Political ideas of B.G. Tilak: colonialism, self and Hindu nationalism

Oak, A.

2. Tilak, Kesari-Mahratta and the Birth of Indian National Congress: 1881-1891

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to trace the origin of B. G. Tilak's political career. The period under consideration- from 1881 to 1891- is marked by the establishment of *Kesari* and *Mahratta*- two newspapers edited and eventually owned by Tilak- and ends with Tilak's rise as a formidable voice representing a radical approach to political reforms and a conservative approach to social reform. The period is significant for the extraordinary debates taking place in the Indian public sphere, giving it a secular-rational as well as Hindu majoritarian shape. This chapter offers a historical background to the debates around the Age of Consent Bill (discussed in the next chapter) and Tilak's rise as a formidable Hindu nationalist leader from within the Congress' fold.

This chapter will provide the historical background to Tilak's rise in the regional politics of western India. The chapter is divided into two parts. I will begin by providing a brief background to the rise of colonialism in Western India in early 19th century. Colonial state established various educational and political institutions. Indians responded by absorbing various tenets of colonial modernity through vernacular press and socio-religious public institutions. I differentiate between the colonised responses to colonial modernity residing in or inspired by the cosmopolitan culture of Bombay-city as opposed to peculiar rejoinder from Pune, the latter being the home-town of Tilak. The second part of the chapter will trace Tilak's early politics- his debates and disagreements with Pune-based intellectuals and social reformers- and his assessment of British colonial state as well as the INC.

2.2 The Setting: Colonial Maharashtra during the 19th century

History of modern western India begins with the demise of the Peshwa dynasty. On 3rd June, 1818, the Peshwa ruler Bajirao II surrendered to John Malcolm (who would be appointed as the Governor of Bombay in 1827) and put an end to the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-18). The Governor-General of India Lord Hastings and Peshwa Bajirao II reached an agreement which forbade Bajirao II to continue to rule over the Maratha Empire. Following the terms of

the treaty Bajirao II was stripped of his title and the Maharaja of Satara- Pratap Singh- was reinstated as the titular ruler. Bajirao II was sent into exile. He chose the town of Bithur near Kanpur in North India to spend his remaining years where he died on 28th January, 1851 while still under house-arrest (Sardesai 1948).

Immediately following the demise of the Peshwa dynasty the newly appointed Governor of Bombay Presidency Lord Mount Stuart Elphinstone, a self-proclaimed disciple of Edmund Burke and a Tory Conservative, took over the reins of administration of the region. He promoted modern education amongst the colonised by placing it on an equal footing with 'protection of sovereignty' and 'imparting justice' (Basu 1952: 210). However, Elphinstone, having spent few years as a Regent at the Peshwa Court, was also aware of the extraordinary influence of the Brahmin community in western India. The Citpāvana branch of Brahmins represented the most powerful social group in pre-colonial western India. During the 18th century, under the tutelage of the Peshwa rulers the Citpāvana Brahmins came to acquire key administrative posts and were endowed with substantial land grants (Kumar 1968a). Therefore, Elphinstone deemed it important to appease this social group and continued with the Peshwa practice of granting annual dakṣiṇā to the Brahmins. Unlike the strong backlash from the Bengali upper-castes in the aftermath of abolition of Sati-practice (1829), Elphinstone's policy of appeasement of the Citpāvana lobby by maintaining a policy of non-interference in their religious matters helped in stabilising the British control over Bombay Presidency (Ballhatchet 1957). It resulted into rapid influx of European ideas and cultural discourse in the region. The ensuing modernity led to the rise of a modern public sphere. The colonial state, through its legal channels, played no small role in ensuring that the colonised were sufficiently modernised. The trajectory of institutionalising modernization in western India was more or less a replica of similar processes undertaken in other parts of British India.

From the birth of 'Bombay Native School Book and School Society' (1822, later renamed as 'Bombay Native Education Society' in 1825) to the establishment of Bombay University (1857) (Naregal 2001: 23, note 12) Bombay City experienced its first phase of an "intellectual renaissance" (Naik 1995: 61). The Bombay Native Education Society controlled the Elphinstone College (built in 1835) which became a prominent centre for pre-University education in Bombay throughout the 19th century. Bombay's intelligentsia enthusiastically participated in adopting European ideas and institutional practices. A Gujarati-language

weekly called the *Bombay Samachar* was started in 1822. It was followed by the first Anglo-Marathi newspaper called *Bombay Durpan* (1832) under the editorship of the maverick Bal-śāstrī Jambhekar (1812-1846). With the passing of the Vernacular Press Act (1835) Bombay city produced many short-lived newspapers, magazines and journals (Padhye 1976)[9].

