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

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4. Tilak and the Rise of Hindu Nationalism: Public Festivals and Mass Politics in Bombay Presidency, 1891-1899

The passing of the AoC Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council and ratified by the British Parliament left an indelible mark on Tilak's political vision. Indian social reformers, especially from Maharashtra and Bengal, were quite pleased with the outcome. Tilak, on the other hand, continued to assert his opposition to the 'interventionist' colonial state and defended the autonomy of Hindu's private life-world. The period under consideration in this chapter, namely 1891 to 1899, witnessed Tilak's rise as a formidable provincial leader of INC. Riding on popular support which he had garnered during the anti- AoC Bill agitation, Tilak was able to consolidate sizable Hindu support for his radical nationalist politics. Hindu-Muslim riots occurring in Bombay city (1893) provided the raison d'être for his first mass nationalist-populist program- namely, the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals. As the Bombay province was experiencing a severe famine followed by the outbreak of bubonic plague (1896-97) Bombay government's stupendous response astounded Congress leaders and infuriated the masses. Tilak wrote several articles in *Kesari* severely criticizing the government's ill-intentioned response in mitigating the crises. The Bombay government did not appreciate the large public outcry manufactured through Tilak's newspapers and held Tilak responsible for fanning anti-government activities. He was tried at the Bombay High Court on charges of sedition in 1897. Tilak defended his criticism of the government and argued for greater freedom of expression under a self-proclaimed liberal colonial state. Tilak's articles published in *Kesari* brought in sharp focus the paradoxical nature of British colonial jurisprudence while exacerbating his on-going struggle with the colonial bureaucracy. His sedition-trial, covered extensively in *Kesari* and *Mahratta* and other vernacular and Anglo-Indian newspapers, catapulted Tilak to nation-wide fame.

In this chapter I will be charting (in a somewhat chronological fashion) the growth of Tilak as a Hindu nationalist leader. I will be focusing on the Hindu-Muslim communal riots of 1893 followed by his role in establishing the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals. These festivals, which Tilak called "national festivals" (rāṣṭrīya utsava), paved the way, arguably, for popularising Indian nationalist movement and laid the foundation of Tilak's radical politics. Tilak's growing popularity in Bombay Province helped him and his clique to, in their opinion, reorient

Congress politics away from social reform towards political action. The ensuing struggle between the old Congress guard led by stalwarts such as Phirozeshah Mehta, D. E. Wacha and M. G. Ranade were openly challenged by Tilak and his cohorts resulting into the separation of the Social Conference from Congress sessions. Reflecting on the polarized nature of Congress politics of this period in 1897, Gopal Krishna Gokhale characterized the politics of the old guard as being 'Moderate' in nature. The two opposing camps of the Congress, namely the Moderates and the Extremists, were born in the closing years of the 19th century and Tilak had played no minor role in this ideological and tactical division of India's nationalist movement.

Tilak's mass politics generated through the two public festivals- Shivaji Jayanti and Ganapati Utsav- has been exposed to scholarly analysis in recent years. Shubnam Tejani has linked the Bombay communal riots with Tilak's decision to start Hindu religious festivals. She argues that the Ganapati festival, just as the cow protection movement during 1880s, "[…] served to create an ideological space that proved more enduring" (Tejani 2007: 60). In this manner, Tilak was successful in shifting Hindu allegiance to Islamic festivals (for instance, Muharram in which Hindus participated in large numbers) towards a proper Hindu festival (Tejani 2007: 55). Raminder Kaur, on the other hand, looks at the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals as moments of vernacular politics which facilitated indirect criticism of the colonial state from local constituencies. Performative politics of the festivals generated political consciousness among Marathi population and helped in mass mobilization, effected through indigeneity and religious customs. She argues- "The festive space operated at the contours of civil society by permitting a heightened yet provisional zone of debate, agitation, and assertion of national politics alongside other activities, in what might be described as the nexus of polity and the quotidian." (Kaur 2003: 7).

The cultural-religious nationalist ideology of Tilak was largely premised upon changing perception of nationalism in Europe during the closing decades of the 19th century. Renewed ideas about nation, imagined in Europe during this period, were based upon cultural authenticity, historicist growth and political self-determination. Consequently, mass rituals in the form of commemorative festivals and public events came to the fore of nationalist imaginations (Zimmer 2003: 27-49). Despite its political unification under the colonial state, India was largely fragmented along linguistic and ethnic-cultural lines. Tilak's mass public

festivals- Ganapati and Shivaji festivals- were peculiar to the cultural-historical memory and collective-religious practices of the Marathi population. By popularizing these ethnic-cultural festivals Tilak aimed at expanding active participation of general (Hindu) population into a regional ritual and, in the process, transform nationalism from an abstract imagination into a concrete project.

Works by Tejani and Kaur point towards greater radicalization of Hindu politics perpetrated through Tilak's mass programs and imply that Tilak was pitching Hindus against the Muslims in a battle for establishing hegemony over nationalist politics. It is true that Tilak's writings and politics were aimed at defending the 'rights of Hindus'. However, my proffered communitarian approach and a close reading of his articles suggest that Tilak was projecting 'mass politics' using a Hindu communal platform. In any case, 'Hindu communal discourse' (still in its nascent stage) during the latter half of the 19th century did not propagate violence towards other religious communities. The two major religious communities of India- the Hindus and Muslims- experienced intense anxiety and harboured fear of competition on political, economic and social resources. While some influential Muslim intellectuals (most notably Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Ameer Ali) refused to support greater cooperation and power-sharing between Muslims and Hindus, others, such as Badruddin Tyabji, were hopeful of greater Muslim participation in the INC (Noorani 2009). Tilak showed no sign of aversion to Muslim participation in Congress activities but hoped that the latter would work with a single agenda-namely- political reform. Therefore, Tilak's public festivals, I argue, were not meant to stoke Hindu chauvinist pride and antagonize Muslims since both communities found themselves "in the same boat" under colonialism (quoted in Tamhankar 1956: 65). While it is true that *Kesari* and *Mahratta* carried numerous articles propagating Shivaji's imagine as a 'protector of Brahmins and cows' (go-brāhmaṇa-pratipālaka), Tilak maintained ambiguity towards them. In his own writings one does not find much evidence of antagonism towards the Muslim community[32].

