CHAPTER - V

RANADE : RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL REFORM

The Brahmo Samaj was the first missionary movement in modern India and Keshab Chandra the first missionary to tour the country for propagating the new faith. When he visited Bombay in 1864, the ground had already been prepared to receive his message. An educated middle class of the same type as that of Bengal had arisen in the Presidency. It was absorbing Western ideas and receiving English education. It had felt the need of religious and social reform and resented proselytisation by Christian missionaries. Societies to combat the spread of Christianity were formed like the "Paramahansa Sabha". In 1867, as a result of Keshab Chandra Sen's visit, the Prarthana Samaj (Prayer Society) was established. Its main tenets were theistic and its object social reform. When such eminent men as M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar joined the Samaj, it gained in stature and strength, and its activities expanded. A newspaper, Subodh Patrika, was started to spread the teachings of the Society and a night school was opened to impart education to the working classes. The Samaj started missionary work in 1882. Pandita Ramabai, a talented Maratha lady, gave much help in founding the "Arya Mahila Samaj". Soon a number of men of light and learning joined the society and gave a great impetus to the work of social reform and social welfare.
The chief architect of the Samaj was Mahadev Govind Ranade, a man of the highest intellectual stature in the India of the nineteenth century. All the years that he lived in Bombay as High Court Judge, Ranade was closely associated with the Prarthana Samaj. Mrs. Ranade tells us that no matter at what awkward hour and with how little notice the Secretary of the Samaj called on him to conduct a service, he would never refuse. Opportunity for religious thought and exposition was very dear to him. His power as a preacher and his gift for public prayer must have been very considerable. Gokhale's testimony was that he had never heard anything richer than some of Ranade's sermons, and Mrs. Ranade declared that as soon as the flow of her husband's love-laden and soothing voice began, the deeps of her heart would well-up, her mind would become intent, and in a movement worldly sorrow would be forgotten and hope and faith would find an entrance. Sometimes, she further declared, we really felt as if we were experiencing the very bliss of heaven and, moreover, the bright religious thoughts awakened in us would live in our minds long after the service was over.


14. See Mrs. Ranade's Introduction to the Collection of her husband's sermons entitled, Dharmpar Viakh-Khanal.
Since Ranade was instrumental in religious reform in this period, it is essential to have a picture of his basic religious beliefs. As a preacher he avoided the dulness of too much abstraction. He tried to make his addresses edifying, profitable for life's everyday difficulties and problems. He used to go to the Bible for his texts but after coming to Bombay he generally based his sermons on the Eknathi Bhagvat, Tukaram, Dnyaneswar, Namdev, Ramdas, the Bhagavadgita, or the Upanishads. He was censured by Hindu papers for making use of the Bible and, on the other hand, Christian papers and his fellow-Samajists found fault with some of his actions as being inconsistent with his professed Theism. He was, for example, criticised for going to the Thakurdwar temple to deliver addresses on Tukaram, Eknath, and Ramdas, and for going like a pilgrim to Pandharpur and Alandi. But Ranade was willing to go to an idolatrous temple or anywhere else, where he would get a chance of explaining his ideas. "Mr. Ranade", says Gokhale, "thought that the discourses were everything - the place were they were delivered was nothing. He wanted his ideas to reach his countrymen and he had no objection to going wherever they were assembled, provided he got an opportunity to speak to them".  

Ranade was a theologian - as was inevitable for a man possessing his richness of inner religious life and his keenness of intellect. He was a convinced Theist. In his "Philosophy of Indian Theism", he vigorously propounds the Theistic interpretation of the universe as against materialism, egoism, pantheism, and agnosticism. We can find no trace of any important changes or development in his religious thought. His position is substantially the same in his "Theist's Confession of Faith" written in 1872, in his "Review of Dadoba Pandurang's Reflections on the Works of Swedenborg" written in 1879, and in his "Philosophy of Indian Theism" which he wrote in 1896. Realising the limitations of the human intellect, he is not distressed by the discovery that certain problems - such as those of the origin of the world and man, the relation between mind and matter - are insoluble. Nor is he embarrassed when he has to acknowledge that on many other matter - such as the origin of physical and moral evil, the imperfect liberty that man has, and the question of the pre-existence of the soul and its precise destination - we must be involved in perplexing doubts that cannot be set at rest. His practical cast of mind leaves him undisturbed in the presence of insoluble problems that are merely speculative, and as

regards matters that have a direct bearing upon life and conduct, he holds, like Kant and Butler, that we can have a strong moral conviction which is sufficient for the purposes of life and eternity. In religion, to use Browning's words, we have a "reach that exceeds our grasp" and many of our deepest tenets are incapable of explicit proof. "All the proof we can attain to in religious matters", he says, "is that of practical moral conviction". We may have certitude, even though we cannot have demonstration. "It is just possible that practical or moral conviction is all that is needed and therefore attainable by the human mind in its search after the Absolute, and in that case the demand for logical proof may itself be an unreasonable demand."  

One feels in Ranade's theology the presence of a strong element of the Will to believe. He shows a pragmatic readiness to accept the goodness of the results as a proof that an idea is true. He is ready to let the practical consequences have the last word, as when he says:

"Belief in the moral government of a Perfect Being, and in the immortality of the soul have made civilized man what is at present found to

17. "Philosophy of Indian Theism", P.15. The page reference in the case of the "Philosophy of Indian Theism" and "A Theist's Confession Of Faith" are to the volume entitled Religious And Social Reform.
be, and whatever may be the case with a few
great thinkers, mankind generally can only be
saved by this saving faith."^{18}

Ranade's approach to the problems of religion and society
was rational, but he was not a blind follower of Western
ways or an uncritical admirer of Western thought. He took
pride in belonging to the Hindu faith and regarded himself a
devout lover of the Bhagavata Dharma. He had freed his mind
from all narrowness and from beliefs which could not be
justified by reason. He condemned the isolationism and
exclusiveness of the Hindus and asked that they should
embrace the whole of mankind with open arms. He exhorted
them to give up asceticism and contempt of the world, to
exert themselves to fulfil their duties in society, to
abandon the complacency which possession engenders, and to
strive for progress and development. For, in discussing
measures for the reform of outward conditions, Ranade is
constantly recurring to the importance of what we might
call "inward personal religion". In an address delivered
at the Hislop College during the Nagpur Conference of 1891,
he is reported as having said:

