



LALA LAJPAT RAI MEMORIAL LECTURES

21ST SERIES

SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY - MAHADEV GOVIND RANADE

A NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIAN STAR

By

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: VENUE :

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Mahalaxmi, Bombay - 400 034.**

: Date :

28th January, 1992

MAHADEV GOVIND RANADE : JURIST AND REFORMER

I deem it a great privilege to be invited to deliver the Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Lecture, the twenty first in a series. I am deeply conscious of the high calibre of lectures delivered in the past by such notables as Dr. T.K. Tope, Prof. C.N. Vakil, Dr. M.S. Gore, Justice V.D. Tulzapurkar, Dr. N.A. Majumdar and Dr. Homi N. Sethna, to name only a few. They have addressed you on a variety of topics ranging from Indian Constitution and Social Justice, University Autonomy, Philosophical Foundation of Social Sciences to Nuclear Disarmament. For my talk today, I have chosen the life and work of one of the most distinguished Indians of the nineteenth century - Mahadev Govind Ranade. Your first reaction could well be : but why Ranade? The simple answer is that this happens to be the sesquicentennial birth anniversary of the great man. Mahadev Govind Ranade was born on 18th January, 1842 - a hundred and fifty years ago. He was a later contemporary of Lala Lajpat Rai though passed away in 1901. Lalaji was born in 1865, a good four years before Mahatma Gandhi, and passed away in 1928. In a sense Lalaji and Ranade belong to the same generation, what we call India's first modern generation. This supposition is based on the theory that those who were born between 1840 and 1870 were the first to benefit from an English education. The three major Universities in India at Bombay, Madras, Calcutta were established in the mid 1850s and those born in 1840 would have been the first to become graduates of these universities. Mahadev Govind Ranade was one such.

Lalaji surely would have come in touch with Ranade some time or other. For the world Lalaji's name is incontrovertibly linked with those of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. Indeed the three reverently were spoken of as Lal-Bal-Pal. Politically they belonged to one camp-

sometimes described as extremists. At the pole opposite was Gopal Krishna Gokhale who was born in 1866. Gokhale was the true blue liberal who shunned extremism in all forms. Mahatma Gandhi considered Gokhale as his master and Gokhale, in turn, looked up to Ranade as his master. Mahatma Gandhi was once to describe Ranade as his master's master - and no apter words were said. That is Ranade's special relevance.

Ranade lived at a time when giants bestrode the Indian scene. His contemporaries were men like Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) often referred to as the Grand Old Man of India which indeed he was, Romesh Chandra Bannerjee (1844-1906), Badruddin Tyabji (1844-1906), Sir Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), P. Anand Charlu (1843-1908), Surendra Banerjee (1848-1925), Rahimtulla Sayani (1847-1902), Anand Mohan Bose (1847-1906), Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848-1909), Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar (1855-1923), Dinshaw Edulji Wacha (1844-1936), Rasbihari Ghosh (1845-1921), Dr. Annie Besant (1847-1933) and C. Vijayaraghavachariar (1852-1944). All of them needless to say were presidents of the Indian National Congress. Ranade never made it. He did not have to. He was never an aspirant to the Congress presidentship. But he is remembered as one of the most prominent of the founders and promoters of the Congress. But long before the party was founded, Ranade had started his work of political education of the people, first as a writer in the columns of the Induprakash and later in the journal of the Sarvajanic Sabha. A reference to Ranade, incidentally, was made by Mahatma Gandhi in his speech of the Quit India resolution at the historic AICC meeting on 8th August, 1942, Said the Mahatma : "The late Justice Ranade did not resign his post but he openly declared that he belonged to the Congress. He said^{to} the government that he was a Judge, he was a Congressman and would openly attend the sessions of the Congress, but that, at the same time, he would not let his political views warp his

impartiality on the Bench. He held Social Reform Conferences in the very pandal of the Congress. I would ask all government servants to follow in the footsteps of Ranade".?

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But let me begin at the beginning.