4.1 The Communal Riots of 1893 in Bombay Presidency

The Hindu-Muslims riots which flared up in Bombay in August 1893 are well-documented (The Bombay Riots 1893) and commented upon in recent scholarship (Upadhyay 1989; Masselos 1993). The riots in Bombay were, by no means, a singular event but belonged to a long chain

of communal disharmony seething in other parts of India[33]. Scholars have traced the rise of communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims to the cow-protection movement in north India during the latter half of the 19th century (Freitag 1989). Cow-protection movement began in 1882 under the auspices of Ārya Samāja. The founder of Ārya Samāja- Swami Dayanand Saraswati- delivered a lecture in Bombay in which he stressed the need to protect cows since its milk helped combat malnourishment and uplift physically degenerate population. Five years later the Gaurakṣak Sabhā (the Cow Protection Society) was established by a prominent Parsi mill-owner named Sir Dinshaw Maneckji Petit. The Gaurakṣak Sabhā held numerous meetings in Bombay, Poona, Ahmedabad, Solapur and other towns/cities spreading the message of cow protection. The activities of Gaurakṣak Sabhā, other smaller cow protection societies and individual fringe elements targeted lower-income Muslim groups. The latter perceived these activities threatening to their livelihood. Emboldened by the Bombay government's disinterest in their activities the Hindu orthodoxy started taking out processions before Muslim mosques and playing loud songs at a time when Muslims expected quieter atmosphere during their daily prayers. Hindu-Muslim tensions flared up in July 1893 in the Muslim dominated region of Prabhas Pattan (in the princely-state of Junagarh) on the day of Muharram when many Hindus were said to have been killed. The Prabhas Pattan riots had a direct bearing on the Bombay riots of August 1893[34] which claimed the lives 81 of its inhabitants. 700 individuals were injured, 60 temples and 33 mosques were desecrated or damaged and property worth millions was destroyed. Police arrested around 1500 persons for inciting violence (Upadhyay 1989: PE74).

The Governor of Bombay Lord Harris and Anglo-Indian newspapers such as the *Times of India* blamed Hindus for inciting communal violence. Christian missionaries blamed 'barbarian' Hindus for the violent upheaval. Agarkar and Ranade were displeased with the colonial government policy of Muslim-appeasement. Government officials pointed out that due to their semi-civilized ways of living and communal hatred between Hindus and Muslims Indians lacked the necessary feat for self-government. Agarkar refuted such claims and argued that ethnic conflict had occurred in Europe during the Reformation and post-Reformation period. Furthermore, ethnic-religious diversity of a vast country such as India periodically led to communal skirmishes. While communal violence of August 1893 was deplorable it was the state's responsibility to protect its subjects (from each other) and establish law and order.

The colonial state had failed in its responsibility ('Hindū va musalmāna yāñce aikya kaśāne hoila?', *Sudharak*, 18th September, 1893) (Agarkar 1995: 172-75).

Ranade urged Congress leaders Phirozeshah Mehta and D. E. Wacha to address a public gathering and criticize the government's attitude towards Hindus. Mehta and Wacha found the idea unpalatable (Phadke 2002: 222-23). Gokhale published a letter in the *Times of India* under the pseudonym 'A Hindoo'. The letter pointed towards a misunderstanding perpetrated by government officials. Official report suggested that the riots had occurred due to nefarious activities by various cow protection societies. Official reports also blamed Hindus for instigating riots against Muslims as a revenge for the violence perpetrated on their community at Prabhas Pattan. Gokhale defended Hindus and put the blame for the riots on "[…] the unfortunate ignorance and fanaticism of the uneducated members of the Mahomedan community." (The Bombay Riots 1893: 52). The opinion on the Muslim side was equally cumbersome. Various pamphlets distributed in Muslim dominated areas and various public addresses delivered by local leaders suggested greater militarization amongst the Muslims fomenting communal disharmony (Tejani 2007: 48-53). Another prominent Bombay-based English-language newspaper *Jnana-Prakash* wrote in its editorial (28th August, 1983): "Some of the government officials may think it to be an agreeable pastime to put one race against another and to make political capital out of the whole affair. But how dangerous this procedure is can now very well be realized when we have experienced this year a frightful succession of disturbances" (quoted in Kelkar 2012a: 343).

Tilak, too, blamed the British government for inciting mob violence. He argued that the Muslim community, due to mass illiteracy, behaved in an erratic manner. Hindus were civilized and had always shown tremendous tolerance towards other religions. He argued that each community had a right to protect their religious interests. Therefore, cow protection societies were well within their rights to protect their religious symbol, namely, the holy cow. He also reminded his Muslim readers of a Maratha decree from the 17th century regarding cow protection which was upheld by the Mughal rulers. Therefore, he urged upon Muslims to show greater resilience. In an editorial ('Hindū-Musalmānāñce daṅge', *Kesari*, 15th August, 1893) (Tilak 1923: 202-207) he wrote, "The Europeans have always teased the Hindus that it is only because of the British government that they are saved from the Muslim tyranny. If British were to leave India, Muslims would end up slaughtering all Hindus! As if the Lord

Himself has sent the British to protect us [Hindus] from the marauding Muslims!" (Tilak 1923: 205, my translation). For him both the communities must concede and respect each other's strength-

"If the Hindus and the Muslims were to live in harmony and maintain unity, they must be made aware of each other's strength and capacity to protect their self-interests […] tigers can live together and goats can live together, but if one attempts to keep a tiger and a goat in the same den then the goat will be saved only until she is protected by a guard". The government (the guard) must provide adequate freedom to both communities in order to follow and celebrate their religious customs and traditions (Mumbaitīla daṅgā āṇi sarkārce kartavya', *Kesari*, 22nd August, 1893) (Tilak 1923: 208).