Bombay city was also home to many Christian evangelists who, as guardians and ideologues of British imperialism (Armitage 2000), embarked upon proselytization activities from the early 19th century[10] (Numark 2011). Thus, the Christian evangelicals were at the forefront in establishing British Imperial activities in India only to be replaced by Utilitarian and Liberal thinkers in successive decades (Metcalf 1995; Mehta 1999). Armed with Orientalist re-construction of Hinduism and institutional access provided by the 'Bombay Bible Society' (1813) and the 'American Mahratta Mission' (1813), Reverend John Wilson viciously attacked Hindu and Parsi customs and religious ideas during the 1820s and 1830s. The conversion of a Parsi named Dhanjibhai Nauroji (in 1839) and a Hindu Brahmin named Shripat Sheshadri (in 1843) resulted in an extraordinary uproar against proselytization from the orthodox Hindu community of Bombay (Palsetia 2006). A Hindu sanātanī named Vishnubawa Brahmachari took upon himself to oppose rising Christian influence. He challenged Christian evangelicals to public debates which were attended by hundreds of Bombay inhabitants (Sardar 1941: 77-120; Palshikar 2000). Brahmachari's ferocious polemic against Christianity was later published in a small treatise entitled *Vedokta-Dharma-Prakāśa* [1859].

Bombay city remained more or less isolated from the military upheavals and general chaos occurring in North India during the Revolt of 1857. Therefore, political consciousness emerging in Bombay in the latter half of the 19th century was distinct from its north Indian counter-part. Bombay's early political activism was pioneered by two organizations- the 'Young Bombay' (1828-58) (formed along the lines of 'Young Bengal' established by Henry Louis Derozio) and the 'Bombay Association' (1852, but revived between 1867 and 1872). Members of these organizations belonged to the Hindu upper castes and were thoroughly educated in English language, mannerisms and customs. Their political activities included hosting discussion forums and sending petitions to Bombay government suggesting minor changes in its policies. Their impact on the general population was rather negligible (Ramanna 1992). A decade later some University-graduates took to public activities. Inspired by the social reform movement in Bengal and the lectures on religion delivered by the renowned

Brahmo Samajist Keshub Chandra Sen in March-April 1864[11] these University-graduates established 'Prārthanā Samāj' on 31st March, 1867 (Vaidya 1927: 31-34; Heimsath 1964: 105-06; Dobbin 1972: 249-50)[12].

Since the middle of the 19th century, Bombay-city began expanding into an industrial hub and a thriving urban metropolis. Demand of cotton in global markets was punctured by the American Civil War, resulting into a boom in textile-manufacturing in Bombay (Chandavarkar 1994: 23). Bombay's population exploded from approximately 200,000 in the late 18th century to almost a million by the end of the 19th century (Kosambi 1995b: 7). The city's social structure and urban landscape was classified along class and caste lines (Chandavarkar 2009). Although Bombay-city continued to play an important role in Indian nationalist movement, by the third quarter of the 19th century the mantel of Maharashtra's political and intellectual leadership was passed to the town of Pune and its upper-caste intelligentsia.

Surrounded by the forts sieged by the Maratha ruler Shivaji in the 17th century and in close proximity with villages such as Dehu and Alandi (traditional pilgrimage centres for the Vaiṣṇava- Vārkarī sect) Pune (or Poona), located 150 miles south of Bombay-city, was the political and administrative capital of the Peshwa dynasty (1740-1818) (Parasnis 1921). The citadel named Shanivar-Wada, built by the first Peshwa Balaji Bajirao-I in 1730, symbolised Maratha political-military dominance and the might of Brahmin rulers over the Indian sub-continent.

