor history could be made to invite such an impossible and undesirable event. India parting with England would part with her good providence, though a gradual re-adjustment of the relations of the two must take place in various matters with the growth of knowledge and sympathy. The monopolists were themselves so much conscious of this necessity that if the British were threatened to retire the next year, these misguided men would be the first to go on their knees and implore them to remain. Of all classes in India, it is the monopolists who wanted a strong power to safeguard their interests.⁴⁶

This extremism on the part of Malabari aroused extremism in the rank of those who stood for political reform first as the key to all other reforms. Both political and social reform, however, in their separate spheres, were understood to be components of nationalism and to assure the social reform movement of the National Social Conference to the Congress, in a sub-ordinate relationship. For most Congress leaders, then and later, political reform attained a more important position in their thoughts and activities than did social reform and whenever a conflict arose between the two undertakings, political interests became paramount. A small number of Congress participants, nevertheless, could always be found in the decades preceding 1920, who gave social reform preference over political reform whenever an open conflict appeared.

Since the founding of the Conference many social reformers had observed with misgivings Ranade's notable success in linking the social reform movement to the Congress, which they sensed was led by men interested in their own advancement and in erecting a platform from which to speak to the British rather than to the Indians. For those reformers, the human energy brought into existence through devotion to nationalism should have been directed towards social reform and not dissipated in debates and resolutions on political issues. Leading Madras reformers, speaking through the Hindu and the social Reformer took the view that the Social Conference should break its ties with the Congress. In 1892, for example, the Reformer wrote, "If it is still insisted to hold the

Conference with the Congress, then the future of the Conference is not hopeful. It is only another way of proclaiming to the world that the Conference cannot stand on its own legs".⁴⁷

The more vigorous reformers felt that the growing interest in politics sponsored by the Congress, forced into the background the primary aim of social regeneration of the nation, many of them urged the priority of social reform over political reform. Malabari's voice heard through the 'Indian Spectator' was especially strong in arguing that if Indians wanted to acquire the political institutions of the west, they would first have to assimilate to some extent atleast, western moral and social usages".⁴⁸ R.G.Bhandarkar, who was never enthusiastic about the Congress, or, in fact, about any public body in India, often deplored the "defects and shortcomings of the countrymen" which would have to be overcome as a necessary preliminary to all progress. He addressed that "without the acquisition of certain virtues and without a reform of our social institutions, real political advance is impossible".⁴⁹ In a Presidential Address to the 9th Social Conference, Bhandarkar deplored the condition of the lower castes and said, "if we ask England to remove our disabilities, we must, as a necessary preliminary, show that we are worthy of the favour by removing the disabilities of the oppressed classes in our society".⁵⁰ Narendra Nath Sen, also addressing the Conference, warned that, "However, we may try to raise ourselves as a nation, we shall find our efforts quite paralysed because of the crying defects in our social system. You will, therefore, see that social

reform is even of more immediate concern to us than political reform".⁵¹ The noted north Indian reformers, Lala Baijnath expressed the same idea in an essay written in 1891, "The subject of social reform is, to my mind, even of greater importance than political reform; for political reform can only be useful when those who seek it are physically, mentally and morally capable of using it to the best advantage".⁵² The hard working south Indian reformer, Viresalingam Pantulu, declared in 1902, "How can we clamour for self government to remove our disabilities when we are not prepared to remove the disabilities of the oppressed classes of our own society? ... If we do not show earnestness in social reform, will not our attempts at political reform be treated with contempt and disdain? In rebuttal to the charges that they were placing unnecessary obstacles in the path of national political advance, social reformers were quick to point to the artificiality of the politicians programmes. Although their own appeals were directed mainly toward educated middle class Hindus and their programme had little relevance to mass upliftment, the reformers believed that social reform, even among restricted groups, was directed toward alleviating the nation's fundamental ills more realistically than political reform. They did not scorn constitutional advances but deplored what they considered the waste of energy by influential Indians who spent their spare time only on political speaking and writing.