The Bombay-riots were followed by another spat of violence occurring in smaller towns such as Yeola, Rajapur and Malegaon. Lord Harris passed a resolution in the Provincial Council applauding British civil servants and local Muslim elites for mitigating communal violence and blamed native police officials for mishandling the crisis. Tilak criticized Bombay government's open prejudice against native policemen and for blaming Hindus for instigating the riots (Mumbaī sarkārcī akher jhālī!', *Kesari*, 20th March, 1894) (Tilak 1976c: 343-349). Tilak believed that Hindus and Muslims, belonging to two different communities, possessed irrevocable cultural-religious rights. And these cultural-religious rights, distributed equally between the two communities, required equal protection from the colonial state which the latter failed to achieve ('Lord Lansdowne yāṅce gorakṣaṇāvara vicāra', *Kesari*, 21st November, 1893) (Tilak 1976c: 419-425). Moreover, Tilak urged upon local leaders (political and religious) to reach a mutual consensus and avoid fanning communal tensions ('Daṅge baṅda karaṇyāce dona upāya', *Kesari*, 24th April, 1894) (Tilak 1976c: 426-429). Similarly, it was wrong to assume, as the colonial government did, that religious revival amongst Hindus was the primary reason behind communal tensions ('Daṅge jāsta hoṇyācī sarkārī cāra kāraṇe', *Kesari*, 22nd May, 1894) (Tilak 1976c: 435-440).

Tilak organized a public meeting, meant only for Hindus, on 10th September, 1893 at Shanivar-Wada (the bastion of erstwhile Peshwa regime). Ranade, eager to include Muslim leaders in the meeting, bowed out of the gathering. Tilak introduced a resolution in the meeting stating that 'cow protection' was not the primary cause behind the August riots. Therefore, the government need not suspend the activities of various cow-protection societies (Phadke

2002: 226). The meeting was attended by thousands of Hindus from Pune and surrounding region. Ranade's opposition to the meeting did not go well with Tilak. Reflecting on the "massive public gathering" he wrote a week later ('Puṇyātīla hiṅdū lokāṅcī jaṅgī sabhā', *Kesari*, 19th September, 1893) (Tilak 1976c: 374-378)-

"The Right Honourable Ranade is fond of serenity. He is mature, intelligent, and is quite experienced in certain matters. However, I do not believe that he is right in every one of his decisions; or that his opinions are always correct. I have said this before- if Mr. Ranade's views meet my expectations I would gladly follow them. But in this case, as many times before, we differ on certain matters. Adorned with a golden necklace [sic], Mr Ranade's views on political matters are not beneficial for our [Hindu?] interests" (Tilak 1976c: 377, my translation)[35].

The success of the public gathering of Hindus made it clear that Tilak had grown in his popularity and challenged Ranade's hold over the city's politics. In the words of one of Tilak's biographers, "[…] Pune was slipping from Ranade's fist quickly, marking the end of the Ranade-age in Maharashtra's politics." (More 2014: 166, my translation). Riding on the success of his growing popularity Tilak took the next bold step in consolidating Hindu support- the establishment of Ganapati and Shivaji festivals.

4.2 Public Festivals and Hindu Mass Politics: Ganapati Utsav and Shivaji Jayanti

The Ganapati and Shivaji festivals began in the background of the Hindu-Muslim riots. Moderates such as Ranade were uncomfortable with public celebrations of Hindu festivals. However, Tilak wanted to exploit the popularity of symbols such Ganapati and Shivaji for organizing mass politics and bring Hindus belonging to different castes under one roof. In an editorial written for *Kesari* (18th September, 1894) Tilak congratulated the "working population" comprising of "gardeners, painters, carpenters, pot-makers, goldsmiths, shop-keepers and others" for participating in the Ganapati festivals in large numbers (quoted in Phatak 2006: 94, my translation). He reminded his readers of various Hindu festivals in the medieval period. While there was nothing wrong for Hindus to mingle with Muslims during the Muharram celebrations the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals were public religious expressions of the Hindu community.

There is some debate about Tilak's role as a pioneer of the two festivals. Stanley Wolpert has argued that the idea of starting a public Ganapati festival was initially proposed by Vinayak Ramachandra (alias Annasaheb) Patwardhan in the early 1890s (Wolpert 1989: 67-8). Richard Cashman refutes Wolpert's claim by pointing towards Tilak's individualist persona. Moreover, in his obituary on Patwardhan written in 1917, Tilak made no such admissions (Cashman 1975: 95, note 83). Recently, Raminder Kaur has offered another perspective, according to which, Krishnajipant Khasgiwale, after participating in Ganapati festivals held at the Maratha princely states of Gwalior and Baroda wanted them to be emulated in Pune. Balasaheb Natu, a renowned conservative thinker of Pune and Tilak's guru, was present to hear Khasgiwale's views and he might have broached the topic with Tilak (Kaur 2003: 38-39). Whatever might be the case, it is beyond doubt that Tilak was instrumental in popularizing the Ganapati festival. The first public Ganapati festival was organized in September 1893 (about six weeks after the Bombay riots) in a Girgaum chawl in Bombay (Kelkar 2012a: 419). In subsequent years the festivals gathered momentum attracting thousands of devotes over its ten days long celebration.