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^{18}. "Note on Selby's Published Notes On Lectures on
"Some there were who thought that when they were asked to lend their support to reform, there was some objective reality outside themselves that they had to deal with. There was no such thing. The thing to be reformed was their own self, heart and head and soul, their own prejudices were to be removed, their superstitions to be eradicated, their courage to be strengthened, their weakness to be conquered, in fact their character to be formed again so as to suit the times, so as to fit with the spirit of the age".19

Hinduism was the chosen faith of Ranade, but it was a Hinduism purified of the excrescences and reinterpreted in the light of modern theistic philosophy. Ranade rejected the mystic pantheistic exposition of Hindu Vedantic philosophy by Sankara and approved the theistic interpretation of Ramanuja, the Vaishnavas, and the medieval Maratha Saints. He said: "They have attained to a higher and truer conception of Theism than any of the other prevailing systems."20 He looked upon the "Bhakti Movement" as truly theistic and not at all idolatrous. He recognised that religious truth did not possess the validity of logical demonstration but of intuitional certitude, just as faith in the truths of science was based on the belief in the

continuity and uniformity natural laws and not on logical
deductions. The way in which he argued in favour of Theism
suggests that he had studied European philosophers on the
problem, but it is doubtful if he had fully grasped the
subtleties of their cosmological, teleological and
ontological arguments, proofs and refutations. 21

The fullest exposition of Ranade's philosophy of
Indian social change appeared in his discussions of the
historical movement for theistic Protestantism within
Hinduism. 22 While holding the view that the theistic
movement in the India of his day was the embodiment of the
modern spirit working within Hinduism, Ranade pointed out
that in fact theism had an early origin in India, and was
for centuries enriched by the teachings of the Bhakti
saints. "The movement is older than modern India", he said,
"and it is not confined to the English educated classes in
the towns. Its roots lie deep in our history ...." 23 In
the evolution of the Hindu religion, as in other faiths,
according to Ranade, the process always worked towards
higher forms, of which worship of a monotheistic personal
God was the highest. In that development Hinduism freely

21. Thara Chand: History Of The Freedom Movement In
India, Volume II, P. 401.
22. In particular, his addresses, "The Philosophy Of
Indian Theism", Raja R. Mohan Roy', And
"Hindu Protestantism", In Religious And
Social Reform.
23. IBID.: P. 205.
assimilated ideas from other faiths, yet despite the "Convergence of historical faiths actively at work", it never lost its uniqueness. Historical precedent thus confirmed the value of accepting new ideas into the body of Hindu thought Buddhism and Islam had introduced worthy amendments and additions to the catholic conceptions of Hindus, and Christianity was beginning to do so:

"The power of organization, active hatred of sin, and indignation against wrong-doing in place of indifference, a correct sense of the dignity of man and women, active philanthropy and a feeling of fraternity, freedom of thought and action, these are Christian virtues which have to be incorporated into the national character, and this work is actively going on in all parts of the country." 24

The continuity of religious growth and progress, with their social counterparts, was Ranade's most important message. For him, Rammohun Roy was not a revolutionary, but a recent exponent of the historical forces always at work in Hindu religion and society. "The members of the Brahma Samaj", he said, "can claim a long ancestry, as old as any of the sects prevailing in the country. The Brahma movement was not first brought into existence in 1828 ...." 25 The "Samaj

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movement" was "only a faint reflection and a humble off-shoot" of the two thousand years of progress in religious thought brought about by a series of protestant movements within Hinduism, the last of which, before modern times, was the Bhakti movement.

Thus, Ranade's conviction that the core of true religion is found in a moral and personal relation between the soul and God, is reflected in the zest with which he traces the parallel between the Protestant Reformation in Europe and the work of the saints and prophets of Maharashtra. The Protestants' protest against the authority of the priest, and against monasticism, and celibacy, he compares with the protest against the tyranny of Caste and against an unspiritual reliance on self-mortification, fasts, penances, and pilgrimages. The protest against image-worship and saintworship is paralleled by the condemnation in theory and practice of polytheistic worship. The liberation from the shackles of Scholasticism and the Latin language is paralleled by the liberation from the dominance of Sanskrit. And he shows how, in both the reform movements, supreme emphasis is placed upon love and faith for the soul's acceptance with God.

26. IBID.: P. 199.
A man of religion above everything else - that was Ranade and this phase of his character influenced all his activity. He more than fulfilled Gandhiji's definition of a man of religion. Gandhiji said: "A man who leads a dedicated life, who is simple in habits, who is the very image of truth, who is full of humanity, who calls nothing his own - such a man is a man of religion, whether he himself is or not conscious of it". Agarkar or Gokhale fulfilled Gandhiji's tests, but Ranade's qualifications actually exceeded the requirements. He was an incorrigible theist! In Ranade's scheme, thought man is not freed from the authority of God, the conceptions of God and Religion are so recast that religious belief is founded on conscience and an individual is freed from the tyranny of textual authorities, the infallibility of prophets and the mediation of redeemers.28

From these religious tenets followed Ranade's ideas of social reform. Since man is essentially divine and all men are equal, it is natural to conclude that human society which is the consequence of the God - implanted social instinct in man, is equally divine. Hence progress of the individual and society is moral progress, which implies the removal of those customs, institutions and modes of

behaviour which obstruct this progress, and deny the divine nature of man. With an underlying moral concern reminiscent of Keshub Chandra Sen, he asked the Conference in 1893:

"Are we or are we not conscious that many of us, under the narcotic influence of custom and usage, too often violate the feelings of our common human nature and our sense of right and wrong, stunt the growth of our higher life, and embitter the existence of many of those who depend on us ...? Are we prepared to point out any single hour of the day when we do not unconsciously commit injustice of a sort by the side of which municipal injustice is nothing, when we do not unconsciously sanction iniquities by the side of which the most oppressive tyrant's rule is mercy itself? ... We should take due care to set our house in order, as no mere whitewashing and no plastering would remove these hidden sources of our weakness. The whole existence must be renovated. The baptism of fire and not of water must be gone through by those who seek a renovation of heart such as this." 29

If Ranade was proud of the ancient Vedic religion as he understood and explained in his speeches and writings, he was equally convinced that the superstitious practices,
irrational and in human customs from which Hindu society suffered in modern days, were the "alienations from the old standards for which you cannot hold the old law-givers responsible. They are the work of human hands, concessions made to weakness, abuses substituted for the old healthier regulations". At the Twelfth Social Conference, Ranade again adopted the stern tone of moral outrage:

"All admit that we have been deformed. We have lost our stature, we are bent in a hundred places, our eyes lust after forbidden things, our ears desire to hear scandals about our neighbours, our tongues lust to taste forbidden fruit, our hands itch for another man's property, our bowels are deranged with indigestible food. We cannot walk on our feet but require stilts or crutches. This is our present social policy, and now we want this deformity to be removed ...."  