Reformers often insisted that their task was more difficult, perhaps nobler, than that of persuading the British to grant political concessions. They suffered the ridicule of their own

countrymen and thus could claim that they bore a greater burden. N.G.Chandavarkar could tellingly cite the observation of Sir William Wedderburn, that it was easier for an educated Indian to affect the thinking of the Secretary of State than his own mother-in-law.⁵³ It was comparatively easy, 'The Hindu' once wrote to criticise the government and urge the British to promulgate constitutional reform". The task of political reform so far as the Congress leaders are concerned is attended with little difficulty. "Not so", the newspaper continued, "the task of social reform. The burden of giving effect to the alterations, we might suggest is ours. The foreign rulers have nothing to do with them. The social reformer has, therefore, a more serious and difficult contest before him than the political reformer. If it is this increased responsibility that scares educated men away from social problems, they will hardly receive credit for courage".⁵⁴

For every social reformer who stood firmly by his principles and defined caste and even family pressure in order to practice what he preached, there appeared to be another who gave into threats of community ostracism or family disapproval. Those reformers who, happily, were never faced with cruel decisions such as whether or not marrying at all could provide none of the moral force of personal example upon which any great movement is based. The National Congress, viewed from within its ranks, gave an appearance of purposeful activity and sometimes even excitement. The social conference, on the other hand, was a much less

encouraging affair, even to its supporters. In the Congress Session of 1893-94, no references about social reforms, this would mean that so far as the programme of the Congress was concerned, there exists no need of social reform or Congress is a body which is not interested in reforming the society as it comes in the way of political attainment in a society divided by in sects, castes and creeds.

In the Eleventh Session of Congress at Poona in 1895, Mr. Surendra Nath Bannerjee said in his presidential address that,

About social reforms, we have not as yet got a written constitution, though I hope, we shall provide ourselves with one before we separate. But there has grown around us a body of usages, the unwritten customary law of the Congress which governs our movement if there is one principle more than another which is uniformly accepted, and universally assented to, it is this that no matter what differences of opinion may exist among us as regards religious beliefs of social usages, they shall be no bar to our acting together in Congress, they shall not be permitted to interrupt the cordiality of our relations as Congressmen. Never was the truth of this remark more strikingly illustrated than in connection with the agitation on the Consent Bill. Congressmen and Congress leaders arrayed themselves on opposite sides. Sir Romesh Chander Mitter, whose ill-health we all deplore and who, if he were better, would probably have occupied the chair which I so unworthily fill, strenuously opposed the Bill. Our great leader, Mr. Allan Octavian Hume was as strenuously in favour of it".



"Ours is a political and not a social movement and and it cannot be made a matter of complaint against us that we are not a social organization may more than it can be urged against any of my lawyer friends that they are not doctors. Even in regard to political matters, such as our respect for the opinions of minorities that so far back as 1887, I think it was at the instance of Mr. Badruddin Tayabji, who once was our President and whose elevation to the bench of the Bombay High Court is a matter of national congratulation, a resolution was passed to the effect that where there is practical unanimity among a class, though in a minority in the Congress that a question should not be discussed, it should forthwith be abandoned".⁵⁵

An open conflict did indeed, appear in 1895 at the Poona session of the Congress. There the convenient solution of the social versus political reform question by the Congress leadership was challenged by Tilak, whose personal fight with the social reformers had not ended with the passage of the Age of Consent Bill. Tilak attacked the compromise solution which permitted the social conference to operate in the Congress precincts and thus challenged the promise that social reform was a necessary or a proper part of the nationalism. His argument could be reduced to enunciation of an ideology of nationalism which differed from that of the majority in the Congress by its repudiation of western ideas and its insistence on an uncritical manipulation of traditional Hindu values. His position was strengthened by the revivalist movements of the day, all of

which, however, did not fully support his hostility to the social reformers.