Cashman is of the view that the nationalist-religious rhetoric of the festivals and the accompanying *melas* was meant to politicize Hindus and disturb inter-communal harmony. Ballads sung at the *melas* denigrated Congress -Moderates and Muslims. But the festivals also brought the two dominant communities of Maharashtra, the Brahmins and Maratha, closer and formed an important backbone to Tilak's mass politics (Cashman 1975: 75-97). Phatak (2006), on the other hand, claims that the two festivals in no way helped in bringing the non-Brahmin community into its folds. Thus, the two festivals continued to be under the effective control of the Brahmin-Maratha castes.

Compared to Ganapati festival Shivaji's public commemoration, which began in April 1895, has a chequered background. The Raigad fort (bastion of Shivaji's Maratha empire) fell in the hands of Bombay government following the demise of Peshwa regime (1818). The fort was also important in the political history of Western India since it housed Shivaji's samādhī (commemorative stone) and the royal canopy (chatrī). The samādhī and the royal canopy were dilapidated. Ranade, with the support of local Maratha chieftains, had urged the Bombay government in 1885 to rebuild the samādhī and the chatrī. Governor Lord Reay had agreed but the issue remained unattended. Ranade took up the more difficult task of

reconstructing the history of Maratha Empire by infusing its memory with contemporary nationalist spirit. Through his *Rise of the Maratha Power* [1900], Ranade fused Reformist zeal into early modern indigenous history and argued that Shivaji's rule was equally palatable to Brahmins and non-Brahmins. He projected Shivaji (of dubious non-Brahmin lineage) with secular credentials, who fought the Mughal Empire, not out of religious hatred but to attain independence (Svarājya) for his kingdom[36] (Devare 2011: 113-120).

Ten years later, in April 1895, *Kesari* carried an article on the current state of the samādhī and chatrī. The article lambasted local Maratha chieftains (sardars) and successors of Shivaji's lineage, namely the princes at Kolhapur and Satara, for their negligence towards Shivaji's memory (Kelkar 2012a: 427). Tilak took up the responsibility of reconstructing the samādhī and the chatrī. He met several Maratha sardars (including those in Ujjain and Gwalior) and urged them to contribute to the reconstruction program. His target was to raise Rs. 50,000 but could barely manage to accumulate Rs.26,000 (Kelkar 2012a: 424-437). Nevertheless, the reconstruction of samādhī and chatrī gave Tilak another opportunity in reviving the glory of the medieval Maratha warrior and rope in his memory into building mass politics.

The choice of Ganapati and Shivaji for building mass politics needs further scrutiny. Ganapati was the chief deity of the Peshwas and possessed significance in the Marathi Brahmin socio-religious world. The Aṣṭavināyaka (8 Ganapati) temples, built by the Peshwas during the 18th century, marked the political boundary of their kingdom. These temples also served as annual pilgrimage sites for Brahmin devotes. Recent studies have pointed towards the pan-Asian presence of Ganapati for close to two millennia. From humble beginnings as a semi-deified figure of an elephant during the Vedic period Ganapati's image grew to one of the primary gods within the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva traditions as well as commanding the status of a minor deity in Buddhist and Jain pantheon (Dhavalikar 2009).

Shivaji's memory was invoked during the 19th century for defending colonialism as well as social reforms. The former, pioneered by James Grant Duff through his *History of Mahrattas* [1826], characterized the Maratha king as a plunderer, rebel and a dacoit. Leaders such as Jotirao Phule, through his ballad titled *Śivājīcā Povāḍā* [1869], presented Shivaji as a hero of the non-Brahmin peasants and his reign symbolizing golden period of western India (O'Hanlon 2014: 168-175). Prominent intellectuals such as Ranade and Rajaram-śāstrī Bhagavat reconstructed the history of Shivaji's reign. Through various reinterpretations of the Maratha

history offered by reformist intellectuals-leaders and nationalist historians such as Ranade and later V. K. Rajwade during 1890s the Maratha warrior-king Shivaji was rapidly turning into an icon of Maharashtra's supremacy.

Shivaji's memory served topical importance. Shivaji had carved out a quasi-sovereign territory from the mighty Mughal Empire and called it 'Hindavī Svarājya'. He was also successful in creating broad caste-alliances between the Brahmins and the Marathas. While their alliance was short-lived Tilak was keen on rebinding them into a solid political force (Lele 1981: 49-53). Tilak's Shivaji Jayanti festival provided an appropriate opportunity to bring the educated and largely urban Brahmin class and the dominant village-based landed gentry and migrant mill-working class (Marathas) under the same pandal. Tilak was openly pandering to the Maratha community and wrote favourably glorifying its loyalty to Hinduism and their racial valour- "It is particularly gratifying to note that in spite of the propaganda of Christian missionaries and atheistic reformers, the heart of the society, viz. the Marathas, were yet true to their religion" (Quoted in Bhagwat and Pradhan 2011 :128).

The Shivaji festival provided a platform for narrating exaggerated stories of the valour of medieval king. Tilak called Shivaji a 'rāṣṭrīya puruṣa' and an 'avatar'. *Sudharak* opposed Shivaji's deification to which Tilak responded that greatness in men was as much of their own courage as facilitated by Divine Grace. Hindu Dharmaśāstra argues that each particle in the phenomenal world comprises of Divinity and each human being contains a miniscule part of the Absolute. When exceptional men possess greater proportion of the Absolute the Dharmaśāstras prefer to call them 'avatāra' worthy of emulation by others ('Hā vighnasaṅtoṣīpaṇā nawhe kāy?', *Kesari*, 19th May, 1896) (Tilak 1976d: 3-8). Nevertheless, Tilak argued elsewhere, blind devotion must be avoided at all cost. One should also be aware of temporal and societal changes. Shivaji killed *Muslim invaders* and unleashed violent uprising in establishing his autonomous rule. However, modern Hindus need not be violent towards Muslims or revolt against the British colonial state. "It is our foremost duty to remind our compatriots, either out of an inherent sense of indebtedness to the past or a rising feeling of patriotism, of the actions and industriousness of great men of yesteryears. This is the sole purpose for commemorating the Shivaji's birth anniversary." ('Thora puruṣāṅcī caritre', *Kesari*, 26th May, 1896, my translation) (Tilak 1976d: 9-13).