But he had sensed that the argument from history was susceptible of misuse by his opponents. He, therefore, placed the idea of reform on firmer grounds, and justified it by reason. He affirmed that "reform is really the work of liberation - liberation from the restraints imposed upon an essentially superior religion,

30. M.G. Ranade: Religious And Social Reform; P. XVI.  
law and polity institutions and customs, by our surrender to the pressure of mere brute force for selfish advancement". 32

In his address on "Revival and Reform", he stated that "it is not the outward form but the inward form, the thought and the idea which determines the outward form that has to be changed, if real reformation is desired." 33 Indeed, he was of the opinion that unless social reform was achieved in that sense, unless the individual was renovated and raised there could be no real economic or political progress. While describing him as a social reformer and also stating that was the greatest aim he set before himself, it is necessary to understand his position and its implications well. This position was succinctly stated by him when he said, at the Sixth Social Conference at Allahabad in 1892:

"The change we should seek is thus a change from constraint to freedom, from credulity to faith, from status to contract, from authority to reason, from unorganised to organised life, from bigotry to toleration, from blind fatalism to a sense of human dignity." 34

The next question for inquiry is, what are the principles on which reformation is based? According to some

32. M.G. Ranade: Religious And Social Reform, P.XIII-XIV
33. IBID.: P. 172.
34. M.G. Ranade: Miscellaneous Writings, PP. 116-7.
a change of the outward form will effect the work of reformation and remove the difficulties lying in its way. But Ranade said this way of thinking or acting was answer­able for all the prejudices that were excited in the people's mind against reform, over and above its being shallow and superficial. For what was really needed was not simply a change in the outward form, in our manners and customs, but what Ranade once again reminds us, "the inward form, the idea and thought which determines the outward form". What are the ideas and thoughts which have obstructed our social progress, made our civilization a stagnant one and brought our decline in the scale of nations? These ideas, he thus sets forth:

"Isolation, submission to outward force rather than to the voice of conscience, observation of differences between man and man based on heredity, passive acquiescence in evil or wrong-doing, and a general indifference to secular well-being, almost bordering on fatalism".  

These are the fundamental ideas of our social system. Almost all the social evils we suffer from are traceable to

35. Quoted in G.A. Mankar, A Sketch Of The Life and Works Of The Late Mr. Justice M.G. Ranade, Volume I, PP. 140-41.

these, such as the subordination of women to men, of lower castes to higher ones, the loss of our natural respect to humanity. Unless these ideas are replaced by new ones, isolation by fraternity or expansiveness, factitious caste distinctions by equality, submission to outward force or power by freedom and independence of conscience, general indifference to secular affairs, by taking an active interest in such affairs and a passive acquiescence in evil by an active hatred of sin and wrong-doing, there can be no real reform. He also points out the responsibility of the individual to his own conscience in these words:

"Great and wise men in the past or in the present, have a claim on our regards. But they must not come between us and our God - the Divine principle seated within everyone of us, high or low. It is this sense of self-respect, or rather of respect to the God in us, which has to be cultivated, and it is a tender plant which takes years and years to cultivate. But we have the capacity, and we owe it as a duty to ourselves to undertake the task."  

The weakness of the appeal to the past which he had at one time supported was realised by him and in a passage full of

37. G.A. Mankar: A Sketch Of The Life And Works Of The Late Justice M.G. Ranade, Volume I, PP.141-142.

38. M.G. Ranade: Religious And Social Reform, P. 175.
bitter sarcasm, he lashed out against the revivalists who were advocating a return to the old institutions and customs. He asked: "What shall we revive? Shall we revive the old habits of our people when the most sacred of our castes indulged in all the abominations, as we now understand them, of animal food and intoxicating drink?... Shall we revive the twelve forms of sons, or eight forms of marriage, which included capture, and recognised mixed and illegitimate intercourse? ... Shall we revive the hecatombs of animals sacrificed from year's end to year's end, in which even human-beings were not spared as propitiatory offerings to God? Shall we revive the Shakti worship of the left hand, with its indecencies and practical debaucheries? Shall we revive the Sati, and infanticide customs, or the flinging of living men into the rivers, or over rocks, or hook-swinging, or the crushing beneath the Jagannath Car?"\(^39\)

In this connection, the pertinent question was which particular period of the past should be revived. Society is a living organism in which the process of change is continuous. Usages change, institutions, laws, customs, religious concepts and beliefs have all undergone modification. "The dead and the buried or burnt are dead, buried, and burnt once for all, and the dead past cannot,\(^39\)

\(^{39}\) IBID.: PP. 170-171.
only the old has to be reshaped into a new organism, and that is social reform.

Among the reforms which he persistently advocated, the most important were the establishment of the equality of men which involved the abolition of caste and the recognition of inter-caste marriages, the prohibition of child marriage, the legalisation of the marriage of widows, the repudiation of the seclusion of women, and the promotion of women's education, the rejection of all irrational and cruel customs and all practices which degraded human beings. In short, social reform was the purification and improvement of the individual and the recasting of the family, village, tribe and nation into new moulds.