Pune and the surrounding towns such as Satara and Wai had a long history of imparting traditional Sanskrit education through Vedic pāthaśāḷās. The Hindu śāstrī community had contributed to a large corpus of Sanskrit commentaries on Vedas, Grammar and Lexicography (Vyākaraṇa), Dharmaśāstras, Mathematics and Astronomy, Poetics and Darśanas in pre-colonial period (circa. 8th century- 18th century) (Dandekar 1972). The advent of British education system did not radically alter the 'life-world' of Sanskrit teachers and their disciples. In 1832, of the 222 schools in Pune 164 imparted Vedic learning while the rest instructed in secular education through Marathi medium (Deshpande 2015a). Brahmins, especially those trained in Western sciences and graduating from the Deccan College, took the lead in reinterpreting ancient Vedic and post-Vedic Hindu traditions (Paddayya 2000-01). Thus, educational activities in Pune continued to be dominated by the Brahminical teachings focused on Sanskrit learning (Masselos 1974: 23).

2.3 The Colonial state and Crisis in Western India: Agrarian Distress and Suppression of Vernacular Press, 1874-1880

The agrarian structure of Western India and the larger Deccan plateau witnessed slow degradation during the latter half of the 19th century. Rapid expansion of agriculture could not retain good quality arable land adversely affecting cattle population (Kaiwar 1992). However, the Bombay State department continued to draw about 40 per cent of its revenue from the agriculture sector till 1900 (Charlesworth 1982: 66). The agrarian crisis was exacerbated by the exploitative moneylenders (Sāvakāra) who acted as landlords (known as khot in Konkan and kuḷakarṇī in the Deccan region) and usurped land holdings.

The situation of the Deccan peasantry further deteriorated due to scanty rainfall during the first half of 1870s prompting a series of riots in Pune and Ahmednagar in 1873-74. Sārvajanika Sabhā's call for 'no taxation' received lukewarm response from peasants, partly because, it refused to acknowledge the exploitative role played by the money-lenders. Consequently, the Deccan peasants revolted against the colonial state and local money-lenders in 1875. The riots were ruthlessly crushed by the Bombay-government (Bagchi 1992).

Triggered by the government atrocities in the face of famine and draught (1875-76) and its refusal to remit taxes, Vasudeo Balwant Phadke spearheaded another uprising in 1879. In a pamphlet, widely circulated amongst peasants and middle-classes of Pune district, Phadke identified rich moneylenders and British colonial bureaucrats as his main targets. The latter were held responsible for the agrarian distress and wide-spread famine. Phadke vowed to repeat the events of 1857 and kill all British officers and liberate the country from foreign yolk. Phadke's rebellion was cut short when he was captured on 20th July, 1879 and later imprisoned for life. He died on 17th February, 1883 while serving at Aden (Phadke 1989: 31-34). The Deccan peasant uprisings found support in Bengal (especially the *Amrit Bazaar Patrika*) and other provinces where local newspapers carried numerous articles criticising the British policies. Phadke's uprising inspired Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the great Bengali novelist, to write his novel *Anandmath* [1882].

Gauging from the role played by local vernacular newspapers in fomenting mass discontent against the British administration Lord Lytton, the new Conservative Viceroy, passed the

Vernacular Press Act in 1878. The Act was rigorous and carried harsh punitive measures. It armed the District Magistrate and Police Commissioner with plenipotentiary powers. They could call upon any newspaper's editor/proprietor to enter into a bond, demand security and prohibit them from publishing such material found to be 'anti-government'. If found in violation of the bond, the District Magistrate/Police was expected to confiscate all printed material and put the printing press under lock and key. The vernacular press owners/editors could not, in such an event, take recourse judicial adjudication (Natarajan 2017: 109). The Press Act drew maximum opposition from Bengal and Bombay Provinces. The Sārvajanika Sabhā, for instance, organised a public meeting on 2nd May, 1878 denouncing the Act for its severity, and unjust nature threatening to curtail constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression and material progress (Tucker 1969: 342). The Bombay-Governor Sir Richard Temple and Lord Lytton blamed the 'educated Poona Brahmins' and 'peasant dacoits' for rising hostility (Gopal 1965: 119-20).

The British Parliament was vehemently debating upon the Famine Relief measures as well the Vernacular Press Act with the leader of the Liberal Party, William Gladstone, raising serious concerns about the Conservative Party's rule over India. His views reverberated in Bengal (Second Townhall Meeting 1878). Conservative Party lost elections to the Liberals and Lord Ripon replaced Lord Lytton as India's new Viceroy in 1880. Under strict instructions from Gladstone, he immediately repealed the Vernacular Press Act.