Reflecting on the second Ganapati festival celebrated in 1894 Tilak wrote in *Kesari* that for long Ganapati festival was celebrated in upper-caste Hindu households. But by turning the celebration into a public festival it resulted into an active cooperation and involvement of Hindus involving various castes and subcastes ('Ganapaticā utsava', *Kesari*, 18th September, 1894) (Tilak 1976d: 14-19). And Tilak was also hopeful that Muslims would emulate their Hindu compatriots. Just as Hindus used to traditionally join the Muharram festivals, Muslims too would join the Ganapati festival in large numbers[37].

Tilak's political agenda for starting the two festivals was clearly articulated through a short remark made in an editorial published in *Kesari* on 3rd September, 1895. He wrote, "Among the many instruments used to generate unity in a people, devotion to a common deity is a primary tool. People belonging to different regions have been united under Her Majesty's rule, giving birth to an incipient sense of nationalism […] Common religion, common King [government], [and] common language are the principal entities that make up a modern nation-state. Of these the last two [namely, common government and English language] have been properly institutionalized [in India] under the British rule. We have largely benefitted by the common rule, undertaken under the name of Her Majesty, and I think that invoking common religious sentiments established through devotion to deities would double the effect on the rising nationalist fervour" (Tilak 1976d: 23, my translation).

4.3 The Social Conference splits from the INC

Tilak was riding high on the popularity which he garnered through the two national festivals and decided to challenge the old guard of Bombay Congress leaders. The wound of losing out to the social reformers during the AoC Bill agitation was seething in Tilak. And Tilak continued to insist in prioritizing political over social reform. In an editorial published in *Kesari* titled 'Rāṣṭrīya (?) sāmājik sudhārna' on 24th December 1895 Tilak wrote-

"Bringing our people together and undertaking a reform as per their will is the way forward. This may take some time but I am sure such reforms (as opposed to laws imposed by the British State) would be long-lasting. Man, by nature, is fond of his traditions and shows disinclination in shedding away the values which he has learnt and cherished all his life. It is silly to assume that common people steeped in their customs and traditions would suddenly

abandon them and follow a new path laid out by the reformers. Humans are not mules to follow somebody mindlessly. One needs to pay attention to their mind-set and only with a tender approach would people gradually follow their leaders" (Tilak 1976c: 167, my translation) and went on to quote from an English author named S Laing in support of his argument. The quote reads: "What has been said of individuals is even more true [sic] of nations. Self-respect is the very essence of national life. A great nation may suffer great disasters and survive them, if the spirit of its people remains intact… But if a nation loses its vigour and self-respect, if it begins to prefer comfort to honour, ignoble ease to noble effort, the hour of its decline has sounded… The most fatal thing any Government can do for a country is to destroy its sense of self-respect and teach it to acquiesce in what is felt to be dishonourable." (Tilak 1976c: 168-69)[38].

In spirit Tilak, it may be argued, was following the tenets laid out by the makers of INC and which presented 'political reforms' as its chief objective. Speaking at the Congress of 1886, Dadabhai Naoroji in his Presidential remarks had argued that the INC was not deaf towards rising demand for social reform. But the primary concern of the Congress was fighting for political rights for Indians. A large body such as the INC, comprising of Hindus of every creed along with Muslims, Christians and Zoroastrians would find it extremely difficult to meet on a common platform vis-à-vis social reform. Therefore, Naoroji suggested, "A National Congress must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation, and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other questions to class Congresses" (Naoroji quoted in Naik 1945: 9-10).

An opportunity to break social reform from political agitation appeared before Tilak in 1895. Pune was chosen to host the annual Congress session for that year. Since 1887 a Congress session was followed by a session of the Social Conference, organized under the same pandal. Bhandarkar and Ranade had envisioned the Social Conference leading the social reform movement in India by creating conditions of equality in terms of gender, caste and communal relations (Bhandarkar 1928: 487-502). Tilak created public uproar against Congress jointly hosting Social Conference. He organized public meetings in Pune for two months prior to the scheduled Congress-Social Conference session in December, 1895. Tilak being an office bearer of the Sārvajanik Sabhā (which he had 'captured' from Ranade-supporters in July 1895) became the de-facto executive officer of the Congress 'Reception Committee'. Influential

Bengali newspapers such as the *Amrit Bazaar Patrika* and its editor Motilal Ghosh supported Tilak's activities. It attacked Congress' lackadaisical attitude towards the colonial government and warned the people of Pune to not fall prey to Congress agenda of social reform (Johnson 1973: 121-22). Tilak's supporters indulged into minor but frequent acts of violence against low-key social reformers[39]. Ranade requested opinions from various Congress sub-committees about jointly hosting the two sessions. Despite getting a majority of 9 out of 13 sub-committees supporting joint-sessions Ranade was not too optimistic. A few days short of the scheduled event Ranade that Social Conference would be held separately (Phatak 1924: 527-28).

