CHAPTER-4

BAL GANGADHAR TILAK AS A SOCIAL REFORMIST

Whenever scholastic, theology, ritualistic ceremonialism and Sacerdotal claims have become dominant, there has appeared in history a counter. Trend towards simplicity and reform. In India also we find that at different periods of her history. Buddha, Mahavira, Kabir, Nanak, Ramananda, Raidas and others preached the simple forms of social living. In the 19th century there emerged various reform movements in India. But even in reform movements there is a tendency, sometimes to overrate the significance of the new and the unique. This generates antipathetic counter – tendency on the part of the older religious system to re-assert themselves. In Bengal, the Movement of the Brahamo Samaj become cut off from the roots of traditional social religious system. Hence, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Aurobindo strongly re-advocated the claims of comprehensive Hinduism. In Punjab, against the exaggerated social reformism and vedism of the Arya Samaj, Swami Ramatirtha (1873-1906), preached devotion to Krishna and expounded the teachings of Monistic Vedanta. In Maharashtra also, Lokamanya Tilak stood for the traditional Social system as against the westernizing tendencies of social reformers like Ranade, Telang and Agarkar.1

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was an Indian Hindu social reformer. Tilak was not a ‘‘Western Modelled’’ social reformer. Tilak was a nationalist in true sense and hence was averse to any reforms sponsored by British authorities. Social reform should come from within and should not be imposed over the people. It should be through evolutionary progress and not through social revolution which would create discord among the age old believer of Hindu religious system. On the other hand Tilak gave primary importance to political freedom over Social reforms. Social unity was more crucial to attend Political freedom. Once political freedom was achieved, the emergence of a democratic polity would pave the way for social reforms. Thus, Tilak’s views on social reform were radically, different from his contemporaries like Ranade, Gokhale, Agarkar and others. 2
One of the most important problems of India’s political life had always been the question of social reforms. Several movements that grew up in the country advocated social change and transformation.

In the early nineteenth country, the British Government took the first steps to end what they perceived to be abuses in intaian society. Thus, Sati was abolished in 1829 by Lord Bentic, widow re-marriage was legalized in 1856 and so on and so fourth. The reforming zeal of the foreign rulers, however, soon subordinated itself to Political expendiency, and the proclamation of Queen Victoria (1858) enjoined non interference with religious beliefs and practices. However, by 1858 a deep ferment had begun to agitated Hindu Society. Thanks for western education and contact, Indian reformers come forward to carry on from where the foreign government left off. The emergence of the Brahmo samaj in Bengal, the prarthana Samaj 1864 and later Phule’s Satya Shodak Samaj (1873) in Maharashtra, are witnesses to this fact. Most of these western education or western inspired reformers, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Gokhale, Ranade, Jotiba Phule. Gopal Hari Deshmukh, believed in the beneficient effects of the Raj and sought active British support to reform Hindu Society.

These reform movements like the Brahmo Smaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj and others raised a voice against social evils like Sati System, Child marriage, Widow remarriage, ban on untouchabilty etc. Raja Ram Mohan Roy sought the government’s help in introducing social reforms in India. Tilak was the main figure behind Bentinck’s Act baning the Sati System. The leaders of the Prarthana Samaj helped the British Government in passing the age of consent Act. Some nationalist leaders like justice M. G. Ranade and Gokhle helped the government in making Social laws. But Tilak was opposed the this view point. Tilak was against the intervention of the state in the social and religious life of India.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was very much disturbed by these developments, on several counts. Firstly, Tilak claimed that the reform movement was creating and inferiority complex about Hindu religion and culture secondly, Tilak saw implicit in the social reform movement, support for foreign rulers and their continued stay in India. Tilak was against reform by the British rulers for he considered them aliens, irresponsible and
people with a fundamentally different religious social background. Thirdly Tilak was perturbed by the anti-Brahminical slant and the appeal of Christianity to intellectuals that Tilak detected in reformers life Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen and Jotiba Phule. Tilak also tended to view English educated reformers as blind imitators of the west. When western civilization was first introduced to us, some of our people, argued Tilak, were so dazzled its scientific knowledge and method that the come to regarded our ancient learning as unless. Further, Tilak claimed they did not care to know that books had on the subject and much less to know what was written in them. Now although this criticism may be true of some of the 19th century elite, it certainly did not apply to the leading reformers of his day, men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhle and Bhandarkar, who were towering intellectuals, not only well versed with western learning, but also eminent Sanskrit scholars.