The 1895 Sessions of the Congress and the Social Conference at Poona provided an opportunity for Tilak to wage a direct fight against the social reformers' claims to participation in the nationalist movement. During the preceding decade, continuing assurances had been offered by the liberal Congress leaders to those hostile or indifferent to social reform that the Congress would take no interest in social matters. In their presidential addresses, Badruddin Tayabji at the 1887 Madras Congress and W.C. Bannerjee at the 1892 Allahabad Session had officially reinforced Dadabhai Naoroji's earlier statement on social reforms⁵⁶ and Ranade had acquiesced for the reformers without a struggle and accepted the judgment of his politically minded colleagues. But those assurances meant little to Tilak, since they issued from a moderate Congress leadership which was known to favour social reform and the continued loose association of the Social Conference with the Congress. By 1895, two years after he began his organising of Ganapati Festival to strengthen the solidarity of Hindus and their devotion to their cultural and religious heritage, Tilak was prepared to issue a direct challenge to the National Social Conference. The Congress was to meet in Poona, where both Tilak and Ranade could count on a substantial local following, and the issue presented was: should the Social Conference be allowed to use the meeting facilities of the National Congress for the scheduled annual session of the Social Conference?

Tilak was on the local reception committee and used his position to urge the committee and Congress leaders from other provinces to prohibit the Social Conference from using the Congress pavillion, or pandal, 'Kesari' and 'Mahratta' publicised his views on the Social Conference and unruly public meetings were held in Poona to debate the issue.⁵⁷ Ranade tried to meet Tilak's challenge fairly. In a letter to K.Subba Rao, of October 16, 1895, he noted the struggle already in progress between anti-reformers and reformers and called it "a genuine struggle between earnest men and though we may be outnumbered now, I have faith that we must win in the end".⁵⁸ He requested Rao, then Editor of the Social Reformer, to ask Subramnai Iyyer of the Madras Hindu to send a reporter to Poona to cover the important affairs. The reception committee dominated by moderate Congressmen resolved to be found in its decision on the use of the Congress Pavillion by the views of the majority of the local Congress Committees. Messages were then frantically sent forth by both sides to the local boards to elicit their opinion. The response was poor, not all local committees answered the messages. Out of fortytwo which replied within the three weeks time limit, twentyeight favoured use of the pavillion by Conference and fourteen were opposed.

Nevertheless, Ranade could not consider that a clearcut victory had been achieved. He wrote to Rao, "The majority is thus decidedly for the Conference. But as many of those who sent a favourable reply (including Bengal and Madras) advised me to see

that the Congress did not suffer, and as many others (including Bombay) were quite different. Either way, I did not think it proper to prolong the controversy more, especially as many who voted against said that they did so reluctantly, did only asked me to make a concession this year". As it turned out, the reception committee agreed to permit the Social Conference the use of the pavillion, thus forcing Tilak's resignation, but Ranade said that, "though it is my duty to take responsibility on myself and relieve them from the position in which could neither say 'yes' or 'no' without provoking controversy. If I am sorry for anybody in this connection, it is for those friends who, after having encouraged me with hopes, held back and counselled peace at any price. It is a general weakness of the nation". He told Rao, "Nobody is particularly at fault".⁵⁹

Ranade's decision to succumb to the anti-social reform faction led by Tilak was the result not only of the pressure from within the Congress to avoid a critical split on an issue that had supposedly been settled at earlier sessions, but perhaps also of threats coming from outside. In Poona, there was a real possibility of riots, which had broken out before on issue of reform, and a threat was abroad to burn down the Congress pavillion if it was used for the Social Conference. At that time, a certain group of young Poona Brahmin was building up through fanatic courage and reckless adventures an atmosphere which was to lead to rioting and several murders in Maharashtra in the ensuing decade. In the extraordinary autobiography of Damodar Hari Chapekar⁶⁰ a young Chit-