The philosophy of religion and society which Ranade propounded was deeply steeped in Western ideology. But apart from the actual concepts of theism, human equality, social freedom, anti-asceticism and activism which he adopted from the West, he owed a far more precious debt to the West in as much as his intellectual approach to the problems of the individual and society was affected by it. His attitude was objective and critical, and his method largely historical and, where necessary, deductive. His striving for reforms was based upon his faith in the idea of progress.
progress, according to him, did not mean merely an improvement in the material conditions of life nor even in knowledge, but rather in the moral and spiritual conditions. He said, at Madras, in 1898:

"is not this or that particular reform about which people have so much controversy, but the general spirit of purity, justice, equality, temperance, and mercy, which should be infused into our minds and which should illumine our hearts. Is it to be the spirit of justice, charity, mercy, toleration and appreciation of all, or is it to be exclusiveness, haughtiness, pride, cruelty and misery of all kinds? The choice lies with us and we may choose which we prefer."  

The question of method in social reform is always important and often controversial, and Ranade frequently refers to it. Four main methods were advocated and used for effecting the desired reforms and for inducing people to support them. These were (I) the traditional method, (II) the conscience method, (III) the legislation method, and (IV) the rebellion method. Ranade made use of all these except the last. The method of rebellion meant "Separating from the

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41. **Tara Chand:** History Of The Freedom Movement In India, Volume II, P. 404.

42. **C.Y. Chintamani:** Indian Social Reform, Part II, P. 109.
community", forming "another camp on a religious basis" and thereby a new social group with the characteristics of a caste. Though respectful of those who followed that course and sympathetic toward their impatience with slow, evolutionary changes, Ranade urged his followers not to forsake the Hindu tradition with the attitude that Hindu society is a "festering mass of decay and corruption" and that one's "highest duty is to separate oneself from the decaying mass and look to our own safety." 43 The second method was the method of tradition, that is to say, the method of basing reform on the old texts. The Social Conference followed this method in connection with the widow marriage agitation. As regards what we have called the conscience-method, which makes its appeal directly to the sense of right and wrong, Ranade constantly uses it. He reminds us that the voice of God is the only voice to which we are bound to listen, and tells us, "all of us cannot listen to it when we desire it, because from long neglect and dependence upon outside help, we have benumbed this faculty of conscience within us." 44 In pursuance of this method reformers strengthened themselves by taking pledges regarding female education, widow-remarriage, abstinence from alcoholic liquor, suppression of child-marriages, etc.

43. From Ranade's address At Hislop College And His Seven Social Conference Speech, Miscellaneous Writings, PP. 113, 127.

44. Address At The Amraoti Conference, 1897.
The legislation method meant the enforcement of reform either through the agency of the caste authority or through the agency of the State. This method was, Ranade said, "a constraint imposed by the wise upon the ignorant in their common interest. It has its merits as well as demerits, but it must be advocated only in those cases in which the first two have no chance of success, for it is a coercive method, which should not be resorted to until other ways have been tried."\footnote{Speech at Nagpur, 1891.}

**THE WIDOW-REMARriage**

No real uplift of women was possible without radical reforms in the marriage system. Most of the disabilities from which women suffered were due to the evils which had crept into the institution of marriage itself. If women suffered as widows, it was due to infant marriage and the denial of the right to widows to remarry, if they were illiterate, it was because they were married early, and thus their educational career was cut short, if the birth of daughters was a cause of sorrow, it was because marriage of a daughter meant the humiliation of her father at the hands of her would be husband's guardian and heavy expenses at the time of her marriage. The Hindu marriage custom had many abuses, such as polygamy, infant marriage, prohibition of
widow remarriage, unequal marriage (great disparity between the age of the bridegroom and that of the bride), heavy dowry and other ruinous marriage expenses, and restriction of marriage within the narrow circle of sub-castes.

The first expression of Ranade's mature view of Hinduism appeared in the widow-marriage controversy, which dominated the social reform movement in Bombay in the late 1860's. The Prarthana Samaj did not take the lead in this movement, although it encouraged widow-marriage among its members. Instead, individual members, including Ranade, pledged their support. For Ranade it presented a challenge to the moderation of his theistic beliefs, but more significantly the controversy catapulted him to the front ranks of reformers in Maharashtra.

The fight over remarriage was largely polemical in Bombay. Christian missionaries denounced the ban as barbarous, and Bal Shastri Jambhekar advocated remarriage in the Mumbai Darpun in the 1830's. Later Baba Padmanji, a member of the Paramahamsa Sabha who subsequently became a leading Christian, wrote two books on the subject. Organizational support for the Bengali reformers began only in the 1860's. After Keshub Chandra Sen's first visit to Bombay, Vishnu Shastri Pandit and a few friends formed the

Vidhavavivahottejaka Mandali (Widow-Remarriage Association) in 1866. Like the other reform organizations of the time in Bombay, the Mandali was predominantly a Saraswat and Chitpavan venture. But unlike the Prarthana Samaj, it made no formal distinction between member and contributor, this was a deliberate and successful attempt to attract leaders of both old and new elites. In addition to University graduates there were liberal Shastris, one or two Sardars of the Desh, and Parsi and Gujarati reformers. 47

Ranade, who had first known him when they were co-editors of Indu Prakash, soon emerged with Bhandarkar as the spokesman for the Western-educated group. Ranade was uncompromisingly dedicated to the cause, for like many others he had personal experience of the suffering of women in their own homes. Children were usually betrothed at an early age, and some child brides whose intended husbands died even before the wedding ceremonies were considered widows. Ranade's own sister, married at the age of ten, was widowed a few years later, henceforth she lived in seclusion in her father-in-law's household. She was rarely allowed even to visit her brother. 48

47. See The Two Half-Yearly Reports Of The Widow-Marriage Association, From 1st February 1869 To 30th January 1870 (Bombay, 1870) passim.