Reform, to Tilak’s mind, must grow from within the people. Since Tilak accepted this proposition as true, then it logically followed that attempt to coerce the community to accept them were absurd. Reform, according to Tilak, would have to be based upon the value system of the people and not on the values taught to the westernized few in an alien system of education. The answer lay, he believed, in popular education which must be initiated with an understanding of the classical values and must proceed to recreate the vitality of those values in the forms of social order. Since the classical values were thoroughly intermixed with popular religion, Tilak believed that, “religious education will first and foremost engage our attention.” In this way a new spirit will be born in India. India need not copy from some other civilization when she can rely on the spirit of her past greatness. As. D. V. Athalye has written: “The difference was this, that while Ranade was prepared, if convenient, to coquette with religious sanction to social order, Tilak insisted that there should be no divorce between the two. Tilak proceeded to take action in accordance with his conviction.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak for his views on Social reforms was more misunderstood by his contemporaries. Because of his opposition to the education of women by Christians and Age of consent, Bill Tilak was severely criticized as social reactionary. It is necessary to present briefly the background of such reforms and Tilak’s opposition to it.
The Age of Council of January 9, 1891, its main proposals were that the intercourse with a wife under 12 years of age should she do desire on attaining maturity. Tilak opposed this bill as an interference with Hindu religious beliefs and organized a raging and tearing compaign against it. In other occasion also, Tilak was branded as a reactionary. Pandit Ramabai a baptised christain established Sharada Sadan in Poona as a school for girls. But she was suspected of spreading Christianity among its students. Tilak wrote in his the Kesari "Cristain Women trying to infiltrate in our society under the cloak of female education and their supporters- however learned- would be regarded by us as enemies of the people and of Hinduism." Though there was sufficient evidence to doubt Ramabai’s bonafides, Tilak was dubbed by social reformers as an enemy of women education.

Tilak was not against social reforms. Tilak had elaborated his philosophy of social reforms in various articles contributed to the Kesari by him. But Tilak was against the intervention of the state in the social life of the people. Tilak wanted that the reform must come from the government. In 1890 Tilak said in a speech made in Poona: ‘There has been much talk about social reform the masses and if dissociate ourselves from them, reform. But we have to bear in mind that we have to reform the masses and if we dissociate ourselves from them, reform would become impossible. The outstanding example of this is the fact that though widow marriage is a desirable reform, most of the reformers do not practice it in their families. Tilak think that each one should begin reforms with himself and convert others through practice rather than by theory. Advocates of reforms should be live up to their own preaching.” For this, Tilak wanted that there should be political liberty. Tilak believed that social reforms could not precede political reforms. In this connection, Tilak differed with Mr. Agarkar. Tilak said, you can shout your social reform from the house –top, But what will you say to a peasant if Tilak comes to you and says, ‘you ask me to put my house in order. All right but where is the house? Then you will have to give him a house first; you see all our activities must lead to providing a house for the homeless. What I say is, Give the people the homes and then ask them to put them in order.” This shows that Tilak wanted that Swaraj or political freedom must come first and that everything else should be added to it later. In his own ‘Political reforms must precede and not follow social reforms. Tilak further said, ‘I do not hold that social reconstruction must be undertaken prior to political emancipation. Tilak
attach much greater importance to the latter. Without the power to shape our destiny our national regeneration cannot in my opinion, be effected and I have throughout my career tried to preach and emphasis these views. When I opposed the Age of consent bill, I did so mainly on this ground. I did not think now, that a legislature, which is not wholly responsible to the public, is competent to deal with social questions.’  