Events such as the peasants' uprising and popular agitation against the draconian Press Act inspired a younger generation of activists. Tilak, during this period, was studying at Deccan college. The college, renowned for classical Indology and Sanskrit studies was no stranger to political debates and discussions. An eye-witness testimony by a Russian traveller makes it clear that the peasant uprising and Phadke's nationalist sentiment was shared by the pupils studying at the premier institute (Minayeff 1955: 52).

2.4 Bombay Liberals' Critique of the Colonial state: Naoroji, Ranade and Telang

Dadabhai Naoroji was among the earliest liberal nationalists who openly criticised the British imperial policies. While Naoroji- a Bombay merchant- spent much of his political career in

England (from 1855 to 1907 as Liberal MP) his writings and speeches were avidly read in India. Naoroji's greatest contribution to Indian nationalism was his 'drain-of-wealth theory', presented to the British and Indian public throughout 1860s and 1870s (Naoroji 1887). Naoroji argued for a symmetric relationship between the British metropolis and its imperial-colonised subjects, which would provide the latter adequate means for self-reliance and progress (Visana 2016).

Naoroji's critique of the liberal political economy and the "evil" perpetrated through British policies regarding India (Naoroji 1887: 245) was shared by his peers as well. Justice Kashinath Trimbak Telang, the Bombay-based jurist, rejected economic model of laissez-faire since it perpetrated unequal trade relations and distribution of resources between the colonial metropolis and its colonies. Following the experiences of the Deccan famine Telang argued, in a paper entitled 'Free Trade and Protection from an Indian Point of View' [1877] (Telang 1916a), that the government of British India should not cease to levy tariffs on imported goods. Such 'protectionist' measures would prevent further cess imposed upon the peasants and small-industrial proprietors. In an interesting reversal of the free-trade doctrinaires' thesis Telang argued that it was useless to apply universal principles of liberty to a colonial region. Due to absence of economic liberty any talk on political liberty, espoused by British liberalism, was utterly useless. Therefore, industrial empowerment of Indians had to be taken up on a priority basis. Only a self-reliant and 'developed' India could enter into a free-trade agreement with Britain (Telang 1916a; Chandra 2010: 646-50). Nevertheless, his advocacy of protectionism for India did not translate into a forceful demand for political autonomy and his role in the INC remained, at best, politically moderate (Bayly 2011: 189-194).

M. G. Ranade, one of founding members of the Sārvajanika Sabhā and the INC, was inarguably the chief leader of the Pune-based social reform movement. While local chieftains (*sardars*), members of business communities and retired civil servants joined the Sārvajanika Sabhā, its most active members included Brahmins such as Ganesh Vasudev Joshi, S. H. Sathe and S. H. Chiploonkar (Mehrotra 1969). The Sārvajanika Sabhā propagated the use of indigenous goods (Swadeshi) in western India and encouraged the sale of locally-manufactured soaps, textiles, ink, candles, etc. (Mehrotra 1969). While the Sabhā claimed to represent all interest groups, in reality, Parsi, Muslim and non-Brahmin communities had only token representation (Tucker 1972: 73). In 1872, the Sabhā took a courageous step in demanding more representation for

the natives in the Bombay Legislative Council and reservation of at least 18 seats in the British Parliament. The petition was signed by 200,000 people but elicited no response from the government (Tucker 1972: 75-76). Over the next few years, the Sabhā also took up issues related to agrarian crisis and unfair taxation imposed on distressed peasants. The petitions and reports prepared by the Sabhā and submitted to the Bombay government helped in the enactment of the Deccan Agriculturalist Relief Act (1879).

Ranade's vision of political economy lay at the foundation of Sabhā 's work amongst the rural peasant classes. Through reports such *Material Conditions in Maharashtra District* [1872], *Famine Administration in the Bombay Presidency* [1872] and *Revenue Manual of the British Empire in India* [1877] and articles published in the *Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sārvajanika Sabhā* Ranade criticised the colonial state's negligence of agrarian distress. Deriving his ideas from Friedrich List, Ranade argued for a state-driven developmental outlook (Goswami 2004: 210-224). Therefore, Ranade, much like Telang, was opposed to free-trade between Britain and India since it resulted into ruralisation, deindustrialisation and denationalisation of India's economy.

