

CHAPTER - IV

LOKMANYA TILAKS APPROACH TOWARD SOCIAL REFORM

The various Socio-reform and religio-reform movements which took place in India during the British rule were the expression of the rising national consciousness and spread of liberal ideas of the west among the Indian people. These movements increasingly tended to have national scope and programme of reconstruction in the social and religious spheres.

In the social sphere, there were movements of caste reform or caste abolition, equal rights for women, a campaign against child marriage and a ban on widow remarriage, a crusade against social and legal inequalities.

In the religious sphere there sprang up movements which combated religious superstition and attacked idolatry, polytheism and hereditary priesthood. These movements, in varying degrees, emphasized and fought for the principles of individual liberty and social equality and stood for nationalism.

The new intelligentsia, which imbibed the liberal western culture, recognized these needs and launched movements to reform or revolutionize social institutions, religious outlooks, and ethical conception inherited from the past, since they felt that these were obstacles to the national advancement, " social reformers convinced that the new society could politically, culturally, and economically develop only on the basis of liberal principles such as the recognition of individual liberty, freedom of unfettered expression of human personality, and social equality."¹

It was the grievance of the Indian social reformer's that the slow advance of social reform was due to the insufficient support to it by the British Government which they asserted, did not actively assist them in the work of storming the citadels of social reaction and injustices in the country. The rate at which the social reform legislation was enacted was too slow and generally undertaken under the pressure of the advanced opinion in the country. But it is true that in the first half of the nineteenth century, the British rulers themselves initiated such progressive legislation as the abolition of slavery, Sati, and infanticide.

Indian nationalism felt democratic yearning from its birth. The socio-reform and religio-reform movements embodied these yearning's. In varying degrees, these movements sought to eliminate privilege from the social and religious fields, to democratize social and religious institutions of the country, to reform or dissolve such disruptive institutions as caste which were obstacles to national unity. They sought to establish equal rights of all individual's irrespective of caste or sex. " The reformers argued that such democratization of institution's and social relation's was vitally necessary to build up a sound national unity to achieve political freedom and social economic and cultural advancement of the Indian people." ²

SOCIAL VERSUS POLITICAL REFORM :

One of the most urgent question that the nationalist movement faced may be stated concisely, should social reform precede political reform or vice versa. 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 at least at some point in their careers. The moderate founder's 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.³ The impact of giving secondary importance to the social reform is felt even to this day. The rise of various regional movements; protest movements, dalit movement, leftist and also naxalite movements, have all been the result of giving secondary importance to socio-reform movements. It was advocated by many social reformers especially in Maharashtra (centre of movements) that reforms should be given more priority than the freedom.

" Ardent patriots in India, held that there could be no real social or economic progress, without the achievement of political progress."⁴ 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. 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 (Parsi Social Reformer) for instead of adopting the tone method of social progress by effecting " reform from within " they were



seeking to force " reform form without " on an unwilling community. The reform party restored that reform from within was impossible and moonshine.⁵

Malbari and his party's political views were very moderate, judging by the political standard 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 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 too much conscious of this necessity that if the British were to threaten to retire the next year, these misguarded 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."⁶ This extremism on the part of Malbari 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 subordinate relationship. For most Congress leaders, then the later, political reform attained more important position in their thoughts and activities than did social reform and whenever a conflict arose between the two understandings 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. Indian National Congress leader's were divided among moderates and extremists. M. G. Ranade, Gokhale, Agarkar and other leaders had much faith in social reform. The interest in social reform naturally led many westernized intellectuals to an interest in politics. In trying to enact and realize some of their reform schemes, many sought a voice in political affairs, aspiring to bring about moderate political reform. " Thus the extremists in social reform became the moderates of political reform."⁷ Their western education, from reading Rousseau, Locke, Milton Bentham and Mill, they became indoctrinated with a social philosophy which caused them to feel dissatisfaction if not revulsion at the social forms of their own people. Moderates decided that they must change the attitude of the British Raj to make it accord with its own ideal political practice and thereby assist in remaking India and also in gaining for the intellectuals

the opportunities and privileges their education had prepared them for. " Their education made them moderates in their demands for political reform always along the principles of British political philosophy and made them extremists in social reform to remake Indian society in the image of the west, so that it might deserve the benefits of British theory put into practice."⁸ If logically followed that social reform must precede political reform to prove India's worthiness for political reform.