To Tilak, political rights were primary and absolutely essential. Political freedom was the supreme need of the nation. Tilak opposed the view that social reform was necessary for obtaining political liberty from the British rulers. Tilak agreed with K. T. Telang that political reform under the present circumstances, ‘Political reform is entitled to a greater share of our energies than social reform under the present circumstances.’ Political emancipation was very essential. Social questions could be solved after that. Tilak said, ‘once the political soul of India was free, the Indian councillors could decide the problem of social changes in an atmosphere of free criticism. Hence Tilak was not against social changes in the social life of the people. Tilak wanted that first the alien government should be changed then social reforms will follow automatically. So Tilak urged the people of India to fight for political rights rather than hanker after social reform. Hence to Tilak, Political liberty was primary and social reform secondary.  

Tilak strongly believed that political freedom must precede social reforms and refuted the argument that the social reformisms was the necessary antecedent for obtaining political right from Britishers. 11 Tilak argued that the British people who wrested political power from unwilling monarchs in the seventeenth century remained socially backward until the nineteenth. Ireland has almost achieved the success of social reform but it did not pave the way for political freedom. Secondly, Tilak was a nationalist, whose goal was Swaraj. But to attain Swaraj, people must unite. Any change in then existing structure of the Hindu Society would bring disruption and disunity among the people. Hence Tilak opposed social reform at that moment. Tilak also opposed any change through social legislation by the British because that would give power to the British bureaucracy to interfere in the social and religious matters of Hindu people. And Tilak never wanted that bureaucracy should be made powerful. For a nationalist like him, it was almost allergic to suggest that British Government would introduce social
reforms. On the other hand Tilak believed that political freedom would pave the way for social reforms. Social reforms should be gradual, evolutionary and voluntary, it should not be trust upon the people.12

Tilak was real social reformist. Because Tilak was opposed to untouchability. In the Ganapati celebrations to men of the lower caste were allowed to take their statues of the god Ganesha in procession along with the statues belonging to higher castes. In 19th the time to Lonavala District conference Tilak had a discussion on the problem of untouchability with V. R. Shinde of the depressed classed Mission. They agreed to offer his cooperation in his own way. The first depressed classes conference was held in Bombay near the French Bride, on 24th and 29th March, 1918. Shinde had organized this conference. The Gaikwad presided on the first day. On the second day Tilak addressed the meeting. Narain chandavarker was in the chair and he greeted Tilak. Tilak declared for untouchability should go. Tilak said that all Indian were children of the son of motherland. There could be no spiritual and moral defense of untouchability. Tilak said in thundering words:, if a God were to tolerate untouchability would not recognize him as God at all. But Tilak confessed that political activities consumed all his energies and hence in adherence to the principle division of labour he was devoting all his time to political work. Tilak wants others to take up the social work. In July, 1920 Bal Gangadhar Tilak attended a Kirtan party organized by the members of the depressed classes of Poona. Tilak was certainly conservative but Tilak did about him self to the change situation. He was opposed to marriage among the various castes but had no objection to marriage among the various sub-sections of the same caste. Tilak held that remarriage of widows was against the shastras but Tilak also held that those who were remarried did not lose their caste although they might occured a somewhat inferior position. Some of the non-Brahmas in Maharashtra especially under the leadership of the Maharaja of Kolhapur, tried to overadvertise the Brahmanistic leanings of Tilak. We have to bear in mind that social situations are changing and it will not be proper to apply the standards of Modern social egalitarianism to a leader of a traditions bound country, who has to carry behind him the vast masses, in the years 1880 to 1920. A martyr cannot and utter whatever he likes. But a leader has to act with great caution at moderation. If he wants to have a continued following among the masses for a number of years, he can only
go a few paces ahead of them. Tilak was democrat and he wanted the people to follow him. Hence he believed an organic and gradual growth in matters of social change. 13