Ranade, Wacha, Mehta and other Congress leaders were deeply disturbed by the split between the Social Conference and the INC and accused Tilak of sabotaging the social reform movement. Ranade, during the course of his address to the Social Conference (1895), described the "pain" which he felt at the events occurring in Pune over the previous few months and the circumstances which led to the schism (Ranade 1992: 153). He also believed that the ideological differences between the two Pune-based factions had turned "[…] the whole nation mad" (Ranade 1992: 154). Tilak defended his action through two editorials ('Sāmājika sudhārṇece mārga- 1 and 2', *Kesari*, 21st and 27th January, 1896) (Tilak 1976c: 136-143) where he argued that social reformers were wasting their energy in "helping couple of widows to remarry" and restricting their work to their locality. The urgent task before a colonized nation was to demand self-government. Social reform, while desirable, would not qualify Indians to be granted self-rule from Britain and pointed out to the defeat of the Irish Home Rule Bill (1892) in the British Parliament despite the relatively progressive state of Irish society. At such crucial juncture when India was trying to develop a spirit of unity and nationalism social reform movement would, Tilak believed, create fissures in the society, produce anxiety amongst people towards their own religion, and people would lose interest in political reforms. In a Self-ruled nation, Tilak argued, Indians would be free to undertake social reforms by means of representative institutions (Tilak 1976c: 137).

4.4 Famine, Bubonic Plague and Tilak's First Sedition-Trial

Western India suffered severe famine between 1896 and 1901[40]. The famine was followed by an epidemic of bubonic plague in September, 1896. One recent estimate suggests that

recurring plague epidemic had claimed the lives of around 10 million Indians between 1896 and 1921 (Arnold 1993: 200). According to government estimates, by March 1897, around 10,000 Indians had died of plague (Sarkar 2014: 181). British government, however, was unsympathetic to the dire plight of Indian peasants. The Viceroy and the Secretary of State firmly believed that the situation was under control and that the agrarian crisis would soon be resolved (Trevor 1896). European countries and the United States threatened to stop trade with Bombay fearing contraction of the deadly disease. France prohibited South Asians from entering the port of Marseilles. Fearing the loss of significant revenue while the city was on the verge of complete collapse, the British government passed the draconian Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897. The new law granted plenipotentiary powers to the Municipal Commissioner to enter and ransack any house within the territory of Bombay Presidency without prior warrant and search for dead rats[41].

Search parties of municipality officials, armed with dubious data gathered from informants, ransacked homes and took way alleged plague-patients to quarantine. Caste and gender social mores, considered extremely pious by Indians, were shoved aside by the search parties. In its bid to confine the disease to Bombay city the government began an extensive inoculation drive, even when results of the vaccine were disproportionate and highly inconclusive. Hospital staff treated patients with absolute insensitivity. Hospital wards were overcrowded. Pandita Ramabai, for instance, complained-

"I did not see any woman nurse attending to the women patients or bandaging the bubos [sic]. And you know in what awkward places the bubos [sic] came […] The poor purdah women, who would never think of uncovering even their face before strangers, had to submit to the most repulsive and humiliating treatment by male doctors, and had at that time to be exposed to public gaze […] They did not even so much as put a screen between the women patients and male visitors" (*Mahratta*, 5th September, 1897).

Tilak severely criticized the government for its lack of foresight and general apathy towards the victims. Tilak was appointed to the Bombay Legislative Council in June 1895. Tilak had tried to use his Council-membership to question the government on its famine relief measures. Tilak demanded detailed report on those talukas and districts affected by scanty rainfall, availability of resources stored in government granaries, and measures contemplated upon by the government in the likelihood of a famine (Bombay Legislative Council 1991: 17-

18). He received no satisfactory and clear response from the government officials in the Council.

Thereafter, Tilak, under the auspices of Sārvajanika Sabhā which he controlled from 1895, prepared a detailed report on the draught situation in Solapur, Bijapur and Ahmednagar and submitted it to the government on 8th November, 1896. The report pleaded with the government to invoke the powers vested in it by the Famine Relief Code and take necessary precautions. The Report was followed by intense correspondence and petitioning from the Sārvajanika Sabhā to the Bombay Government without yielding much positive results. Under directions from Tilak the Sārvajanika Sabhā widely distributed copies of the Famine Relief Code amongst villagers in the Bombay Presidency. Tilak hoped that affected peasants, by reading the Code, would be better informed of their rights and pressurize the government for safeguarding their crop and livelihood (Kelkar 2012a: 494-501).

Starting from November, 1896 Tilak wrote many articles addressing the famine (Tilak 1976a: 407-498). He encouraged Deccan peasants to demand suspension of land-tax, seek employment in government-sanctioned infrastructure activities and request for short-term government loans to support agricultural activities ('Duṣkāḷa', *Kesari*, 17th November, 1896) (Tilak 1976a: 407-10). Local British officers would be arrogant with poor peasants often rejecting state assistance. Tilak reprimanded such government officials- "Our peasants are making rightful demands [guaranteed under the Famine Relief Code] and if they are killed protesting for their rights then it would be a noble death" (Duṣkāḷāce svarūpa', *Kesari*, 1st December, 1896) (Tilak 1976a: 412, my translation).

Tilak was mindful of the fierce debate taking place in Britain between anti-Imperialist socialists and representatives of the colonial state. As Gregory Claeys has recently pointed out, British socialist leaders such as Wilfred Scawen Blunt and Henry M. Hyndman were leading exponents of the rights of Indians. Blunt's *Ideas about India* [1885], written soon after the Deccan Famine of 1879, scourged the British colonial state for its policies of unjust taxation, the opulence of British officials and the general agricultural mismanagement (Claeys 2010: 40). Influential British journals such as the *Positivist Review* lambasted colonial policies for draining India of its wealth via excessive taxation causing repeated draughts in the Indian sub-continent (Claeys 2010: 68, note 74). Others such as Sidney Webb and British-Indian

Parliamentarian Romesh Chunder Dutt, too, criticised British colonial policy. Their views reverberated through Tilak's editorials ('Duṣkāḷācī kāraṇe', *Kesari*, 8th May, 1900) (Tilak 1976a: 415-17).