Ranade's eagerness to challenge the old order in its inner bastions was evident in his earlier writings, for he had learned in college to hold the priestly order in contempt. He wrote in one college essay:

"I know very little of Brahminical schools — either their method or their scope. Still I know this much that they are diametrically opposed to Bacon's method — and are full of the restless agitation and the dogmatic tendency which Bacon has censured. They despise that knowledge of nature which they deprive from observation as being mean and sordid. They have recourse to mental abstraction and contemplation and spun [sic] a web out of their own brains which astounds us all and is intelligible to none." 49

Yet despite such depth of hostility to "the priestly establishment", the reformers chose to challenge the orthodox view of women's rights not by reference to abstract ideals of justice and morality but by invoking the Dharmashastra itself. Announcing the attack, Vishnu Shastri asserted that the society would "take into consideration the best means of reintroducing the practice of remarriage of females of the high caste community who have or may become widows, and to advocate the cause on the authority

of the Hindu Dharma Shastra.50 The reformers thus deliberately chose to occupy the home ground of the Shastris. The orthodox party responded to the new society by forming its own group, the Hindu Dharma Vyavasthapaka Mandali (Society for the Protection of Hindu Religion), which sponsored meetings at the great temple at Thakurdwar in Bombay and elsewhere to rally support.51 When Vishnu Shastri published a Marathi translation of Vidyasagar's book in Indu Prakash in 1868, he precipitated a debate between the two sides which grew into a bitter three-year conflict. The struggle demonstrated the patterns of social power in Maharashtra and the means which were used both to defend stability and to initiate change.

Out of combined strategy and conviction the reformers portrayed themselves as only moderate reformers, eager not to dismantle the whole fabric of traditional ethics. M.M. Kunte, one of Ranade's long-time associates and secretary of the Poona Prarthana Samaj, wrote in 1870 that the Shastras "lay down rules for the guidance of society and maintenance of order, justice and purity of affections and sentiments. Their proper function is to save society from impurity and degradation, to prevent it from sinking in

50. Quoted In Masselos "Liberal Consciousness", P.265.
vice, ... to inculcate correct principles of religion, to teach proper methods of worship, and thus to regulate all the general social affairs". Kunte felt obliged to distinguish between reformers, who advocated gradual change and based their actions on "The social constitution", and revolutionaries, who "seek to turn everything upside down". The wise course of reform, he wrote, "does not hold out imaginary and celestial hopes. It is humble in its ambition and cautious in its policy. The legitimate basis of its action then is the removal of direct, positive, and definite evils in conformity with the social conservative constitution and principles." In the course of the first trial, Ranade published his interpretation of the Shastras in a pamphlet entitled "The Texts of the Hindu Law on the Lawfulness of the Re-marriage of Widows", which was widely circulated. Shortly after, his article, "Vedic Authorities for Widow Marriage", reiterated many of the same points. The two became basic texts for the reform movement, both for their specific arguments and for their broad assumptions about the worth of Indian social traditions in the modern world. He argued that some texts permitted widows to remarry under specified conditions of distress, others from different

times permitted a long list of exceptions to a general practice forbidding remarriage. It is a fine example of the moral fervour, the discreet action, and the studious research which Ranade showed in these controversies. He writes:

"The advocates of re-marriage have never maintained that a woman after her husband's death should not live a life of single devotion to her deceased husband. They freely allow that such heroic self-sacrifice to a sentiment is peculiarly meritorious. But a woman who cannot live this species of life, a woman who is widowed when a girl, before she knew who was her husband, before she knew what her duties as a wife were - surely such a women cannot practise this devotion. It is on behalf of such women that this perform is a peremptory and crying want, and to require them to live a life of devotion in the manner Manu prescribes is a simple mockery of all religion and justice."

And his summing up of his examination of the sacred texts is:

"There is thus express permission in the Vedas, express permission in the Smriti law common to all the yugas, and express permission in the special law for the Kaliyuga, and it has been

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shown that all the prohibitory texts are mostly very vague and general, and so far from abrogating, only restrict the number of contingencies when remarriage is permitted by the law. And such of them as are more particular are controlled by the Parashara text, first because it is so special, and secondly, because it is the binding authority for the age". 55

The other contribution was a paper which he wrote in 1888 for Dayaram Gidumal's book, The Status Of Woman In India. The paper was entitled "The Sastric Texts on the Subject Of Infant Marriage", and in the following year it appeared in the Sarvajanik Sabha Journal with the title of "The Sutra and Smriti Dicta on the Subject of Hindu Marriage". In that paper Ranade traces the deterioration of the status of women in Hindu society, from the time represented in the Sutra writings when late marriage was the rule and widow re-marriage was common, when monogamy held sway, when female education was approved, and woman's place in society one of freedom and dignity, - to the time when early and even infant marriage came to be insisted on in the name of religion, and the remarriage of widows condemned, and when so far as the male was concerned monogamy lost its strictness, when women were put on a level with Sudras

55. Quoted In Jame Kellock, Mahadev Ground Ranade, PP. 96-97.
in respect of exclusion from Vedic learning and performance of Vedic rites, and were condemned to life-long pupilage, first to the father, afterwards to the husband, and lastly to the son. He analysis the opinions of the Smriti writers and concludes that for girls 12 may be taken as the authoritative minimum age for marriage and 16 as the minimum age of consent (i.e., the age below which consummation of marriage is not permitted), while for boys the corresponding ages are 18 and 25 respectively. 56

THE AGE OF CONSENT BILL DEBATE

By 1880 public debate was shifting from the problem of enforced widowhood to that of child marriage, the major cause of widowhood. In many parts of India it was common practice among the upper castes to have girls married before they reached puberty. 57 There was prolonged agitation and acute discussion in which most of the celebrities of Ranade's joined while the controversy over the Age of Consent Bill lasted. It began with the publication in 1884 by B.M. Malabari, the renowned Bombay poet, journalist, and social reformer wrote two pamphlets - one on "child-marriage" and the other on "compulsory widowhood". These are known a Malabari's Notes. He was already known in

56. IBID.: P. 97.
Bombay for his outspoken social criticisms, and publication of the Notes brought Malabari instant fame in many parts of India. His argument rested on a sense of moral outrage, he appealed to the public conscience rather than to legal principles or tradition. Portraying child brides as brutally exploited by their husbands' families, he cried:

"The country cannot rise unless its millions are lifted to a higher moral atmosphere and social responsibility. And this will not happen until we have a system of heart-education side by side with headeducation."\(^{58}\)

He demanded immediate and decisive government intervention to end child marriages. When he sent copies of the Notes to many government officials and leading Indian spokesmen, he precipitated a debate over whether the government should raise the legal age of consent and what a new minimum might appropriately be. Ranade's first reaction to receiving a copy of the Notes was tentative support for legislation. In a lengthy reply to Malabari Ranade stated that there was no doubt in principle about the justification for state action: legislation on social reform was acceptable as long as it represented the most enlightened views of Indians themselves.