A new leadership of the new men of the Congress began to arise. Foremost among these were Lala Lajpat Rai of the Punjab, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose of Bengal and Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra. They became dissatisfied with the moderate programme of Prayer and Petition and began to advocate putting 'more grit in the Congress.' Their group in the Congress began to be called the Extremists. Reformers wanted to break all old bad traditions of caste, sati, child-marriage, etc. But Extremist had much faith in Hindu-religion. According to Tilak, " The edifice of the Hindu-religion is not based on fragile ground like custom. Had it been so it would have been levelled to the ground very long ago. It has lasted so long because it is founded on everlasting Truth and Eternal and pure doctrines relating to the Supreme Being." ⁹

All Extremist wanted India should be free from British rule and after Independence or Swaraj, They would reform the social condition. In their view social condition was not a hindrance in the way of Swaraj. Though the Extremist used much stronger language, and Tilak and his follower's had much more fight in them, substantially they were not very different from the moderates, Gokhale in his Presidential Speech (Banaras, 1905) and Dadabhai Naoroji in his Presidential Speech (Calcutta, 1906) had both advocated self-government and Swaraj as the goal of the Congress." 10

" On the extreme ' Left ' was Aurobindo and on the extreme ' Right ' Lajpat Rai. In between stood Tilak. It is strange that the controversy between the Moderates and the Extremists raged mainly round the personality of Tilak." 11
But it is also true. " Tilak was a free agent, a law unto himself, who would bow neither to priest nor to reformer, neither to government nor to the elite, unless it suited his purpose." 12

The clash of personalities at Pune from the beginning of the 1890's had been intense. There had been serious differences between Tilak and Agarkar, they had been co-workers in the Deccan Education Society and ultimately Tilak resigned from the society. There after, there had been a constant tussle between the followers of Tilak and his opponents. The opponents rallied round M. G. Ranade and Gokhale.

TILAK'S VIEWS :

There was constant struggle on should social reform precede political reform or vice versa. Tilak was of the opinion that, India should first achieve Swaraj and then social reform would gradually follow . In those days significant problem was that of the relation between political agitation and social reform. Since the inception of the Indian National Congress this problem was regarded as important. In laying down the objects of the Congress Mr. W. C. Banerjea, the President of the Congress, in 1885 stated ; " The authoritative record, after this has been carefully elicited, by the fullest discussion of the matured opinion of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing of the social questions of the day. " At the Second Congress of Calcutta, President Dadabhai Naoroji categorically said " a national congress must confine itself to question's in which the entire nation has a direct participation and it must leave the adjustment of social reform's and other class questions to the class Congresses " Congress is a political organisation as against a social body. This arose from the statements of early Congress leaders like Banerjea and Dadabhai Naoroji.¹³ These leaders fully concentrated on political reform and not arosed a social issue, but without social development no one can unite. The base of progress is problem less society and during 1885 there

were many social problems. Those problems created misunderstanding and prejudices among various castes and communities. But the true situation was that, the leaders of Congress agreed to leave out social questions from the Congress movement and make it purely a political one.¹⁴ Opinion of some Congress leaders was that " There were different social problems among different communities, caste, creed 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 i.g. The son of a Parsi Priest, had started a journal ' Rast Gofter ' for social reform "¹⁵ But they wanted to avoid any matter which might disturb a united political action.

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. K. T. Telang , Secretary of 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 " Raghunathrao, General Secretary of the Conference and M. G. Ranade gave

addresses to the Congress on social question."¹⁶ Clear cut attitude of Congress leaders was to eliminate social reform. Dadabhai Naoroji's Presidential Address at the second congress in Calcutta throws much light on this aspect.