Ranade was born in a Chitpavan family. His father who originally was in the service of the British Government subsequently served Kolhapur state. It was in Kolhapur that Ranade had his early education. For his matriculation he had to come to Bombay. That was more easily thought of than actively pursued. We must remember those times. The distance from Kolhapur to Bombay had to be covered by bullock cart; proper lodgings had to be found for a 15 - year old boy and a guardian had to be found! Also Ranade's mother was most reluctant to send her son away and that too to get an English education. English education was then frowned upon. The belief in orthodox homes was that after learning English, children became irreligious and ungodly if they had not been converted to Christianity. There was active fear that boys would be alienated from their own culture and way of living! When a public-spirited citizen of Kolhapur started classes in English he had to go from house to house to persuade parents and guardians to appreciate the benefits accruing out of learning the language of their masters!

But then Ranade's mother died and the boy was sent to Bombay along with a brahmin cook and a Maratha bearer. Ranade could not possibly eat food cooked by anybody but another brahmin. Such were the social conditions of that day and age. Ranade was a great reader and a hard-working student. He was enrolled in what ^{was} then called the Elphinstone Institution. The University of Bombay was formally inaugurated in 1857

but it had not taken proper shape and the first matriculation examination was held only in 1859. By then Ranade had joined the college, which speaks for the way education was then conducted. For all that he was required to appear for the Matriculation examination. There were only 21 students who appeared for the examination for the first time in the University's history. Among them was Ramakrishna Bhandarkar the famous Sanskritist after whom is named the Bhandarkar Institute in Pune.

Ranade, of course, passed with distinction. Throughout his student days he used to be called Prince of Graduates because he invariably stood first in his class. He was quick to master English, a foreign language. Simultaneously he studied Latin to such an extent that he could read Ceaser and Horace in the original. In his Marathi paper Ranade wrote an essay on transformation in Hindu society since the days of Manu and in this he passed some severe strictures on British rule in India! For that indiscretion he had to pay by having some marks deducted from the total. The Principal of the College, Mr. Grant, was also to admonish him to mind his ideas. When Ranade first joined the Elphinstone Institute he was awarded a scholarship of Rs. 10 a month which was subsequently raised to Rs. 20* when he passed his Matriculation examination he held a junior scholarship of Rs. 60 a month and after three years a senior scholarship of Rs. 120 p.m. for three years. It was a lot of money for those days. When he was hardly 20, he passed the B.A. examination in first class. Ranade read voraciously. By the time he had graduated he had read Macaulay, Gibbon, Buckle, Scott, Bulwar Lytton, Plato's Dialogues, Milton, most of Byron, Washington Irving, Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations and, of course, Shakespeare. His examiner was so impressed that Ranade was awarded a gold medal! He did his M.A. when he was 22 and was entrusted with teaching and even when he was

teaching and working for his Honours degree he had read 25,000 pages, no less and had prepared summaries of all that he had read. That was industriousness by any name!

He was good at anything he applied his mind to. At the very first convocation of the University of Bombay Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of Bombay and Chancellor of the University specially mentioned Ranade as a distinguished alumnus. Ranade was nominated as Fellow of the Senate in recognition of his learning.

He had offered Marathi as his subject for matriculation but later switched to Sanskrit in which he became adept. He read history, law, economics, worked as a Marathi Translator, a Karbhari at Akkalkot and even as judge.

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In 1868 Ranade took up appointment as Assistant Professor of English and History in Elphinstone College on the princely salary of Rs. 400 a month. The Bombay University then was hardly 11 years old. Simultaneously, Ranade began to attend the Bombay High Court as an Assistant Reporter. Three years later he passed his Advocate examination and was quickly appointed successively as Third Presidency Magistrate, Fourth Judge of Small Causes Court and Acting First Class, First Grade Judge at Pune. He was then all of 29 years! In 1873 he was confirmed as First Grade Sub Judge on Rs. 800 a month when a rupee fetched a hundred times more than what it fetches now! Ranade was now on his way up and up the judicial ladder. He was appointed Sadr Amin at Nasik in 1878, Sadr Amin at Pune in 1881 and Judge of Small Causes Court Pune in 1884 on Rs. 1,000 p.m. Nine years later, in 1893 he took his seat in the Bombay High Court as a Judge. He was to remain a Judge till the end of his life.