Government hospitals, meant to segregate and treat plague-ridden patients, were proving insufficient. Tilak took up the issue and with the help of few of his comrades (including doctors and wealthy inhabitants of Pune) built a temporary hospital for Hindu patients (Kelkar 2012a: 520-22). For many months he would daily visit the hospital and personally paid attention to medical provisions and treatment rendered to the patients. Tilak organized a public meeting in Pune on 20th March, 1897 and published a public statement criticizing the Bombay government's negligence of plague victims. Tilak also popularizing the need for common people to get inoculated by the plague-vaccine developed by leading bacteriologist Dr Waldemar Mordecai Haffkine ('Plega ṭocaṇe, plegacī las va plegavarīla upāya', *Kesari*, 15th August, 1899) (Tilak 1976b: 723-728). However, of immediate concern for Tilak was for the chaos and anarchy spreading across Pune caused by the 'search parties' to stop ('Punyāta sadhyā cālū asalelā dhumākūḷa', *Kesari*, 16th March, 1897) (Tilak 1976b: 713- 717).

During the annual Shivaji festival held in June 1897 prominent intellectuals of Pune such as Shivram Mahadev Paranjape, Prof. Jinsiwale, Prof. Bhanu and others gave lectures explicating the greatness of Shivaji. Tilak presided over Prof. Bhanu's lectures where the latter spoke on the famous episode in Shivaji's life when he had gutted Afzal Khan, the military general of the Adilshahi dynasty, in 1659. Prof. Jinsiwale compared Shivaji's acts with those of Julius Caesar and Napoleon by suggesting that violence, in order to protect innocent victims and punishing unjust actions, was permissible and that History would be kind in her judgement of such bravery. Tilak, in his chair-remarks, argued that Shivaji's assassination of Afzal Khan could not be measured by the tenets of modern penal code. Similarly, while Hindu Dharmaśāstras prohibited killing of humans (manuṣya hatyā), the *Bhagavad Gītā* sanctioned violence if pursued as a moral duty (karma-yoga). Shivaji possessed super-human qualities (avatārī puruṣa) making his every action inherently just and righteous. A summary of Tilak's speech was published in *Kesari* on 15th June, 1897 along with a provocative poem titled 'Śivājīce udgāra' by an anonymous poet (Phatak 2006: 141).

A week later, Viceroy Lord Elgin and Bombay Governor Lord Sandhurst were busy in celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign, falling on 21st and 22nd June, 1897.

In a series of articles ('Mahārānī sarkāracā jayajayakāra- 1,2 and 3', *Kesari*, 8th, 15th and 22nd June, 1899) (Tilak 1976a: 31-45) published on the eve of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria's reign, he applauded the Queen's rule and informed his readers that in the 60 years since Queen Victoria was declared the British monarch in 1837, the total area under the British control had risen from 75 lakh square miles to 1.15 crore square miles and the number of British subjects in the colonies had grown from 21 crores to 38 crores. British commercial activities had multiplied 8 times, earning Britain an annual income of 90 crore pounds and allowing it to control half of global trade flows. Britain had the largest navy (400 warships and 1 lakh navy-men), one of the largest armies (7 lakh white soldiers and 2.5 lakh Indian soldiers) and also produced 50% of global coal output (Tilak 1976a: 37-38). And yet, Tilak added in a bitter tone-

"Our aesthetic theory states that once one describes Rāvaṇa then one need not spend time in describing the qualities of Rāma. Merely stating that Rāma killed the mighty Rāvaṇa is symbolically sufficient to point to the greatness of Rāma. By the same logic an elaborate description of British Empire's prosperity and growth followed by a line about India's poor conditions would prove the point" (Tilak 1976a: 40, my translation).

The laissez faire policy adopted by the British government had produced an illusion of progress. Unlike Japan, a technological power-house, India languished in poverty. Indian peasantry was exploited by the British parliament, the British-India State and local the money-lender. "The present Jubilee Celebrations are a commemoration, not of the prosperity, but of India's terrible ruination" (Tilak 1976a: 40-41, my translation).

Damodar Hari Chapekar, Vasudev Hari Chapekar, Balkrishna Hari Chapekar and Mahadev Vinayak Ranade murdered Pune's Special Plague Office W. C. Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst on 22nd June, 1897. In the statement given to police upon their arrest the Chapekar brothers admitted to carrying out the assassinations in order to avenge the desecration of Hindu idols and exploitation of Hindu women at the hands of 'search parties' led by European soldiers and sanctioned by the two British officials. After a lengthy trial the four assassins were hanged (Source Material 1958: 335-384). Lord Sandhurst suspected that anti-government articles and editorials published through Marathi vernacular newspapers had played no small major role in instigating the assassins. Nineteen articles and news-pieces published in select Marathi

newspapers were scrutinized. The poem on Shivaji and the summary of Tilak's speech delivered on the occasion of Shivaji festivals mentioned before were included in this list.

Meanwhile, Tilak wrote scathingly against government measures to retract Chapekar brothers ('Sarkārace doke thikāṇyāvara āhe kā?', *Kesari*, 6th July, 1897) (Tilak 1976b: 623-28). He condemned the assassinations in mild terms and put the blame on the arrogant and ill-conceived working methods of search parties. He was displeased with Bombay's government decision to scrutinize native press and entrap newspaper editors on charges of sedition. He wrote- "Our government is behaving like a mad elephant which goes around trampling upon and destroying everything that comes in its way […] A death of a British officer does not, in any way, affect the mighty British Empire. But, it seems, the Bombay government is interested in using this opportunity to trouble innocent natives" (Tilak 1976b: 624-25, my translation). A sustained campaign undertaken by Anglo-Indian newspapers and supported by the British government had turned all inhabitants of Pune (and especially of Brahmin caste) into suspects and conspirators against the British Empire. Tilak appealed to the government to act cautiously and with a cool temperament (Tilak 1976b: 624-25).