While public intellectuals such as Naoroji, Telang and Ranade provoked an anti-imperialist sentiment amongst the educated elites of western India they were also equally invested in the social reform program. The colonial state, which claimed heritage to a long tradition of modern values of freedom and equality from the post-Restoration period, was believed to be inherently 'compassionate' and exhibiting 'progressive outlook' towards its metropolitan and colonised subjects. As such Ranade, amongst the three leaders, was most vocal in using the colonial-modern legal machinery and Enlightenment values in 'modernising' Indian traditions. For this purpose, he joined the Prārthanā Samāj[13] in 1867. However, he found the Samāj adopting the Brahmo ideals of Christianity quite unsuitable to Indian and Marathi sentiments. Instead, he proposed theistic readings of Hinduism inspired by European Positivism.

While relief- measures undertaken by the Sārvajanika Sabhā found positive response from the inhabitants of Pune the Prārthanā Samāja faced vehement opposition from the Hindu śāstrī community. The latter had adopted a paternalistic stance towards the social reform movement, supported the radical anti-caste movement of Jotirao Phule and the widow remarriage movement. In 1875 Ranade and Mahadev Moreshwar Kunte (principal leaders of the Prārthanā Samāj) organised a lecture-series by the Ārya Samājist Dayanand Saraswati.

Ranade was hopeful that Dayanand's active opposition to caste-rigidities and idol-worship through the invocation of Vedic religion would help Maharashtra's social reform movement (Masselos 1974: 176-77). However, his lectures were not appreciated by orthodox Brahmins who indulged into a vitriolic attack in defence of the Vedic system. The debate reached a crescendo and the Śaṅkarācārya of the Karvīra-pītha was invited to adjudicate in the matter.

Apart from the śāstrī-community Ranade's liberalism and social reform agenda also found an unlikely nemesis in the form of Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar. Chiplunkar's *Nibaṅdhamālā* [1874-1882] (Chiplunkar 1917) energized the upper caste modern intellectuals of Maharashtra. Despite lacking great intelligence, Chiplunkar's strength lay in his command over Marathi language which he put to its optimum use. His writing style was 'oratorical', punctuated by surprise and wit, aggressive and often derogatory towards the adversaries. It seems that Chiplunkar was not prone to serene contemplation. Most of his energy was spent in enthusiastically ridiculing his opponents with unsubstantiated claims and garnering laughter and mirth from his readers. *Nibaṅdhamālā* (Chiplunkar 1917) carried essays on language, literature, science, biographical sketches, Hindu religion, contemporary society and culture and the art of history- writing. Thus, while he famously compared the English language with "the milk of a tigress" ("vāghinīce dūdha", my translation) he did not support British liberalism. Indian nationalism, according to him, should be built upon a strong foundation of India's ancient past and the wisdom derived from its learned Brahmin community. His criticism of the social reform movement and his attack on the non-Brahmin reformer Jotirao Phule emerged out of his firm belief that the Brahmin-Aryans were the rightful rulers of India. They alone possessed divine sanction to modernize or make changes (if necessary) to the Hindu doctrine (Phadkule 1975; Naregal 2001a; Ujgare 2010).

The ideological trajectory of the Bombay liberals and the challenge posed to it by cultural-nationalists such as Chiplunkar was keenly observed by young Tilak and his peers. Reflecting on the socio-political conditions of Maharashtra around the time of *Nibaṅdhamālā*, Tilak stated the earlier generation of scholars believed in applying western notions of modernity and progress to India. But Chiplunkar, Tilak observed, argued that each nation possesses qualities peculiar to its history, traditions and culture. As such, Chiplunkar instilled pride about native languages, culture and history. Chiplunkar attacked reformist reinterpretations of Hindu religion (largely inspired from the Western philosophical discourse) and reminded his

readers of the greatness of its orthodox (sanātanī) nature ('Kai. Viṣṇūśāstrī Cipḷūṇkara yāncyā veḷacī sthitī', *Kesari*, 19th March, 1901 and 'Kai. Viṣṇūśāstrī Cipḷūṇkara', *Kesari*, 2nd April, 1901) (Tilak 1976c: 903-918).

Thus, by the late 1870s, political aspirations coupled with cultural-ethnic nativist militant pride had taken roots in western India. Socio-cultural pride in Hindu religious superiority had to be directed towards one goal, namely, political rights for Indians. Rights were not merely "a matter of bestowal" (Chandra 2005: 109) but also had to be "desired and conceived" (Chandra 2005: 109). Educated Indians, exposed to British liberalism, were impressed with its overall insistence on freedom of thought and expression but were frustrated with the colonial state's pragmatic outlook- what was conceded in principle was weakened by common tactics of legal subterfuge. Thus, the Extremist faction of the Congress, spearheaded by Tilak and others, presented a political challenge to the growing dichotomy between 'imperial interests' and 'national interests.'