Till Ranade was appointed Presidency Magistrate his legal reputation was based upon his knowledge of civil law. But he soon began to deal with criminal law as well. He was feared as a law-giver. During the three months that he was a Presidency Magistrate he had occasion to try a European whom he sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for six months for stealing Rs. 50. A little before he tried this case, he had awarded only one month's simple imprisonment to a Hindu who had tried to steal a hundred rupee note that he had been sent to change in the market. Ranade was charged with racial bias in the Anglo-Indian press, but his superiors came to his rescue.

During the seven years that Ranade sat on the High Court Bench, his work was highly appreciated by his colleagues. One of them, Sir Lawrence Jenkins said : "Ranade was a profound and sympathetic judge possessed of the highest perceptive faculties and inspired with an intense desire to do the right. His opinion was of the greatest value to his colleagues and his decisions will stand in the future as a monument of his erudition and learning".

A remarkably distinguished feature of Ranade's court work was the amount of care he bestowed on it. The most importance of his judgements related to Hindu Law. For arriving at his decisions Ranade would study the Smriti texts in great detail. One of the cases he had to decide was concerning whether a gotraja sapi nda widow was entitled to enjoy her property exclusively as stridhan. Ranade ruled against it. Another decision related to maintenance of a Hindu widow. In another case Ranade held that a Hindu father's right to divide his property was absolute and a division once made could not be re-opened by his sons whether

major or minor. There was a case where a daughter's marriage was arranged and performed without her father's knowledge and consent. He was not present to perform the kanyadaan even though living. Ranade in his verdict said, that the injunction of the smritis, that a father should give his daughter in marriage was only directory and not mandatory. Once the marriage was performed, the fact of the performance could not be set aside by a hundred law books. Ranade obviously took the commonsense view and did not care for the letter of the law.

He had cases concerning adoption that came up to him. He once discussed the dwamushshayana form of adoption and its validity. Ranade held that even if a mother gave her only son in adoption to another woman, he continued to be the son of both mothers and it was justifiable and rightful and in keeping with the Dharma Shashtra. In another case Ranade held that even if an adopted son is older than the adopting mother, the adoption was quite valid. He conceded that the smritis recommended a younger adoptee than the mother, but he held that it was only a recommendatory direction meant for general guidance and therefore not obligatory.

Ranade was a social reformer but he studiously refrained from introducing his social reform views in his judgements, which were meticulously researched. In matters of property dispute Ranade was particularly careful to see that justice was not only done but seemed to be done. The Indian Law Reporter's tribute to Ranade as a Judge is perhaps the most accurate and authoritative. The Reporter said : "No more important function falls to the lot of an Indian judge than, that of ascertaining and applying the personal law of the various communities which inhabit this

country. The whole system of modern Hindu Law is thus a superstructure raised on old foundations to which every Judge who has sat on the High Court Bench has contributed his mite. Mr. Justice Ranade's contribution to this branch of Indian Judiciary law has been both solid in quality and large in quantity. His great forte was his intimate knowledge of life in the moffusil.... Thus, on the question of adoption by a widow who had not removed her hair, or the adoption by her of her brother's son, or of a son older than herself, or the right recognition as regenerate cases of castes that claimed to be so, his opinion of what daily practice had made current, was almost conclusive... Mr. Justice Ranade's wide learning, his knowledge of the social and economic conditions of his country and his clear and comprehensive grasp of measures and events stood him in good stead when as a High Court Judge he had to advise Government on any new piece of legislation....."

Ranade never shirked a question or evaded an argument. His final conclusions were formed after mature deliberations and independent consideration.

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In his biography of Ranade, T.V. Parvate says that the entire credit for having laid the foundations of what has now been regarded as Indian Economics must indisputably go to his subject. Ranade held the view that the principles of Economics were not of an eternal and axiomatic character and that their application to Indian conditions must be made only in the light of India's political, cultural and social posture.