On this ground Tilak was also opposed to mix up social and political issues. According to him the imperative demand was political progress, and social questions could be discussed and social change introduced only gradually. "Tilak was the leader of what was commonly styled as the anti-social reform party. Instead of wasting his energy on social reform, he wanted to use it to consolidate the masses on political platform",¹⁷ by aggressive methods.

Tilak has elaborated his philosophy of social change in various articles written by him in Kesari. In March, 1886, he wrote an article 'Which First Political Or Social' ? In this article he gave preference to political independence. He rejected the advice of Britishers by stating that "First improve your homes. Before demanding political rights free your wives, daughter's and sister's from slavery, educate them, give permission to marry widows. When you will succeed in doing all these things you are really capable of enjoying political independence." Tilak gave the example of history and said,

" From history it is not proved without social reform, political reform is not possible. For example Shivaji created a Maratha Empire, the Peshwas progressed the Maratha Empire without bringing in social reforms. It has been nowhere mentioned that women like Shivaji's mother or Bajirao's mother should be educated, neither there had been any reforms which preceded political reforms."¹⁹ He further cited " In England in the early part of 17th century took to political reforms but not of social reforms. In the 17th century the social conditions in England were not much different than what the social conditions of India had been. The position of the English women was not in any way different from the Indian women. He pointed that there was not much difference in Indian and England social conditions".²⁰ He further pointed that, social reforms and political reforms have little to do with each other at different times in different places.²¹

Tilak was of the opinion that " our leaders in India have to capture two forts. First is political fort and second is social fort . It will be more profitable to capture the first fort i.e. political independence. In this work many people will help us. But if we want to capture or give importance to the second fort (social reform) there

would be no favourable conditions. So we have to first achieve political independence and then it would be easy for bringing social reformation." 22

Tilak was of the opinion, that if we achieve Independence first then it would be easy to reform our social condition. He gave the example of Elder Bajirao and Elder Madhavrao who spread their kingdoms far and wide and later on gave importance to social reforms. Tilak also cited the example of Brahman Parashrambhao Patwardhan, in those day's, who wanted to get married his young widow daughter who was supported by many and agree with him. In the marriage of Savai Madhavrao, the Hindus and Muslims ate together, Balaji Bajirao got married with a Deshastha Brahman girl. All these are the example of social reform " during the Peshwai period. Tilak also felt that had if the Peshwai rule continued much social reform would have taken place.²³

The main problem facing the nationalists in the nineteenth century, was about the means that the leaders and citizens of a country should select and adopt for creating and strengthening this falling of unity amongst the people. The liberals held the view that the social system in India characterised by religious exclusiveness and bigotry, lack of

individual freedom, rigid separation of classes and inequality of rights and privileges had been the chief hurdle to the growth of the feeling of unity. The main thrust of their effort was towards religious and social reform. They endeavoured to infuse in men such values as the dignity of the individual, secularism, respect for reason, tolerance, competition and contract. Tilak, however, took a stance which was antagonistic to social reform by citing various examples he tried to prove that countries which enjoyed their political independence had not adopted all those wholesome reforms advocated by the social reformers. Moreover the countries such as Ireland which were free from the evils of caste or untouchability had also remained under imperialist domination, ^{were} much the same way as India had been. He looked upon political and social reforms as basically antagonistic to one another in the Indian social context." In the political field the Indians had common interest in opposing the British. It would be easy, therefore, to unite them on a common political platform."²⁴ However as people's ideas and sentiments had been moulded by custom and tradition sanctified by religion for centuries together, it would be difficult to persuade them to abandon them. The task of social reform was much more difficult than that of political reform.