Anglo-Indian newspapers were drawing inspiration from British tabloids such as the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail* which lambasted the British government for not acting swiftly and fiercely with the culprits. These newspapers hinted at the rise of a 'second Mutiny' and urged the Bombay government to tackle conspiracies against the Empire, fomenting under the guidance of 'Brahmin editors' of the native press. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who was visiting London to testify before the Welby Commission, defended the Marathi press. In an interview to the *Manchester Guardian* on 2nd July, 1897 Gokhale indicted the Plague Administration for its cruel treatment of Indians and demanded fair enquiry (Nanda 1977: 107-110). Bombay government's unjust attitude towards native press with total disregard for its freedom and autonomy was discussed in the British Parliament. Sir Ellis Bartlet and Parsi-Indian Mancherjee Bhownagree, both members of the British House of Commons, questioned the Secretary of State for India on 8th and 9th July, 1897 and demanded restoration of freedom for native press with immediate effect (Phadke 1989: 93).

While the Bombay government was deliberating on arresting Tilak for publishing seditious material in *Kesari* Tilak's speeches and articles were discussed in the British Parliament as well. Using the opportunity to his advantage Tilak presented his views on sedition ('Rājadroha

kaśālā mhaṇatāt?', *Kesari*, 20th July, 1897) (Tilak 1976a: 617-22). He argued that the term 'disaffection' found in Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) could not be invoked when the subject-population rightfully criticized government policies. Democratic governments invite criticism from citizens only when the latter feel unjustly treated. Moreover, every liberal government (and especially the British government which prided on its democratic legacy) should embrace public criticism. Valid public criticism was also a natural right guaranteed to all subjects in a democratic country. "Government office-bearers, power-hungry and arrogant, would oppose any steps taken by the public in exercising their rights" (Tilak 1976a: 623, my translation).

Tilak was arrested on 27th July, 1897 and sentenced to 18 months of rigorous imprisonment in September, 1897. He was charged with sedition under Section 124A of the IPC, to which he pleaded non-guilty (Kamra 2016). Tilak's lawyers rejected the dictionary meaning of the term 'disaffection' found in Section 124A. They implored the Bombay High Court to expose the term to rigorous legal scrutiny. Similarly, the poem published in *Kesari* represented mass discontent but did not propagate rebellion and, therefore, was not seditious in nature. But Justice Strachey was of the view that 'disaffection' meant 'lack of affection' towards government, often resulting into 'disloyalty' and sedition (Setlur and Deshpande 1897).

Tilak's incarceration was widely condemned throughout India. While the Congress session for 1897 (held at Amravati, in Maharashtra) did not introduce separate resolution regarding Tilak's unlawful incarceration, Congress President C. Sankaran Nair condemned the harsh treatment meted out to native press editors at the hands of the government (INC Report 1898: 13). Surendranath Banerjee, too, thought that Tilak's incarceration was a "[…] mistake" and that his heart was "[…] full of sympathy". He added- "A nation is in tears […] I have no hesitation in saying that we believe Mr. Tilak to be innocent of the charges brought against him (Loud and cheers). The ends of technical justice may have been satisfied, but the ends of substantial justice have grievously failed" (INC Report 1898: 68).

Tilak's incarceration provoked anxious responses from Britain as well. A petition demanding Tilak's early release on the grounds that he was a learned scholar and unused to hard labour reached the Secretary of State Lord Hamilton. The petition was signed by Sir William Hunter

(ICS and Scottish historian), Sir Richard Garth (former Chief Justice of Bengal and MP), Friedrich Max Müller (eminent Sanskrit scholar), William Caine (former MP), and Indian politicians and MPs Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chunder Dutt (Keer 1959: 148).

Tilak's sentence was later reduced to 12 months and he was released on 6th September, 1898 (Kelkar 2012a: 611). His incarceration proved to be a blessing in disguise for his political movement for, upon his release, Tilak enjoyed extraordinary support from various sections of Indian population. Tilak's popularity had easily crossed the limits of the Bombay Presidency. He was emerging as a prominent nation-wide leader.

4.5 Conclusion

Congress politics were resolutely separated from social reform movement after the 1895 Pune session. The social reform movement in Bombay Presidency (and especially Pune) was further enfeebled with the death of Agarkar in June 1895[42]. Ranade, too, in the last five years of his life moved away from actively participating in public affairs. Tilak's efforts at collectivizing Hindu communities under common regional-religious and historical symbols was bearing fruits. However, the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals were largely Maharashtrian festivals. Tilak was anxious in challenging British colonialism at a pan-national level but found the Hindu population divided and deeply fragmented on caste, regional and linguistic grounds. In order to mitigate such inherent fragmentations within the Hindu community it was essential to reimagine it using a supra-community lens.

After his release from prison Tilak's first public statement appeared in the form of an editorial written for *Kesari* on 4th July, 1898 ('Punahśca harī oṃ') (Tilak 1969: 94-105). Through the editorial Tilak declared his intention to continue with his public work while remaining loyal to his political principles. Tilak intended to stand for elections for the Bombay Legislative Council (which he had vacated impending his trial in 1897). Gokhale, too, had submitted his nomination. The Bombay Governor was sceptical of Gokhale and gravely concerned about Tilak. He suggested to the newly appointed Conservative Viceroy Lord Curzon to veto Tilak's election. Eventually Tilak refused to contest elections and Gokhale became a member of the Legislative Council (Nanda 1977: 119-121).

Tilak intended to expand his nationalist politics amongst Hindus spread across India. Regional symbols and heroes such as Ganapati and Shivaji were found to be insufficiently appealing across different sections of Indian population. Therefore, it was important to construct an idea and a sociological-historical nomenclature which could have cross-regional impact and appeal to most Hindus living in India. Tilak found the Aryan race theory, established by European Indologists and propagated through the Orientalist-Imperialist discourse of the 19th century, useful for his endeavour. In order to establish superiority of the Aryan race vis-à-vis modern European nations Tilak wrote two scholarly works on Vedic antiquity which would be discussed in the following chapter.