Ranade, it must be remembered, was very knowledgeable about the economic conditions of India. In 1881 he had been on inspection duty in Pune and Satara districts under the Deccan Agriculturist Relief Act. In 1887 he was a Special Judge under the Deccan Ryots Relief Act. Ranade had all the facts and figures at his finger tips. As India was an undeveloped and industrially backward country, Ranade exhorted the State to adopt a policy of aiding the peasantry to take to progressive methods of production, of freeing them from the incubus of ancestral, perennial indebtedness. He often pleaded for encouraging industrialisation by starting State factories for the manufacture of certain goods, antedating the concept of Public Sector by a good 75 years! In a paper he wrote for the Deccan College Ranade wrote : "The State is now more and more recognised as the national organ for taking care of national needs in all matters likely to be so effective and economic as national effort. This is the correct view to take of the true functions of the State.... Education, both liberal and technical, posts and telegraphs, railways and canal communications, the pioneering of new enterprises, the insurance of risky undertakings - all these functions are usefully discharged by the State". Parvate says that "Ranade would almost seem to be anticipating the concepts of a Welfare State and a Socialist State in this paper". In that paper Ranade further wrote : "Even if political considerations forbid independent action in the matter of different duties, pioneering a new enterprise is a duty which the Government might more systematically undertake with advantage....".

It is an amazing paper in which Ranade showed himself an outstanding critic of British economic policy in India. He had the courage to point out that

the process of ruination of India must be arrested in the mutual interests of both India and Britain. Ranade freely quoted Ricardo, Adam Smith, List and others and demonstrated how they were invalid.

Ranade was not against private enterprise and he wanted each individual to develop to his full possibilities. Yet unchecked individualism was considered by him as unnatural and wasteful. He did not regard with favour absolute right to private property or freedom. But that did not deter him from advocating a number of reforms on the basis of self-reliance. His fundamental prescription for the eradication of poverty was industrialisation. He did not ignore agriculture, the backbone of India's economy, but he wanted even that to be modernised. In this field, too, he wanted the State to act as a pioneer and a demonstrator and a mentor by running State farms that secured larger production, quality Production and economic production. He wanted small land holders to form cooperative unions. Karl Marx could well have taken a few lessons from Ranade. Some of the prescriptions he suggested are so modern that one wonders at the man's prescience. Ranade wanted laws enacted to secure fair rent and tenancy to the tenant-cultivator, debts being written off or settled on concessional terms. And Ranade advocated swadeshi long before Gandhiji advocated it.

Studying Ranade's economic philosophy at this distance in time, one is amazed at the man's vision. He wanted planning when planning was something unheard of. He wanted to stop export of raw materials and stepping up of export of manufactured goods. Mr. Parvate says that had Ranade's counsel been accepted there would have been a well-developed engineering industry in India well before the First World War!

Though he was never tired of seeking State help Ranade was quite clear in his mind that "State help is after all a subordinate factor in the problem. Our own exertion and our own resolutions must conquer the difficulties which are chiefly of our own creation"! Prophetic words.

A scholar, P.K. Gopalkrishnan in his exhaustive review of Ranade's contribution to Indian economic thought has written thus : "Mahadev Govind Ranade was the first **economist** who laid down the conditions of economic progress for India and showed a whole range of possible policy to achieve this progress, the importance of Ranade was that of a very great scientific pioneer. He succeeded more than anybody else in India in isolating the chief categories of Indian economic life. He left to his successors many unsolved problems but he also indicated ways in which they might be solved. Thus not only early Indian economic thought but modern Indian economics also with its interest in problems of economic development could claim Ranade as its founder".

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Though professionally Ranade was a Judge and an economist by inclinations, his singular contribution was in reforming Hindu society.