2.5 *Kesari- Mahratta* and the Birth of Indian National Congress

Chiplunkar's radicalisation of the Marathi literati and public sphere found an expression in the form of two newspapers- *Kesari* and *Mahratta*- established by Tilak and his comrades. The first issue of *Mahratta* was published on 2nd January 1881 which was followed by the first issue of *Kesari* published on 4th January 1881. Vishnu-śāstrī Chiplunkar, Vaman Shivram Apte, Mahadev Ballal Namjoshi, Dr Ganesh Krishna Garde, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar and Tilak were the founding-editors of the two newspapers. In the words of N. C. Kelkar (Tilak biographer and the future editor of *Kesari* and *Mahratta*) the editorial policy of the two newspapers was decided through discussions and deliberations and the editorial collective resembled a "[…] a capital-stock company […]" (Kelkar 2012a: 128, my translation). The name *Kesari*, which means lion in Sanskrit/Marathi languages, was suggested by Tilak (Phatak 2006: 26). *Mahratta,* in an open-letter published in its first issue declared- "Our true duty will be to interpret, petition and instruct, and advocacy may be said to form the second part of our real work" (Quoted in Kelkar 2012a: 133). The name *Mahratta*- the statement further stated- did not connote racial pride nor restricted to a region-caste. The purpose of the newspapers was to provide information about domestic and foreign affairs to its Marathi (through *Kesari*) and wider English-speaking readers (through *Mahratta*).

Writings compiled in his 'Collected Works' suggest that Tilak wrote sporadically between 1881 and 1883 and his contribution to *Kesari* was meagre[14]. A two-parts article on the cultural-historical differences between three sub-castes of Brahmins from western India ('Kokaṇastha, deśastha va kaṛhāḍe- 1 āṇi 2', *Kesari*, 11th and 25th January, 1881) (Tilak 1976c: 3-9) or responses to articles published in prominent English-language Anglo-Indian newspapers such as the Times of India (Tilak 1995: 831-836) are few examples. Tilak spent his energy in editing *Mahratta*, teaching at the New English School and running 'Preparatory' law classes free of cost. In the following year Tilak was busy setting up Fergusson College under the auspices of the Deccan Education Society [DES] where he would eventually teach mathematics. However, after an irreconcilable fall-out with Agarkar and other members of the DES, Tilak resigned. Subsequently Agarkar (who was opposed to Tilak's further association with the DES) had to forfeit his editorship of *Kesari*. From 1897 onwards, Tilak became the sole editor and proprietor of *Kesari* and *Mahratta* (Phadke 2002).

Two important events around the middle of the 1880s sparked great curiosity and discussions in the public sphere of Bombay and Pune. These two events were the publication of the *Notes on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood* [1884, hereafter *Notes*] and the establishment of the INC [1885]. The former will be explored in greater details in the following chapter. Suffice to say here that the *Notes* provided much needed inspiration for the social reform movement. The social reformists took the lead in establishing the INC. Therefore, Hindu orthodoxy and conservative leaders wondered (and feared) that the INC would end up being a powerful tool in the hands of social reformers.

While its precise ideological origins continue to be "[…] shrouded in mystery […]" (Sitaramayya 1946: 11)[15], the establishment of INC was a spectacular event in modern Indian history. *Mahratta* had carried a short note on 6th January 1884, congratulating the efforts of the Indian Association in trying to launch a nation-wide political organization and cautioned against the fate which had befallen similar attempts in the past (such as, the 'Vernacular Press Association' launched by G. V. Joshi in 1878). Calcutta was fixed as the venue for the first Congress-session. *Mahratta* wrote (6th December, 1885) – "If a central place, well-known for its public activities and intelligence be fixed upon, then there need be no apprehension of a failure. We may be pardoned for suggesting the name of this city [Poona], because we know

that this city is not behind other towns (sic)" (Source Material 1958: 6). But due to fears of cholera-infection in Pune, Bombay hosted the maiden Congress session.