There is also one more reason why Tilak did not accept the proposition of the primacy of social reform over political emancipation as he felt that, social reform was an endless process, the horizon appears to be at a short distance of three-four miles, when one surveys the service in an open ground. But as one travels this distance of three-four miles he sees the horizon to be away from him by the same distance and this goes on; which would never be complete. In the same way it is impossible to say that social reform can be achieved in full at a particular point of time. So Tilak felt that it would be unwise to postpone the achievement of political emancipation and make it dependent on the achievement of social reform, we can have as much social reform as possible with our own efforts and without the aid of the alien rulers even during the foreign rule, but the process of social reform would get real impetus only after the achievement of a political emancipation.

Moin Shakir and J. R. Shinde state that " owing to his assessment of the foreign rule, Tilak was in sharp disagreement with the social reformers on three grounds,

- 1) He believed that social reform, especially, as it touched matters with which tradition and religion were intertwined, should be initiated by ripe opinion and not by a

foreign government. In this respect Tilak might appear to be set against the entire philosophy of the social reform movement. From the time of Raja Ram Mohan Roy which under the inspiration of the British utilitarian doctrine, was prepared to use the arm of the state to quicken social conscience which otherwise would be content to remain stagnant and unprogressive.

2) Tilak believed that the more urgent task before the country was the attainment of independence, with his sense of realism he could argue that emphasis on any matter other than freedom would amount to diverting the attention of the country from its major immediate objective. He was also intolerant of the Liberal ideas of gradualism and the method of petitioning.

3) Tilak showed, after an examination of various ethical doctrines, among the contemporary western doctrines, that there can be no inflexible universal ethical rule except that one's action should be appropriate to the context and adequate as a means of realizing the end. This leads to his much debated doctrine of ethical relativism which he maintained vigorously against the purists of his days. Tilak's view emphasises the value of realism whereas the view of purists such as Gokhale and Gandhi would emphasize the autonomy and inviolability of the ethical obsolete.²⁵

Theodore L. Say remarks that " His objection to the social reformism of men like Mr. Ranade, and his disciple Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Professor Bhandarkar, Malbari, Agarkar, and the others was to fold. First without a full appreciation of the values that had been preserved and transmitted by the social system these men were willing to discard virtually everything, to remark India almost totally in the image of the west, and to base Indian Social Reforms on the values they had learned from their western education. To Tilak it was folly, it was criminal, to banish everything created by India's civilization because Indian values and Indian religion did not coincide with the nineteenth century European notions of materialism, rationalism and utilitarianism. He knew their obsession was contrary to common sense and good practice. He once wrote ... ' a number of our educated men began to accept uncritically the materialistic doctrines of the westerners. Thus we have the pathetic situation of the new generation making on their minds a carbon copy of the gross materialism of the west. '

And he went on to remind the social reformer's that ' our present downfall is due not to Hindu religion but to the fact that we have absolutely forsaken religion.' ' Second

since the reformers could not inspire mass popular support for their imitative social reform programme, they sought to enforce reform through administrative fiat, to rely upon the coercive power of the state, the alien state of the British Raj, to effect social change.²⁶ Theodore L. Says this remark cannot be accepted because by 1920's the social reformers had the masses with them, rather than the Extremist like Tilak. In fact Tilak cited history for drawing mass following.

Tilak struggled to reawaken India to her past and to base her future greatness on her past glories. According to him real progress can only be made by a self governing people, knowing that moral progress can only be made through moral and democratic decision, knowing, therefore, that Swaraj or self-rule was the prerequisite of real social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual progress. " Tilak argued that political reform must precede social reform for it is only popular self-government that is moral government, that it is only moral government that can create moral, social change, and therefore, self-rule is necessary and the first object which must be pursued is the awaking of the people to their heritage of self-rule."²⁷ This was the approach of Tilak ;

which can be stated that have sown the seeds of glorifying the past glories. He launched the ' Home - Rule ' movement aligning with Annie Besant, just to rework the past glories, which Annie Besant also did through her news paper " New India " published from Madras. In fact the Congress hold or spread in South India (Bombay and Madras Presidency) took place only after the demise of Tilak. His approach towards social reform in fact has done too little good as far as the development of Nationalism in India as far as today is concerned.

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