Tilak has elaborated his philosophy of social change in various articles by him contributed to the Kesari. Tilak was not apposed to social reform as such but was hostile to a total and immediate programme of social revolution. Tilak adhered to an organic, evolutionary and spontaneous conception of social change brought about by progressive education and growing enlightenment. Any system of reforms imposed from the top under the sanction of legal punishment appeared to him mechanical and hence likely to subvert the pattern of existing life and society. Tilak did not want to disrupt the cohesiveness of the community as an evolving organism by creating section and factions on the question of social reform. His principal aim was a nationalistic upsurge and hence be Tilak was opposed to creating confusion in the mass mind by holding up before them divergent social philosophy. Tilak did not want to incorporate corrosive influences in the social body by creating schisms. Tilak felt that progressive social change should by gradually introduced but it should be under the inspiration and leadership of those who had reverence for Hindu ideals. People who had lost faith in the primacy of the spiritual principle and were more or less out caste intellectuals had no moral right to impose their ill-digested notions of social reform borrowed from a rather fragmentary acquaintance with the complexities and intricacies of western social history. Tilak wanted gradual and peaceful change in society and refused to believe that the salvation of India lay in the blind social imitation of the west. Tilak wanted progress but Tilak had sufficient apperception of what Hegel calls the Volksgeist the spirit of the people, not to rush into the blind alley of hasty social legislation conceived in utter disregard of the history and evoluation of the Hindu society. 14

Tilak wanted genuine reform and not simple imitation of western life and manners, and because Tilak believed that such reform must come from the people themselves and not from a foreign government, Tilak was led to advocated two causes which were to become his life’s work. First Tilak fought to reawaken India to her past and to base her future greatness on her past glories. Second knowing well that 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 began to think in terms of the restoration of Swaraj. The social reformers were prepared to criticize almost every thing Indian, to imitate the west in the name of improvement and to really upon the power of a foreign government to bring about this improvement. They were convinced that only by social reform would they earn political reform, that therefore social reform must preceded political reform. Tilak argued just the contrary, 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 cause creat moral social change, and therefore, self rule is necessary and the first object which must be pursued is the awakening of the people to their heritage of self rule Tilak’s approach being more realistic and founded on social moral values, he could perieve more clearly the root causes of the Indian social evils than did his social reform opponents.

Tilak felt that it was not simply the forms and practices of Indian society while had to be changed if meaningful social reforms were to be brought about. Tilak sensed that abusive social practices were the direct our growth of the ‘spirit of orthodoxy’ which filled the forms of social order and inertly resisted change. This spirit had resulted from thousand years of instability, defeat foreign overlordship, defensiveness and inflexibility. Therefore, reawakening of the true, vital, life, affirming spirit of the Indian people and civilization. Insteaded criticizing social form as the great evil, Tilak began his battle with the atrophied spirit of orthodoxy while still engaged in his battle with the westernized reforms. Tilak wrote just as old and orthodoxy opinions are one sided, so the new English educated ‘reformers’ are also one sided and dogmative. The old Sastries and Pandits do not know the new circumstance whereas the newly educated class of reformers are ignorant of the traditions and traditional philosophy of Hinduism. Therefore proper knowledge of the old traditions and philosophies must imported to the newly educated classes, and the Pandits and Sastries must be given information about the newly changed and changing circumstances. 15

Tilak was not opposed to social reforms. Tilak was opposed to social reforms by the British authorities and secondly, Tilak gave less emphasis to social reforms by the
British authorities and secondly, Tilak gave less emphasis to social reforms in comparison to political freedom. 16

Tilak was a convinced democrat. Tilak was confident that once political freedom is achieved, social reform will follow it and not vice-versa. While lamenting over the miseries of the people under British rule Tilak wrote “only on remedy can cure the people of India. This remedy is political power. The Indian industry will not develop, without it we would not be abide to give our youth the education it really needs. Without first settling the question of political power we can secure neither social reforms nor material welfare for the people.” 17

Tilak said that he was not opposed to social reforms as such but he had doubts about the intentions and methodology of the advocates of reforms. His objections were mainly (i) Any reformism driven by western rationalistic-secular world view can not have a correct perspective of our social institutions and practices. As Tilak put it, we do not want to anglicize our institutions and so to denationalize them in the name of social and political reforms. (ii) People seeking liberation from an alien government should refrain from seeking their support in solving social questions. It is morally wrong and socially enervating to try to cleanse our social system through the support of a foreign government and not through our own judgment and resolve. (iii) Education and not legislation is the proper method of eradication social evils. 18