We have to remember the times in which he lived. Child marriage was common. Ranade's first marriage was celebrated when he was just 12 years old! Issues of child marriage, widow remarriage, raising the age of consent and consummation of marriage were major issues that concerned society. Ranade wanted social reform badly, but he was not such a staunch revolutionary as to defy society or even his parents. Ranade's second wife

was just 12 and he himself was 32 when he married her. The excuse given is that Ranade's father manouvered to force his son into marrying for a second time to a girl who was so young she could have been Ranade's daughter. What is evident is that Ranade was not strong enough to oppose his father on a matter of principle. Theoretically Ranade was all for marrying a widow, but in practice he failed his friends who expected him to take a bolder stand. He succumbed to his father's coercion.

Ranade's father was a bit of a tyrant and once protested when the son invited a friend of his who had married a widow to dinner. When Ranade Senior came to know of this, he refused to have his dinner; for Ranade this was very painful. He respected his friend for his courage, but he respected his father even more. In the end Ranade had to apologise for inviting a friend who had married a widow to his home! Such events left a deep scar on his psyche.

Caste rules were strict and woe to anyone who broke them. Social boycott was a major weapon in the hands of Orthodoxy. That could even lead to excommunication. For eating fruit and taking tea with English friends one Krishnashastri Chiploonkar was considered unfit to act as a panch unless he underwent purificatory rites. Ramakrishna Bhandarkar, a great sanskrit scholar was similarly considered unfit to be a panch because he ate fish. Ranade himself was subjected to much presecution at one time. His brahmin cooks left him; he was not invited to any social functions. The ladies of his household were insulted if they went to the temple. Everyone avoided them. If there was a death in the family, it became a matter of difficulty to postmortem obsequies. When Ranade's father came to live with him, Ranade would not sit in the same row as his father and would sit aside like an outcaste - and that, too, in his own house. Once a Christian Missionary institution invited a few Pune

notables for a lecture. They included Ranade, Bhandarkar, Tilak and Gokhale. After the lecture tea was served to the guests. Not to offend the hosts, Ranade and Co. took the tea and had a biscuit or two. This was taken to mean that they had broken caste rules! It is stated that Ranade had not actually drunk the tea but had only touched the cup as a mark of courtesy but that did not matter and he had to appear before a religious head and submit to the latter's authority, along with Tilak. Ranade shocked his reformist friends but Ranade had his own explanation. In a letter to a friend he wrote: "The position that reformers ought to regard all ecclesiastical authorities as their open enemies is one which nobody in active life will venture on urging for a moment. These authorities have their uses and no great purpose is served by ignoring them or treating them with contempt..." Ranade wanted to have no conflict and finally agreed to undergo prayaschitta. Writes Parvate : "It seems that Ranade had fixed certain priorities and preferences in regard to private conduct and therefore he had no qualms of conscience when he seemed to be sacrificing the principles he expounded in his public speeches or writings".

In his public speeches etc. Ranade could wax eloquent about social wrongs. But he was neither a revolutionary nor a revivalist, but an evolutionist. He strongly refuted the claims of the cult of revivalism in one of his addresses to the Social Conference. He said in a show of rare but vehement eloquence: "When we are asked to revive old institutions, people are very vague.... What shall we revive? Shall we revive the old habits of our people when the most sacred of our caste indulged in all the abominations as we now understand them....? Shall we revive the twelve forms of sons or eight forms of marriage which included capture and recognised mixed and

illegitimate intercourse? Shall we revive the niyoga system of procreating sons on our brother's wives when widowed? Shall we revive the old liberties taken by the rishis and their wives with the marital tie? Shall we revive the hecatomb of animals from year's end to year's end and in which human beings were not spared as propitiatory offerings? Shall we revive the shakti worship of the left hand with its indecencies and practical debaucheries? Shall we revive the sati and infanticide customs or the flinging of living men into the rivers or over rocks or hook-swinging or the crushing beneath Jagannath's Car? Shall we revive the internicine wars of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas or the cruel persecution and degradation of the aboriginal population?.... In a living organisation as society is, no revival is possible....If revival is impossible, reformation is the only alternative open to sensible people".

That was the voice of the true social reformer.

