Justice M.S. Ramade, the great social reformer of the 19th century, remarked during his social observations that the study of the morbid symptoms of a nation's decay was no doubt very irksome, but the pain must be endured, and the scruples set aside. "The Gordian knot tied during centuries of devolution cannot be cut asunder by any spasmodic violence," said he. The successive stages of slow decay must be closely watched, and properly diagnosed before one can evolve out the solution of the decay. Ramade did not despair in the wretched state of social abuses. He did not give in to the gloomy situation. Instead, he voiced to the people, trammelled in superstition, the determining note of survival through steady and assiduous process of persistent national efforts. "The process of recovery may be slow," he explained, "but if we stimulate the stifled seeds of health and growth, and lop off dead excrescences decay may yet be arrested and death successfully averted." 2

To Mahadev Govind Ranade, social reform meant the first step to national regeneration. A country socially crippled and undertoged by superstition and ignorance, held Ranade, could never really make any lasting progress. So, Ranade's life-long struggle was to focus through the Congress...
the work of social upliftment and organise regular social works.

When the Indian National Congress met at Bombay in 1885, leaders like Dewan Bahadur R.Raghunatha Rao and M.G.Ranade, persistently insisted that the national Congress should not be allowed to be exclusively a political body, but must be put in action, through its members, for ameliorating the existing condition of the society. The addresses made by men like Dadabhai Naoroji, Budruddin Tyabji and M.C. Banerjee in their presidential addresses at the second, third and eighth Congresses, strongly upheld the demand for social reform. After good deal of debates and discussions, a group of enthusiasts, led by Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunatha Rao, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Narendra Nath Sen, and Janakinath Ghosal, came to the final decision of holding annual Indian Social Conferences, as a part of the Indian National Congress. Thus, was organised the first Indian Social Conference at Madras in December 1887, with Maharaj Sir T.Kadhava Rao as the President.

The conferences came to some deliberate and clear-cut method of approach. It was unanimously decided to hold regular annual social conferences and facilitate them with ample scope of field works. In fact, more emphasis was given to the practical side of the social works. The different circles of social workers were entrusted with the task of supplying the factual

1. Indian Social Reform—Edited by C.Y. Chintamani—Appendix.
2. Ibid.
details, the statistics of the works carried round the year? 1

The Central organ of the conference collected all these informations and examined the work of progress. " The Conference, " said Justice M.G. Ranade, in his presidential address, " had a very important function of its own. While not superseding the local associations, it is intended to strengthen their local efforts, by focussing together the information of what is being done in these matters in the several communities, provinces, and castes and thus stimulating mutual co-operation". 2

Ranade, as the President of the second Social conference held at Allahabad, in 1888, left a standing instruction to the members of the Social conference to follow a scheduled pattern of work instead of haphazard undertakings. " I will sketch the work we mean to do " 3, said Ranade, and accordingly circulated to the different groups his precise and thorough programme.

" With a view to gain local co-operation " explained M.G. Ranade, " it will be necessary to name the various secretaries who will volunteer in their own different circles. In making these appointments, I would desire that the existing local associations should be represented by their regional secretaries, who would report their group works to the central conference and regularly correspond among themselves. 4

After the initial appointment of these regional group

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1. Indian Social Reform By C.Y. Chintamani.
2. Ibid - second part, p.3.
heads, the president called upon the local representative associations to come closer together and affiliate themselves to the central conference, and instructed them to exchange notes and reports in their annual meetings.

The fourth social conference, held at Calcutta in the year 1890, recorded the splendid account of the successful social works done by the conferences and the affiliated bodies.

The first proposition of the conference was moved by M.G. Ranade and contained the following summary of work:

That this conference has heard with satisfaction the account of the work done in the promotion of social reform by the various independent and affiliated associations, established in different parts of the country, and it trusts that the good work has done during the past year will be continued with the same earnestness during the coming years.

A perusal of the work done by the various independent and affiliated social reform associations was laid before the general secretary of the social conference.

The conference acknowledged the record of the social works from sixteen circles. The ultimate object of all these conferences was to work out experimental changes in different units of social reforms by enlightening and liberating public opinion. Mr. Mammochan Ghosh, a strong supporter of the movement.

1. Indian Social Reform - By C.Y. Chintamani, P-14.
introduced a new measure of self-help in this work of Social liberation. He earnestly believed, as did Hanade too, that social salvation could be best worked out by setting personal examples, rather than through rules and dogmas. On the question of infant marriages and widow remarriages, the various Social Reform circles proceeded with this newly introduced self-help scheme.

At the fifth session of the Social Conference at Nagpur, 1891, M.G. Ranade made further new addition, to the successful working of the Conference. M.G. Ranade introduced four methods of reform: 2 the first method, was technically termed as the method of tradition, by that he meant, reforms in conformation with the rules of the old texts. He insisted on the interpretation of the old texts to suit the requirements of the modern times. Ranade, on this context, deeply appreciated the endeavours of Dr. Bhandarkar in this field.