Tilak has been considered by certain scholars to be not only orthodox, but also reactionary and bigotted. In defense of Tilak, it can certainly be said that Tilak was not opposed to reforms as such but to reformers who strengthened foreign rule and created a sense of inferiority complex among Indians Tilak held that freedom was the key to all reforms and that controversial pursuits would only weaken the will for freedom. Further, reforms themselves and in their families. Tilak wanted reformers to convert others through practice, rather than by theory. Now although these arguments forwarded by Tilak are well taken, we must at the same time, not forget that what Tilak overlooked was the fact that the courage for an individual to practice reform can come only after prior the orizing and popularizing the idea and after obtaining government backing. A
number of instances can be cited to show that Tilak’s outlook in general, was conservative and biased in favour of preserving brahminical customs and traditions. 19

THE RAKHMABAI-DADAJI CASE (1986)

Tilak’s preference for political progress was deliberate. Tilak rightly believed that freedom would be the key to all reforms a belief that has been amply vindicated since India achieved independence. Tilak was not against social reform but he did not want to force it down the throat of a society for whose uplift it was meant. In 1890 Tilak said in a speech in Poona. There has been much talk about social reform. But Tilak have to bear in mind that we have to reform the masses and if we dissociate ourselves form them, reform would be come impossible. The outstanding example of this is the fact that though widow-marriage is a desirable reform, most of the reformers do not practice it in their families. I therefore, think that each one should begin reforms with him self and convert others through practice rather than by theory. Advocates of reforms should live up to their own preachings. Ironically, the first few years of Tilak’s public life were occupied not so much by political struggle as by the controversy over social reform. Numerous provocations for this were forthcoming form the Rakhmabai- Dadaji case in 1886 to Vedokta episode in 1901. 20 The Rakhmabai Case- who married to Dadaji at a very young age and without her consent, refused to say with her husband. Rakhmabai’s husband pleaded before the court for restitution of conjugal rights. Rakhmabai pleaded that she was married to Dadaji without her consent and therefore should not be forced to live with him. The high court overruled the first judgment which was in her favour. Tilak welcomed the high court’s verdict as upholding Hindu law and convention. In a bitter argument with Ranade (in his Marathi daily Kesari). Tilak quoted Brahminical scriptures to support his view. Quite obviously, Tilak did not care much for the human issue at stake and was denounced by progressives and reformers as opponent of women’s emancipation. 21

THE AGE OF CONSENT BILL

On 8th January 1891, the Age of consent Bill was moved in the imperial legislative council, thanks to the untiring effort reformers like Behram Malabari and
others. A movement was growing in the country for rising the age of consent for girls. B.M. Malabari Seth, a Parsi gentleman, had been making propaganda in England for the introduction of social reform in Hindu society. His idea was to bring the pressure of the Secretary of state for India on the Victory to enact into law some of his proposals. Some of the proposals of Malabari were as follows:

1) Enforcement of marital relations by a husband over his young wife below twelve years of age was to be a legal offence.

2) The wife was to be given the right to cancel her marriage performed in infancy, if after becoming a major she so liked.

3) Legal proceedings by husbands for the restitution of conjugal rights were to be disallowed.

4) A widow should continue to have proprietary rights over her first husband’s property even after her remarriage.

It was clear that these were for reaching proposals. Soon it became known that the Government of India was contemplating the amendment of section 375 of the Indian Penal code and raise the age of consent from ten years of twelve years. 22

Tilak opposed the Bill tooth and nail, claiming it to be interference with Hindu religious beliefs and customs and organized a vehement campaign against it. Dr. Bhandarkar, a Sanskrit authority and scholar and founder of the famous Bhandarkar Institute at Pune, rejected Tilak’s arguments, saying that a correct interpretation of Sanskrit text’s justified passage of the Bill. Dr. Bhandarkar’s interpretation of Sanskrit texts, strengthened the government’s hands in passing the Bill. Tilak’s final comment was that the government had finally decided to wrong with Bhandarkar than right with him. However, in all fairness to Tilak, it must be noted that while opposing the Bill. Tilak put forward his own voluntary proposals which should, to begin with, bind reformers and their families. These proposals all reformers should contribute one-tenth of their income for promoting reforms. 23