\(^{58}\) Quoted in D. Gidumal, B.M. Malabari, PP. 192-92.
When Malabari's Notes first appeared, Ranade and others thought that the evils of child marriage were presented in exaggeratedly lurid colors. Ranade's own awareness of how slowly Indian society was reforming itself by its own volition was sharpened by Malabari's moral perception. With the publication of "State Legislation in Social Matters" in 1885, Ranade joined Malabari in the front ranks of militant reformers. In contrast to the previous year he now contended that the evil of child marriage was widespread and insidious. A numerical survey alone could not tell the whole story, he contended, for child marriages was indirectly responsible for the sorrows of widowhood and other social evils. His general opinion on the matter is indicated in the following words:

"After making all allowances, it cannot be denied that Hindu society contrasts very unfavourably with all other civilised races in both the points noticed so prominently by Malabari. It is also not denied that early marriage leads to early consummation, and thence to the physical deterioration of the race, that it sits as a heavy weight on our rising generation, enchains their aspirations, denies them the romance and freedom of youth, cools their love of study, checks enterprise, and generally dwarfs their growth, and fills

59. IBID.: P. 192
the country with pauperism, bred of over-population by weaklings and sickly people, and
lastly that it leads in many cases to all the
horrors of early widowhood".  

Malabari's proposals involved getting Government to pass a
law laying down the minimum age at which girls might be
married, and in other ways legislating on matters
concerning Hindu marriage. He also carried his crusade
simultaneously to England, where he rallied the support of
many of the most powerful figures in the country. In 1888
his forces adopted a new tactic. One of Ranade's close
associates in the administrative work of the Social
Conference was Malabari's friend and biographer, Dayaram
Gidumal. It was Gidumal who proposed that the marriage age
be changed by a simple revision of the penal code making
twelve, not ten, the minimal legal age for consummation.  

In 1889 the government took note of Gidumal's suggestion and
began informally to reconsider the question of legislation.
(An Age of Consent Act passed by the government of India in
1860 defined the age of ten as the minimum legal age for
consummation of marriage, but the act had not been enforced.)
In support, Ranade proposed a resolution drafted by Gidumal
at the Social Conference of December 1889, which encouraged

60. Quoted In Dayaram Gidumal, The Status Of Women In
India, PP. 13-14.

61. Charles H. Heimsath: Indian Nationalism And Hindu
Social Reform, P. 161.
both government action and private efforts simultaneously. It stated that "cohabitation before the wife is twelve years old should be punishable as a criminal offence, and that every effort should be made by awakening public conscience to the grave dangers incurred to postpone the completion of marriage till the age of fourteen at least".62

Government invited the opinions of leading public men of India on Malabari's proposals. Among them were naturally Ranade and other eminent men of the day like Rao Saheb V.N. Mandlik, Justice K.T. Telang, Sir Ramesh Chunder Dutt and many others. Ranade in his personal memorandum sent to Government said that in the absence of self-regulating power in Hindu Society "The only way to secure the emancipation of the Hindu Community from this bondage of past ideas is to withdraw one by one these fetters of so called religious injunctions and turn them into civil restraints".63 He proposed State action as follows: (1) that minimum marriageable age-limits both for boys and girls should be fixed by law, not compulsory in the sense of annualling marriages contracted before attaining the said limits, but only permissive in the sense of leaving the parties concerned freedom to question the binding character

63. Quoted In T.V. Parvate, Mahadev Govind Ranade - A Biography, P. 153.
of the marriage so contracted - the age limit to be 16 to 18 for boys, and 10 to 12 for girls, subject to exceptions in particular castes and localities. (II) That Municipal and Local Boards should be empowered to certify ages and that the parties concerned should be required to obtain licences from these Boards, before marriages were solemnised. (III) That the Universities should, after a reasonable notice, confine their honours and distinctions to those who in addition to their other qualifications, submit to the condition of remaining single during their College or School course. (IV) That the Penal Code be amended so far as to declare sexual intercourse with a girl under 14 to be rape. (V) That men of 45 and upwards should be prohibited by law from marrying young virgins, so also the marriage of young men with girls older than themselves should be prohibited as being unnatural and mischievous. (VI) That a second marriage during the life-time of the first wife should be allowed only if there be in the first wife one of the defects in view of which the Sastras sanctioned such a marriage. 64

There was, however, hot opposition to the proposal, not only from the right wing of religious orthodoxy, but also from many of the social reformers themselves, and particularly from the new school of thought that was coming to vigorous life under the leadership of B.G. Tilak, not at

64. James Kellock: Mahadev Govind Ranade, PP. 84-85.
first over education or political policies but over issues of social reform. The Hinduism-in-danger cry formed the backbone of most opposition arguments, including Tilak's. But Tilak's case also brought out a point which was more difficult for the reformers to face: a people prepared and anxious to liberate themselves from foreign domination should refrain from seeking help from the alien rulers, above all, in solving their private domestic problems. It was humiliating, Tilak kept urging, morally wrong, and socially weakening to ask for legislation to curb a domestic social evil. He admitted the need to control consumption of marriages below the age of puberty (which, he felt, could not arbitrarily be set at twelve), but he contended that "education and not legislation is the proper method for eradicating the evil". 65

The question of a proper marriage age was soon displaced, through, by the question of government interference on behalf of any specific age. In Poona, Tilak immediately appeared as the defender of Hinduism against intrusions by an alien, despotic power. In the summer of 1884 he published a detailed defence against outside interference. He opened with a barbed reference to Ranade's second marriage and a plea for more Karsondas Muljis and Vishnu Shastri Pandit, who would bring forth social changes

by their own courageous example. This point was central for the moral fiber of society: men like Ranade who failed to embody their marriage ideals had no right to lead society. Furthermore, the reformers' claim to speak for the public was invalid, since the great majority of Hindus did not even understand Ranade's position, much less sympathize with him. The population as a whole was in no way prepared for reform. "They are in the fullest conviction that when they marry their children at an early age, they perform one of their solemn duties, enjoined by custom and by religion, and that there could arise no evil from such performance." 