For all that it was as if Ranade was willing to wound but afraid to strike. He was a visionary where matters economic were concerned, but an evolutionary where matters social were concerned. He believed that the only way to secure the emancipation of the Hindu community from the bondage of past ideas is to withdraw one by one those fetters of so-called religious injunctions and turn them into civil restraints. He proposed that minimum marriageable age-limit, both for boys and girls should be fixed by law, not compulsory in the sense of annulling marriages contracted before attaining the said limits but only permissive in the sense of leaving the parties concerned freedom to question the binding character of the marriage so contracted, the age limit to be 16 to 18 for boys and 10 to 12 for girls, subject to exceptions in particular castes and localities. We may laugh at this in this day and age, but Ranade apparently saw nothing wrong

in accepting what was practically child marriage. Some of the suggestions Ranade made are quaint. For example, he wanted Universities should, after a reasonable notice, confine their honours and distinctions only to those who, in addition to their other qualifications, submit to the condition of remaining single during their school and college courses! And that men of 45 and upwards should be prohibited by law from marrying young virgins!

On another occasion, Ranade sent a questionnaire to several people to elicit their opinion on matters of social reform. The questions indicate the nature of social reform Ranade had in mind. The questions pertained to female education, prohibition, intercommunication in food and intermarriage, high-caste child widows, sea-voyage to distant countries, custom of employing hired mourners, early marriage, extravagant marriage and funeral expenses, education of backward classes, Street beggars and mendicants etc.

For all that Ranade obviously believed in hastening slowly. In social matters he was ahead of his times only theoretically; in practice he was wary of change. In matters of religion he was a theist. He took it for granted that certain problems were beyond solution by the human intellect - problems like the origin of the world and of man, the relations between man and his creator and the whole creation. In his essay on Philosophy of Indian Theism he wrote "All the proof that we can attain to in religious matters is that of practical, moral conviction. It is just possible that practical or moral conviction is all that is needed ^{and} therefore attainable by the human mind in its search after the Absolute and in that case, the demand for logical proof may itself be an unreasonable demand". Ranade recognised that the human intellect was limited and it could never solve certain riddles. One of his friends, Rao Bahadur Mahajani wrote : "Ranade's

paramount and fundamental characteristic was his exceptional devotion to God. In an intimate conversation he once told me that he often had the feeling that at the end of a long tube God was speaking to him and at the other end he was listening to Him. It is no wonder that one who had experienced such an emotional trance had his whole life highly spiritualised."

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Among other things Ranade was also a first historian in his own right. He was specially interested in Maratha history. His interest dates back to his undergraduate days. Though he was all admiration for the Mahratta saints and Shivaji, in his youth he had written that "a band of robbers led by a successful chief" had laid the foundation of an immense empire. He was to modify that statement later in his classic work Rise of the Mahratta Power. In it he wrote : "Unlike the great subhedars of provinces who became independent after the death of Aurangzeb, the founder of the Mahratta power and his successors for two generation bore the brunt of the attack of the Mughal Empire at the zenith of its splendour. The military adventurers named above were not backed up by any national force behind them and their power perished with the individuals who founded it. In the case of the Mahratta Confederacy however, it was far otherwise. For ten generations, a succession of great leaders sprang up to fill up the place of those who died in the struggle and the Confederacy not only outlived opposition but derived greater strength from the reverses is sustained from time to time, rising Phoenix-like in greater splendour from the very ashes of its apparent ruin. This tenacity showed clearly that the underlying principles had stronger vitality than can be explained by the standard theory of adventure and free-booting or the illustration of a sudden conflagration".

Ranade, along with his friend Telang planned to put in the proper perspective the place of the Mahrattas and their achievements in the history of India by rectifying the mistakes and misrepresentations of British writers like Grant Duff who, in their turn, had mainly depended on Persian sources for their treatment and interpretation. The tradition among British writers of Indian history was to regard the part played in it by the Mahrattas as not of much consequence. Ranade pointed out that it was a serious error of judgement if not deliberate suppression of obvious facts. As Parvate has stated, Ranade's service to the history of India and the Mahratta nationality lies in that he established beyond doubt that the British had to defeat the Mahrattas and wrest power from their hands before establishing their sway in western and central India and that though discomfited, the Mahrattas were quite enlightened rulers who had to succumb to a people of superior civilisation. Ranade clearly demonstrated that there was much to admire in the 150 years rule of the Mahrattas and that they were a people whose rise was not "a mere accident due to any chance combination but was a genuine effort on the part of a Hindu nationality, not merely to assert its independence, but to achieve what had not been attempted before - the formation of a Confederacy of States, animated by a common patriotism and that the success it achieved was due to a general upheaval - social, religious, and political - of all classes of the population".