**THE PANCH HOWD EPISODE (1891)**

“The punch Houd Mission Tea-Party” incident was a very small affair in comparison to the Age of consent Bill controversy because while the latter was an all
Indian affair the former was relevant only in the context of the social history of Maharashtra. The Panch Howd episode followed soon after (Oct. 1891) in which by a quirk of fate both the reformers and their opponents were inveigled into drinking tea at a mission school by one Joshi, who gleefully published their names the next day. For a Brahmin to partake of refreshments from a Christian was considered a defilement of caste in those days. The atonement of such sin could be obtained only through a Prayaschitta, which the misdemeanants (including both Ranade the apostle of social reform and Tilak) underwent. What is noteworthy about this episode is that while Ranade meekly subjected himself to the Prayaschitta, Tilak did so only on his own terms and after vigorously fighting his case before the Shankaracharya, the highest ecclesiastical like Sardar Balasaheb Natu. Tilak’s comment on this episode strikes a balanced note: “The reformers want to bring about social reforms with a magic wand. We think that reforms can be brought about in conformity with the spirit of the times and” the environment. We all have families and want to live with society. Under these circumstances a compromise between the individual’s wishes and society’s expectations would have to be arrived at. Reforms accomplished through such compromises will alone endure. Those who only want to live according to their own individual whims should do so on a desert island. Others who want to live in society will have to follow a path of compromise.

THE PANDIT RAMABAI EPISODE

Pandit Ramabai provided another bone of contention between the reformers and the orthodox. She was a brilliant woman, hailing from an orthodox Brahmin family, who got converted to Christianity. After conversion, she embarked on a programme to educate young Hindu girls and for this purpose started the Sharada Sadan at Pune. Tilak doubted her bona fides as a pure educationist and accused her of trying to infiltrate Hindu society and spread Christianity under the guise of female education. In his writing, Tilak did not hesitate to describe her as an enemy of the people and of Hinduism. For his crusade against Ramabai, Tilak invited the wrath of all leading social reformers who described him as an enemy of women’s education. However, to be fair to Tilak, it must be noted that even Rande and Bhandarkar, two leading Brahmin reformers, were subsequently
compelled to disassociate with Ramabai because of her open prosletying activity. Ramabai, herself, later moved her institution to kedgaon and made it a part of a Christian or organization, named Mukti Sadan. But even if it be admitted that Tilak was correct in his fear about Ramabai, Tilak did show a bias when he once observed that given the paucity of funds, Tilak would prefer free education for boys only. Mr. V.R. Shinde, in his memoies, “Mazha Athavani va Anubhav” recollects how when the issue of free primary education by the Pune Municipality came up for discussion, Tilak took the platform to argue that if the lack of finance made it impossible to provide free education to all, then free education should be provided for boys only.26

THE VEDKOTA EPISODE (1901)

The Vedkota episode is chronologically of a much later date-1901 but it also shows the discriminating attitude adopted by Tilak in matters of social reform. The issue was whether to extend the privilege of vedic rites to non-Brahmins. Tilak was not against it but he opposed the compulsion on Brahmin priests:

The very principles of personal liberty would be violated if we answer the question in the affirmative. I know that every community can freely resort to Vedkota rites if it chooses, but no one can justify the forfeiture of ancient inams granted by old rulers under a different understanding. 27 Once again Tilak makes it clear, Tilak is not opposed to the reform, but it is clear that while he chooses to be sensitive to the sentiments of the orthodox, Tilak does not show equal concern to the sensitivities of the others, whether non-Brahmins, Missionaries.28

ON INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES:

In 1918, Vithalbhai Patel brought a bill in the Delhi Central Assembly to legislate inter-caste marriages. Tilak’s paper Kesari, opposed it tooth and nail. Kesari’s bias in favour of the high castes come out clearly in its view that anuloma marriages, that is marriages between high caste men and low caste women, could be allowed, but not patriloma marriages or marriages between low caste men and high caste women. What specifically angered reformers was the comparison of marriages between Aryans and non-aryans to marriages between white and Blacks. As one local non-Brahmin paper, the
Deccan Ryot wrote, “One immediate result of the bill is that the patriotism of our Brahmin politicians as a class has been tested and found wanting.” However, Tilak must be given credit for doing the best under the given circumstance of rigid orthodoxy that characterized Pune city in his days. Thus Tilak was bold enough to observe regarding untouchability that he would not recognize even God if he said that untouchability was ordained by him. Tilak’s own concern for obtaining political freedom first, made him take the stand that social reconstruction cannot be given priority over political emancipation. While opposing the Age of consent Bill Tilak clarified his position thus: a legislature which is not wholly responsible to the public, is incompetent to deal with social questions. However, the question that nagged reformers was slightly different, viz. can a popular legislature undertake reforms given the widespread backwardness illiteracy and dominant orthodoxy. 29