Tilak had come to the conclusion that the root necessary was political liberty, and that this end should be pursued to the exclusion, if necessary, of everything else and he felt that by all means the independence, confidence, and pride of nationality must be fostered among the Indians. He felt that the social reformers were too deeply tinctured with Western ideas, and that their criticism and denunciation of national institutions and national customs would tend to the disintegration of the nation. At first he was not altogether hostile, though he thought that the masses were not prepared for general legislation. He proposed that those who approved of the reforms should bind

66. Mahratta: August 8, 1884.
67. IBID.: December 14, 1884, PP. 1-2.
themselves to carry them out, and that the legislation should apply to the reformers alone and not the masses. A meeting was held to discuss his idea, but it did not find acceptance, as Ranade showed from an analysis of the position, as revealed by the Reform Societies' reports, how futile, owing to the variety of opinion, such a procedure would be. Tilak's attitude stiffened into one of hostility. He strongly criticised the Social Conference in a letter published in the Bombay Gazette - to which Ranade fully replied.

Tilak's associate, G.V. Kanitkar, wrote to Ranade opposing legislation on the basis of Mill's principle that government should never interfere where individuals could work more effectively, a principle which Ranade had invoked in other contexts. Ranade replied that in this case the principle did not apply:

"For society with us has not passed through the stage of authority and command. The individual is not as strong to help himself and others [as in Europe] .... We are not barbarians certainly, but we are priest-ridden - we are caste-ridden. Authority is supreme in settling the smallest details of our life in all department. In such a state of society the expectation that each individual will possess sufficient independence to work out his destiny by the higher law within us is of course anticipating events by decades. In the
meanwhile we cannot afford to wait. The fringe of society may be able to help itself, but it is, after all, a fringe - and the mass is inert and spell-bound". ⁶⁸

Again we can gather the lines of Ranade's answer to Tilak's position from his lecture on "State Legislation in Social Matters" which was delivered in the year 1885:

"The State in its collective capacity represents the power, the wisdom, the mercy and charity, of its best citizens. Under these circumstances it is entirely unnecessary to distinguish alien from self-rule. The alternative to government action would be to "let us remain as we are, disorganized and demoralized, stunted and deformed, with the curse of folly and wickedness paralyzing all the healthy activities and vital energies of our social body." ⁶⁹

With regard to the fact that the Government in India is foreign one, Ranade admits that jealousy of foreign interference in social matters is not a bad sign, and says that if the interference were of foreign initiation the argument against would be irresistible.

After the Bill was passed on March 19, 1891, Tilak, through the Mahratta, called for "a grand central


organization" based on "self-preservation, self-protection, and self-support", whose main purpose would be to counteract the reformers' propaganda in England. The Mahratta charged that "we have been mischievously and shamelessly represented as a nation of savages and the Sudharaks [reformers] have shamelessly testified to it. Let these Sudharaks therefore form themselves into a separate nationality .... We ought no longer to allow to be amongst us those of our fellow-countrymen who are really our enemies but who pose as our friends. The time has come when we should divide." The organization did not materialize for another four years, but the groundwork was laid through the merging of social and political conflicts, which was precisely what the Congress had tried to avoid.

THE CONGRESS AND THE SOCIAL CONFERENCE

The original intention of Ranade and his associates who founded the Indian National Congress, 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, a secretary at the

70. Quoted from Mahratta, March 22, 1891, In Government of India, Imperial Records Department, Report on Bombay Native Papers, 1891.

71. Several accounts of the origin of the Congress cite the intentions of the leaders to consider social questions, e.g. Annie Besant: How India Wrought For Freedom, P. 7.
first Congress session, explained that because the representatives began to disperse by the third day of the sessions there was no time to discuss publicly and pass resolutions on matters of social reform, but that Raghunath Rao and Ranade gave addresses to the Congress on social questions.72

The relation of political to social advance was not a simple one. Many felt that if the Congress was to develop strength, it must concentrate on those political issues which had already elicited a united national position and leave the divisive social issues to another platform. As president of the Congress in 1886, Dadabhai Naoroji argued that the Congress was a political organization whose diverse membership could not confront the social issues which were specific to individual castes and regions. Dadabhai made clear his own commitment to social reform, stating that "It does not follow ... that the delegates here present ... are not doing their utmost to solve those complicated problems on which hinge the practical introduction of those reforms"73 N.G. Chandavarkar, one of the most zealous social reformers, reported that the Congress delegates

72. In a letter to the Times (London), March 9, 1886, Cited In Government Of Bombay, Source Material For A History Of The Freedom Movement In India, II, 22-23.

"all agreed that our primary object was union, that questions on which all felt alike ought alone to be taken up by the Congress, and by following such a course alone could we hope to unite all and make them see the necessity of social reform". 74 Almost simultaneously K.T. Telang, delivered a speech entitled "Must Social Reform Precede Political Reform"? Which provided the Congress with its most powerful justification for excluding social controversies from its debates. Telang rested his case on a contrast between the Congress' opposition on political questions and the opposition in social controversies. As political opponents:

"We have a government by a progressive nation, which is the benign mother of free nations .... on the other side, we have an ancient nation, subject to strong prejudices, not in anything like full sympathy with the new conditions now existing in the country". 75

The government was critical of the decision in the Congress to avoid social questions. Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, had originally encouraged the founding of the Congress, presuming that it would promote social causes. When the Congress emerged as an exclusively political agitation, his hopes were dashed. In a speech of 1887 he retorted:

"I cannot help expressing my regret that they should seem to consider such momentous topics [as social reform], concerning as they do the welfare of millions of their fellow - subjects, as beneath their notice". 76

However the leaders, after much careful thought, come to the conclusion that it would be better if the Congress did not make it part of its function to deal directly with the discussion of social questions. Those who felt keenly the urgency of the social problems resolved, after mature deliberation, to start a separate movements, to be called "The Indian National Social Conference". Ragunath Rao and Ranade were the moving spirits, and the first Social Conference was held at Madras, in December, 1887. It was closely related to the Congress, following it immediately, and being held in the same Mandap (i.e., marquee). The position, as Ranade once put it, was as follows:

"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 a background of common traditions, common religion, common laws and institutions and customs and perversions of such customs, which make it possible to deliberate together in spite of our differences." 77