The next method, which Ranade laid out before the Conference, was that of appealing to the conscience of the people. He emphasised the method of appealing directly to the individual's sense of right and wrong, good and bad, sinful and virtuous. "The weapon of this school of reformers", explained Ranade, "is to seek to bind men by their own pledge or promise." 3

1. Indian Social Reform - By C.Y. Chintamani, P-14.
2. Ibid. P-25.
3. Ibid.
The third method, emphasised Kanade, should be enforcement of reforms by means of imposition of penalties. It was imposed in those acute cases only, where the first two methods failed absolutely. It was a coercive method, and not very frequently applied.

These three methods were adopted by the social conference and embodied in the code of the conference.

Kanade also had an eye for social legislations. But he was aware, as a conscientious Social Reformer, that the primary aim of social reforms was the purification and improvement of the character of the citizens as individuals. 1

M.G. Ranade begged to his countrymen to lend their active support and genuine sympathy, to the cause of national strength through social reforms.

"The Conference and the Congress", said Kanade, "were so closely united that they could not help the one and discountenance the other; they were like two sisters, as Congress and the Conference; and they must let them both hand-in-hand, if they wished to make real progress. The cause of the conference was the cause of the well-being of the people, as the cause of the Congress was the cause of their country's progress". 2

The sixth social conference was held at Allahabad, 1892

1. Indian Social Reform, 5th. S. Conf. 1891, P-23.
5th Social Conf. 1891, Nagpur session Report.
under the Presidentship of the Hon'ble Rai Bahadur Ram Kali Chaudhuri and it marked a further stage of remarkable development.

In reviewing the current reports of the conference, K.G. Kanade gave a list of different practical achievements reached by the varied Reform Associations.

In the Bengal Presidency an agitation initiated by Kumar Benoy Krishna Bahadur and supported by such men as Sri Dinesh Ch. Mitra and Pundit Mahesh Chandra and Babu Surendra Nath Banerjee, was carried on successfully in the matter of social disabilities for those who visited foreign lands and crossed the seas. The Bengal agitation group tried hard to let easy admission to society to these foreign-visited men.

In the N.W. Provinces and Oudh, the Kayastha Association and their conference had done a great deal for the community in the way of checking intemperance and extravagance, and promoting education.

In the Punjab, the vigorous activities of the local Arya Samaj in co-operation with the social conferences were most outstanding and had great contribution to the development of education, female emancipation and uplifting of the community.

Lower down in Rajputana a social service league, named the Walterkrit Rajputra Sabha developed its organisation and enforced its rules with greater success than ever before, and the movement extended among other neighbouring classes of the community.

The leading Native states started lending their support to the cause of reform officially. In Gujarat, for instance, His Highness the Maharajah of Gokwar was approached for help by the Mahajans of some thirty leading sub-castes to help them in raising the limit of marriageable age, and checking extravagance.

In the British territory in the same province, the Kunbi population was similarly profited by the operation of the rules framed under the Infanticide Act. In the rest of the Presidency, the Marwadi Jains at Nasik and the Vyasas Prabhus held conferences for the promotion of reform in their own community.

In Malabar, the proposed legislation of marriage among Nairs made considerable progress. In the Madras Presidency, a new association of earnest workers was formed and came to be known as the Young Madras Reform Party.

Social missionary tours were sponsored by the Social Conference workers in the provinces of the Punjab, Central Provinces and Berar. The most outstanding feature of this
itinerant social team work was the reclaim of a native Christian to Hinduism by the leading Pandits of Jubbalpore. 1

After the long survey of the yearly list, M.G. Ranade expressed a note of satisfaction.

"Being in touch with friends in all parts of the country, I can speak with some authority, and I am glad to testify to the fact that the different local associations do not remain idle all the year round". 2

At the seventh session of the holding of the Social Conference at Lahore, 1893, Justice M.G. Ranade conceded that this movement in favour of social reform in India was neither confined to any one province nor to any class of the community, but was a general and popular movement sprawling all over the country and embracing all castes. 3 It covered a wide range of reform programme: encouraging foreign travel, remarriage of widows, interfusion of castes, the admission of converts and checking infant and ill-assorted marriages, polygamy, sale of girls, against dancing-girl institutions in temples, against intemperance and untouchability. 4 This social movement for reforms implemented an over-all plan for purging social evils and abuses.

4. Ibid.
The Eighth Social conference was held at Madras in 1894. Justice K.G. Banade, in his untiring zeal, read the papers of the conference and threw lights on different subjects of reforms. The most striking feature of this annual conference was the overwhelming activities undertaken by the Native States in the spheres of reforms.