Among its political demands included the need for a Royal Commission to enquire into the workings of the Indian civil administration, abolition of the Indian Council, creation of new legislative councils and allowance of election of some its members. Few other demands were concerned with civil and military expenditure and raising the age-limit of candidature for the ICS exams. The Congress also opposed the annexation of Upper-Burma and its incorporation to British Indian territory (Sitaramayya 1946: 19). For reasons unknown Tilak remained aloof from Congress' activities through its initial four years.

Early Congress was aware of the debilitating economic conditions forced upon the India and, especially, its peasantry. However, it worked along the perceived sense of fraternal bonds between the English and Indian civilisations. Various administrative, constitutional and economic issues were regularly raised in Congress sessions and placed before the British policy-makers. And yet, the Congress was deemed to be serving at the pleasure of the colonial state. Its leaders impressed upon the British colonial officers that the Congress' criticism of the British government need not be construed as seditious. Early Congress leaders, familiar with official British temperament owed their professional status and acquired wealth to the colonial state. Hence, "[…] loyalism [to the colonial state] was an obligation and a value in itself" (McLane 1988: 49). Early Congress was, thus, more interested in expanding its participation in the decision-making process of the colonial state, rather than aspiring to reshape its political institutions in order to express India's national character (McLane 1978 :89).

During its early years most of Congress representation in the Bombay Presidency came from the Citpāvana Brahmin community. For this reason, Jotirao Phule, leader of the non-Brahmins, was displeased with the Congress. Writing in his *Sārvajanīka Satya Dharmapustaka* [1890] Phule argued that since the INC was hegemonized by the "allochthonous Aryan Brahmins" (Phule 1991: 495, my translation), its claim to popular representation was completely hollow.

Amongst the Bombay liberals Ranade regarded the INC as a pan-national organisation for undertaking reform in Hindu customs and traditions. For Telang, on the other hand, the

primary reason for establishing the Congress was to further political demands of Indians. In a much-publicised speech delivered in April 1886 to the 'Students' Literary and Scientific Society' Telang justified his stance of prioritising political over social reform (Telang 1916b). According to Telang, India was ruled over by a government which represented a "[…] progressive nation […]" (Telang 1916b: 288). The colonial state had adequately showcased, through its promises and actions, that it was serious in granting greater institutional liberties to Indians. Moreover, Indians belonging to different religions, castes and creeds could unite to deal with political matters as demonstrated during the first National Congress. However, on social matters, Indian customs greatly differed and it was difficult to reach any kind of consensus (Telang 1916b: 269-99). Tilak welcomed Telang's suggestion over prioritising political over social reforms ('Ādhī konate, rājakīya kī sāmājik- 1 and 2', *Kesari*, 2nd March, 1886 and 9th March, 1886) (Tilak 1976c: 66-73). But Telang's stand created schism in the Congress ideology. After much deliberation, it was decided to bifurcate Congress' political agenda from its overall commitment to social reform. For the purposes of the latter, a separate organisation named 'Social Conference' was established, working in close proximity with the Congress (Tucker 1972: 161-62).

Tilak's views on the establishment of Congress are unknown. His first visit to a Congress session was during its fourth session held at Bombay (1889). While Tilak soon realised the potential of Congress as the sole representative of India's political demands in the British parliament he also feared that the Party might end up as an instrument for social reform. Writing a few days before the second session of the INC, Tilak suggested that the Congress should take the lead in Indian agitation for self-rule. Self-rule, he pointed out, did not mean secession from the British Empire or revolting against the British monarch. Instead, it meant carving out federal autonomy to India and allowing Indians to represent themselves in a bi-cameral legislature. Tilak pointed out that such a scheme, as devised in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, would prevent frustration of educated Indian towards the British colonial state and avoid all violent conflagration ("Hindusthānāsa svataṅtra rājyarītīcā lābha kewhā hoīla?", *Kesari*, 14th December, 1886) (Tilak 1995: 18-20).

Early Congress, however, was tip-toeing on the issue of popular agitation for popular representation. Justice Telang had recommended in the maiden Congress session (1885) that the responsibilities and powers of the provincial legislative councils be increased. He had also

requested the Congress to draw up a plan by which the government of British India could be pleaded to increase the number of elected representatives to Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils to one half and not more than one-third be government officials. The Congress, however, did not approve of such 'radical' demands. During its 1889 session Tilak proposed to the Congress that "[…] elections to the Imperial Legislature shall be made by the elected members of the Provincial Councils" rather than granting the said authority to an electoral college (INC Report 1890: 29) The proposal submitted by Tilak emerged out his "[…] sense of duty to [his] province [Bombay] […]" (INC Report1890: 28). The proposal was unanimously refuted. Part of the refusal to indulge into popular representative politics during the early years of the Congress lay with the fear shared by several of its delegates that India's common masses were incapable of ascertaining correct political choices. Therefore, the right to choose appropriate candidates had to be restricted only to those classes and communities of men (but not women) capable of exercising political wisdom (Johnson 1973 :15-16). Moreover, the early Congress was in no mood to pollute its relation with the British colonial state and its powerful bureaucracy.