77. M.G. Ranade: Miscellaneous Writings, P. 89.
The Congress and the Conference together made Indians feel that politically they were a united nation, and that their social arrangements were being subjected to the inspiring influences of the national spirit. Although Ranade was disappointed that the Congress refused to take direct responsibility for liberalizing Indian society, believing that the demand for political advance could be justified only on the basis of a parallel movement of social reform. He was left, then, with the task of associating his Social Conference closely but informally with the work of the Congress. As general secretary of the Social Conference from year to year, Ranade made annual introductory addresses at the Conference in which he outlined its work and character. He never failed to stress that the need for social reform was if anything even greater than the need for political advance. The Congress was unified and disciplined in its work, for:

"In the Congress we meet as citizens of one empire, subjects of one sovereign-obeying the same laws, liable to pay the same taxes, claiming the same privileges, and complaining of the same grievances." 78

Since most of the social issues of the day were local interest and the delegates to the Conference were extremely

78. IBID.: P. 116.
varied in their backgrounds, Ranade chose to leave the Conference organization in an informal state, largely dependent on his personal co-ordinating efforts. Through the Social Conference Ranade attempted to co-ordinate and encourage a loose alliance of the many and diverse organizations which were attempting some sort of social liberalization. Reluctant to exclude anyone who would join, Ranade was searching as always to rally all possible allies in the work of modernizing his society.

The associations which contributed most actively to the annual sessions of the Conference were the voluntary intercaste reforms groups which had begun to proliferate during the previous decade. In 1887 social reform associations were organized in Sind and Ahmedabad, probably as adjuncts of local branches of the Prarthana Samaj. Their example, publicized by the National Social Conference, led to the formation of similar organizations elsewhere. The associations typically required pledges of their members binding them to such vows as abstinence from alcohol, not marrying their daughter before a certain age, and support for widow-marriage and women's education. The Social Conference co-operated with individual caste associations.

The Kayastha Conference in north India, for example, had been formed to discuss the possibility of sanctioning interdining and other liberal practices among the subcastes of Kayasthas. Other conferences of individual castes or caste clusters in north India were also beginning to meet to discuss possible reforms in their caste practices, chiefly concerning the rights of women. 81

Ranade was aware that reforms undertaken by caste associations would be conservative and cautious. He warned his listeners that they "cramp and narrow the sympathies of those who belong to them, and the sphere of action is restricted within very defined limits". But under existing circumstances, in which all efforts at social reform were welcome, he believed that the caste associations "cannot fail to effect considerable change for the better in the social condition of the country, if only these separate caste movements work together for the common good". 82 A third possible ally of a conservative stripe was the more progressive native princes. Ranade's active efforts to gain the support of the princes for social reform reached back to 1870, when he joined the Bombay delegation to Baroda which tried to enlist the Gaikwad's support for

81. See the annual reports of the Social Conference. See also Dobbin, "Growth Of Urban Leadership", Ch. I, for rapid concurrent developments in Bombay.

82. M.G. Ranade: Miscellaneous Writings, PP.164-165.
widow-remarriage. Twenty years later he was able to show that the great states like Baroda and Mysore were actively working for reform. He took the change to indicate that Indian society as a whole was beginning to modernize:

"If the heart of the nation can be traced anywhere in its ancient strongholds, you will certainly see it strongly entrenched in the Native States. If any movement stirs the Native States, which are impervious to your political and industrial propaganda, that is a sign that the heart of the nation has been touched." 83

There was yet a forth and more startling potential ally in conservative society, the Shastris themselves. Through careful negotiation with the leaders of the orthodox camp, reformers like Ranade were attempting to gain their support for specific items on the reform agenda. By 1890 the campaign to curtail marriage expenses was being organized, and Ranade was able to state with pleasure that "even the Delhi Pundits found it necessary to yield to the spirit of the times by taking up the cry of the reformers against extravagant expenditure on marriage and other occasions." 84

Three years later, in 1893, he announced that the Shankaracharya of Sankeswar had pledged his support for the campaign to end excessive bride-price payments, ill-matched


84.  IBID.: P. 102.
marriages between old men and young girls, and temple prostitution.  

There were massive obstacles in the way of organizing one conference to coordinate the activities of such varied groups in society. Each type of organization had different purposes and procedures, each had different values and represented a different orientation to traditional society. Although he never admitted it publicly, the almost mechanical optimism of Ranade's social reform addresses betrayed the constant drain on his energy which this work demanded. In the effort to articulate a common set of values for all constituents of the Social Conference, Ranade saw no alternative but a middle course of encouraging each organization in its own terms. Only two lines of reform were unacceptable. The first was hollow lip-service. In a speech shortly before the 1891 Conference, he ridiculed those who agreed verbally that reforms were desirable but took no positive action. Presumably referring to Tilak and his followers, Ranade described these men as saying that:

"They should preach reform but that they should in practice only drift into reform, which means

85. IBID.: P. 128.
86. IBID.: PP. 87-88.
that we should close our eyes, shut our mouths, 
tie down our hands and feet .... Things should 
be allowed to take their own course.\(^{87}\)

Second was the method of reform by rebellion. With the Brahmo Samaj and Maharashtrian reformers like Agarkar in mind, Ranade stated that the Conference did not sanction this approach, since it meant a sharp rupture with Hindu society.\(^{88}\)

To sum up, perhaps the largest claim of Ranade to the grateful remembrance of his countrymen lies in his work in connection with the Social Reform Movement. He was the friend, philosopher and guide of the movement. He was its centre and focus. The ideas associated with social reform were no doubt older than Ranade, but it was he who gave shape and organisation to the forces working in that direction in different parts of India. He nursed the plant of social reform with the development of a mother to her child. It may almost be said that the Indian Social Conference was Ranade and vice versa. He was its secretary as long as he lived and year after year he delivered addresses on social questions, marked by wide study, deep thought and burning ardour for the betterment of his

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87. IBID.: PP. 111-112.
countrymen. In these addresses he was constantly making out, that the social evils in this country were of recent growth, that they were unknown in India's most glorious days, that the reforms advocated had the sanction of the Shastras, and that the reform movement was but part of a wider movement, directed in its manifold aspects to the purification of national life in all spheres.