The vigorous debate between the reformers and Tilak did bring a few points clearly into focus viz, that popular education must precede and prepare the ground for acceptance of reforms, as much by the masses as by the masses as by the dominant orthodox elite: that social reforms have a better chance of acceptance in a free society that self-governing, than in a colonial society and that reforms must not undermine the general respect for one’s own past and heritage.

In the first phase Tilak represented orthodox Brahmin opinion and emerged as the leader of the Hindu community after the Hindu Muslim riots of 1893. The second phase saw Tilak emerge as a national leader, when he took a strong position on the partition of Bengal, and ended with his imprisonment in the Mandalay jail in Burma. In the third phase, beginning with his release from jail, Tilak “mellowed” and played a crucial role in forging unity between the Congress and the Muslim League in 1916. The fourth and final phase began, a little before his death, when Tilak turned his attention to the problems of the labourers and working class. Mr. Sunthankar opines that the last phase is one which scholars have not yet generally acknowledged. By way of evidence in support of the last phase, which promised much and was cut short by his death in 1920. Mr. Sunthankar relies on a speech delivered by standard biographies on Tilak, have failed to take note of. In this speech, observes Mr. Sunthankar, Tilak spoke like a Bolshevik, warning citizens
that if the labour problem continued to be neglected, dire consequences would follow. Tilak reminded his audience that in this country about fifteen million people go with only one meal a day, adding that, no other country is such a state of affairs tolerated. Capitalists were only entitled to decent rate of interest, argued Tilak, asserting that all the rest belonged to labour.

Above all his argument was that in order that the reform should be a success, it should start from the masses and should not be imposed over them. He said, the outstanding example of superficiality of reform was that though widow remarriage was a desirable reform, most of the reformers did not practice that in their own home. Tilak’s argument was that each one should begin reforms with himself and practice should be more emphasized than precepts. In fact Tilak was not a social reactionary but a social revolutionary. Tilak described social practices based on dogmas and he was more vociferous in his opposition to social orthodoxies. It is true that Tilak did not like the attitude of the social reformers. Tilak had received western education and wanted to introduce western social nations in Hindu society. They had the scoffing and ridiculing attitude towards Hindu religious codes and scriptures. Philosophically speaking, Tilak did believe that with the change in time there were bound to be changes in the interpretations of scriptures. Even new social laws were bound to be made. But so long as the majority was sticking to the teachings of the religious codes, it was not proper, according to Tilak, to deride their nations and conceptions. In Indian history it is found that social reformers have also been great saints. Nanak and Kabir were great spiritual souls. But the modern self-styled reformers, who were at best westernized intellectuals and, some of whom even did not hesitate to bask in the sunshine of bureaucratic favours, had no moral right to sit in judgment upon the social codes which according to the Hindu cultural orientation, were associated with religion. The social reformers had purely socialistic nations of social reforms conceived in the western faction. They were social positivists believing in the judgment of enlightened political authority in the social and moral spheres. Tilak was a conservative historicist believing in the graduals evoluation of the social consciousness. Tilak accepted the need of social change and reform but these should be carried on under the leadership of men of eminent moral and spiritual character living as the embodiment of the Hindu way of life and not by mere intellectuals pouring the vials of their wrath on
the contemporary society in newspapers. Hence, it is clear that Tilak’s hostile attitudes to social reform was dictated by his comprehensive conception of politics and culture. Tilak wanted social reform but opposed only the use of the state machinery to bring about social, and more so because this machinery was controlled by a foreign government.
REFERENCE

10) Ibid. P-137.