2.6 Conclusion

British liberals of the late Victorian period were indebted to Whig ideals of the 18th century, which emphasized upon "[…] civil liberty, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the freedom of the press and the institutions of Parliamentary government" (Moore 1966: 1). By the late Victorian period, the notion of Pax Britannica was gradually getting challenged in favor of semi-free British colonies. The British government's 'India Policy' came under heavy criticism from British liberals. Through his speeches and writings, William Gladstone severely ridiculed the notion that India was colonized with the singular motive of 'civilizing the barbarians' and that the profits accrued by Britain was an unintended consequence. Gladstone argued that India, in fact, was proving to be a burden on England's economy and that England should instead pay more attention to its British Isles. In an article published in the journal *Nineteenth Century* he hinted at granting self-determination to India and wrote-

"[…] the question who shall have supreme rule in India is, by the laws of right and Indian question; and those laws of right are from day to day growing into laws of fact. Our title to be

there depends upon a first condition, that our being there is profitable to the Indian nations; and on a second condition that we can make them see and understand it to be profitable […]" (Gladstone quoted in Moore 1966: 23).

Gladstone was unhappy with some of the draconian measures undertaken by the previous British Viceroys to India. As mentioned earlier, the Vernacular Press Act (1878), which aimed at stifling freedom of native press, was heavily criticized by Gladstone and repealed by the new Viceroy Lord Ripon. Ripon was also interested in reforming local self-governments. He tried to devolve power to the local bodies by decentralizing few subjects within finance, education and health. He was also interested in including non-official (meaning native) members into local governments. Such liberal policies adopted by the Ripon administration were deeply appreciated by educated Indians but frowned upon by conservative British bureaucracy. Growing pressure from the British bureaucratic class forced Ripon's hand in passing the Ilbert Bill (1883). The Bill declared that, henceforth, Indian judges be prohibited from trying criminal cases which involved European-British subjects (Gopal 1965: 144- 151).

The British Premier routinely bowed under pressure from the British Unionists and Conservatives. Early Congress leaders were disinclined in criticizing Gladstone's government since they held greater hope from his liberal ideology. Tilak was unconvinced. Thus, during the Parliamentary deliberations Sir Charles Bradlaugh's suggestion of allowing non-official members of the Indian legislative Councils to be popularly elected Gladstone remained adamant. Instead, he passed on the buck to the Imperial Legislative Council of British India to make necessary amendments to the Council of India Bill (1891). Tilak wrote scathingly that "the great statesman" Gladstone had sacrificed India at the altar of the Irish Home Rule ('Īnḍiyā kāunsila bila', *Kesari*, 26th April, 1892) (Tilak 1976b: 889, my translation).

For Tilak, the primary impediment in the transference of British liberal ideals into its colonial spaces was the 'steel frame' of bureaucratic system installed in India. European 'governmental state' not only disciplined its colonial bodies but, by the late 19th century, worked as a 'sovereign power' which had amassed extraordinary power through the authority of its executive (Heath 2016). The "rule of colonial difference" in terms of racial divide marked the governing principle of the British colonial state (Chatterjee 1993a:16) which was readily absorbed by the British bureaucracy.

But Indian social reformers, many of whom were provincial leaders of Congress, were excited by the colonial state's intervention in reforming obsolete Hindu socio-religious practices. Tilak, on the other hand, feared that such governmental interventions would open the floodgates for legal scrutiny of every social custom, the latter sanctioned by religious scriptures and rigorously observed by Indians for centuries. 'Authenticity' and 'authority', hallmarks of Hindu religion, would subsequently collapse. Therefore, Tilak's agitation against the 'Age of Consent Bill', discussed in the next chapter, marked the beginning of his political career as the leader of Conservative Hindus in western India. Colonial bureaucracy, too, took notice of his rising fame amongst the younger generation of radicals.