Seventeen states in Rajputana 1 such as Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Pratagad, Sirsi, Tonk, Ulwar, Jaisalmer, Kotah, Bundi, Ajmere, Kheri, Kishengad, Jhalewar, Banasah and Dongarpore and another, joined in active members to the Walerkritis Sabha, a vigorous social organisation renowned for carrying out multifarious reforms.

The Maharajah of Mysore passed into law this year the first instalment of measures intended to put a stop to marriages of girls below eight years of age and ill-assorted marriages of young girls below fourteen with old men above fifty.

The Maharajah of Kashmir, for the first time this year, presided over a Social Reform Association.

The native rulers of Baroda, Indore, Kapurthala, Bhavanagar, Morvi, Gondol, Wadhwan, Cooch-Behar, Kolhapore and many other states have purposely set on sea-voyages with a mind to do away with this unjustifiable social taboo on sea-sailing.

1. Indian Social Reform by U.Y. Ghantamani - P.46.
Alluding to this side activities, Banode said, "The work of social reform cannot be an act of a State. It is chiefly valuable when it is the work of the people. I shall, therefore, now appeal to the popular movements, which have been started during the past 7 years and more, and which are so characteristic of our new life." 1

Enthusiastic meetings of popular bodies were held just about this season of the year, in half a dozen cities in Northern and Western India:

The great Kayastha community of the North met at Mathura. The Vaishya conference met at Lahore where they decided to meet again at Shajahapur under the guidance of Lala Beijnath. The Bhargenas met at Lucknow and the Audichyas in Bombay. At Ahmedabad was held also a Mahomeden conference, in which Hindoos, too, joined in. In the Punjab there was a big list of Baradari and caste Association, the most prominent amongst them were the Sarin Sabha, the Kayastha Sabha and Khalsa or Sikh Sabha. Sri Madhwa met at Tirupati. 2

The social work was taken up in these individual groups with great caution and prudence. 3 The social reforms were enforced without prejudicing customary rules." The Reports,

2. Ibid. P-48.
which these communities and caste associations forward to the conference", opined Y.G. Kanade, "are the most interesting part of the social work. The conference focuses these reports for general information, points out the limits of practical work and suggests the lines of further development. 1

The religious organisations, such as the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Dharme Maharand, and the Sathan Sabha undertook the work of voluminous social reforms, but exclusively on independent lines. 2

The Poona social conference of 1895 met with a tough challenge. Its very existence was at peril. The Congress main body refused its alliance to this affiliated body, the Social Conference. The political body of the Congress refused point-blank the sitting of the social conference in the Congress ground and questioned brusquely the meaning of the social conference and the reasons for their gathering. This gave rise to a situation of tension. On speaking about the causes of the excitement at Poona 3, Justice Kanade read out the portion of a letter, received by him from Dewan Bahadur Raghunath Rao.

"The facts of the case", wrote Dewan Bahadur Raghunath Rao to Kanade, "are that Mr. Joshi .......... about a week ago called upon me at Kumbhakonum. He said in...

2. The Eighth Social Conference 1894. President address - p.49.
exultation that the Congress had rightly refused its panel to the Social Conference".  

In the same conference the extract from Surendranath Banerjee's letter was read out in the open meeting, which contained the true Congress feeling towards the social conference.

"The raison d'être for excluding social questions from our deliberations, is that if we were to take up such questions, it might lead to serious differences ultimately culminating in a schism. It is a matter of the first importance that we should prevent split. The request of the other side is very unreasonable; but we have sometimes to submit to unreasonable demands to avert greater evils".  

The people got very much exasperated not only at Poona but at Satara, Sholapur, Ahmedabad, Nasik, Bombay, Nagpur, Dharwar and many parts of the country as the social conference received sympathetic telegrams from all these centres.

In examining the situation M.G. Hanade said, "I am quite aware, one most obvious explanation that occurred to many is, that this excitement is due to personal difference and party quarrels".

3. Ibid. P.56.
4. Indian Social Reform - P.56.
"The question before us is," argued Ranade, "why should men otherwise intelligent get so much excited over petty matters like this Pandel question. The two assemblies, as you know, had nothing whatever to do with each other. Their organizations are separate, their modes of work are separate, their publications and objects are separate, but as so many people come from all parts of the country, it has been found convenient that those among them who cared for one or both, who cared for social and political reform, should have a common meeting ground provided for them at one and the same place, time at common expenses."

Since the year 1895 till the death of M.G. Ranade in 1902, social conferences continued sitting regularly on their own independent existence, and carried on enormous social reform works of far-reaching consequences.

Justice Ranade's life-long struggle against social iniquities and wrongs won for him a permanent seat of love in the heart of his countrymen. Whatever little headway the society made during this period was all due to Ranade's whole-hearted devotion for the cause. The present-day community welfare projects and works, carried under the Five-Year Plan Commission, owe their origin to the pioneer social works initiated by Ranade.