pavna Brahmin, who was responsible for murdering a British Plague Inspector named Rand in June of 1897, are several pages devoted to the secret plans to strike against the social reformers in 1895. The intensity of the resentment towards all reformers manifested in that document has no equal in the published record of the period. Chapekar had formed a club of militant Poona youths, whose aim it was to train men in physical fitness and the use of arms for the ultimate purpose of undermining British rule, indoctrinating themselves in hatred for officials, missionaries and social military drills. Chapekar noted the proficiency that his group developed in heckling and physically attacking its "implacable enemies" the reformers, "We know the names of all of them but I need not pollute this memoir by mentioning them in this place".⁶¹ He described an abortive attack on a wedding procession which he instigated because the bride was over 16 years old. In 1895, the Poona Social Conference invited his greatest wrath. He had also laid plans to set fire to the Conference Pavilion even after Ranade had agreed not to use the Congress facilities. The plot failed since construction work on the new conference pavilion was constantly in progress.⁶² The hatred for reformers felt by Chapekar and his associates was only slightly greater than their distaste for English re-educated Indians and even Tilak was regarded with suspicion. Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar came closest to being their mentor. Ganapati Festival organized by Tilak suited their uncritical patriotism, but Tilak was "neither a thorough reformer nor is he thoroughly orthodox".⁶³ However, Chapekar wrote, "I consider him to be far better man than a reformer. Lately, he had adopted his manner to the

opinions of his community and this had considerably checked his irregular conduct. We hoped that after some time, would be much improved.⁶⁴ Tilak's membership in the Congress proved his limited capacity for real patriotism, as far as Chapekar's group was concerned. The Congress leaders resembled Manmohan Ghosh who "thought a Hindu by religion ... dress like a European from top to toe, and shave his moustache like a eunuch, he was a national hero," Chapekar wrote, "because between warm water showers and elegant meals, he made arrangements for the Congress and allowed himself to be pampered by the local patriots".⁶⁵

There is no mention in the published writings of the reformers of Chapekar's undercover movement, which Tilak on later occasion, repudiated. But its activities were known to the public through handbills and letters to editors and they may have influenced Ranade's decision not to press more vigorously for the use of the Congress pavilion.

At the 1895 Poona Session, Ranade's reputation and stature were embellished not blemished, by his backing down on the Conference site issue. Surendranath Bannerjee, the Congress President, applauded Ranade's noble sacrifice "made to restore amity and concord". It averted a crisis which might have proved disastrous to the best interests of the Congress".⁶⁶ In an official letter written earlier to Ranade, Banerjee observed that the demand of the anti-reformers was very unreasonable but we have sometimes to submit to unreasonable demands to avert greater greater evils".⁶⁷ —

Banerjee was a friend of the social reform movement,⁶⁸ but then his pre-eminently political ambitions for the English educated class kept him out of active social reform associations. As a Bengali, he claimed immunity from the Poona controversy and summoned his famous oratory to reinstate the true between reformers and their opponents. The unwritten customary law of the Congress, he proclaimed that, "no matter what differences of opinion may existing among us as regards religious beliefs or social usages, they shall be no bar to our acting together in Congress - they shall not be permitted to interrupt the cordiality of our relations as Congressmen."⁶⁹ Bannerjee's personal loyalty and respect for Ranade and his support of the Social Conference became clear to everyone when the famous nationalist leader appeared on the rostrum of the Conference and delivered a resounding speech on reform. Citing his Brahmin heritage, which he claimed, he adhered to with pride, he nevertheless urged that Hindu society must be founded on a new basis to meet the challenge of western civilization, whose impact on India was "destructive and militant". He also said, "it is not with physical forces that we are now called upon to contend, it is a moral force impalpable, invisible which escape the open eyes"⁷⁰

Thus, Poona, a centre of orthodox reaction and traditional Brahminism thwarted once for all the plans of some of the gifted intellectuals in the Indian National Congress who aimed at an integrated society of oneness by carrying on the battle for social reforms and political reforms together. The enlightened element

among the Muslims in the Congress and outside must have felt that the Congress is going to be an organization of Hindu reactionaries to a great extent who were fortune-seekers by demanding political rights. Moderates within the Congress who were more secular than the Tilakites proved to be weak and the cause of the Indian National Congress that it can assimilate the variety of sections by attempting to secure a place of position for them also suffered. Tilakites, in a way, rendered more disservice to the nation than the service by their stand in 1895 Congress at Poona. As it warned the underprivileged people in the country that the Indian National Congress would not accept the programme of liberating them since it goes against the interests of the upper classes whose support they needed most.

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