Till Ranade and Telang came to express themselves forcefully on the subject of Mahratta power, Grant Duff was the only prominent historian to write about it. Ranade took it on himself to remove the erroneous belief that the history of Muslim rulers was alone worth any attention. He opposed the British theory that the

Mahrattas were mere freebooters. As Ranade put it : "Freebooters and adventurers never succeed in building up empires which last for generations and permanently affect the political map of a great continent".

It was Ranade's view that the secret of the Mahratta combination lay in the fact that it was not the work of one man or of a succession of gifted men. The foundation of national consciousness lay broad and deep in the hearts of the Mahratta people. It was the upheaval of a whole population strongly bound together by the common affinities of language, race, religion and literature and seeking further solidarity by a common, independent political existence. It was a national movement in which all classes cooperated.

Ranade further believed that it was not a mere political revolution that stirred Maharashtra towards the close of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. The political revolution, he held, was preceded and to some extent was caused by a religious and social upheaval which moved the entire population. He held that the popular idea that it was religious persecution which agitated Maharashtra and strengthened the hands of Shivaji and his comrades was not wholly wrong, but it represented only a partial truth. The Muslim rulers of the Deccan in the 15th and 16th centuries were not bigoted fanatics. Ranade pointed out that the fact was that, like the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the 16th century there was a religious, social and literary revival and reformation in India. The revival was not Brahmanical in its orthodoxy. As Ranade put it : It was heterodox in its spirit to protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinction based on birth and ethical in its preference of a pure heart and of the law of love to all other acquired merits and good works. The religious revival was also the work of people of the masses and not of the

classes. At its head were saints and prophets, poets, philosophers who sprang chiefly from the lower orders of society such as tailors, carpenters, potters, gardeners, shopkeepers, barbers and even mahars, more often than Brahmins". The political leaders merely acted in concert with the religious leaders and derived strength from them.

Ranade had planned to follow his first volume of Mahratta history with a second and possibly a third volume, but he passed away before he could fulfill his ambition. But he had struck a blow for the reconsideration of history through a new pair of eyes. That was his signal contribution to the assessment of a period of history that had been otherwise looked down upon.

A distinct feature of Ranade's approach to history was his fearlessness. His interpretation of the Shivaji-Afzul Khan Episode comes immediately to mind. After the publication of his book Rise of Mahratta Power, he was sharply questioned in the matter of Afzul Khan's murder. Wasn't it true, he was asked, that when the two men met Afzul Khan caught Shivaji under his left arm and dealt him a blow with a concealed dagger, a blow that could have put an end to Shivaji's life had he not taken the precaution to wear armour on his body? The questioner quoted Sabhasad and Chitnis as saying that the first blow was dealt by Afzul Khan and that Shivaji subsequently used his vyagranakh only in self-defence. Ranade replied that he had consulted both Mahratta bakhars and Mohhamadan histories and that both sides sought to defend either Shivaji or Afzul Khan from all blame. Then he added: "The view I arrived at was that both intended mischief if they could get the opportunity. Shivaji got the opportunity and effected his purpose. He had kept his men near while Afzul Khan's army was far off". The questioner, Mr. S.A. Athalye, was not satisfied with Ranade's explanation and insisted on asserting that it was Afzul Khan who was the first to attack Shivaji with a dagger. Mr. Athalye wrote

"All the bakharkars are unanimous in stating that the Khan was the first to take the initiative by way of sending emissaries to Shivaji who took the measure first. Do I understand you right?"

Ranade replied promptly. He wrote: "It is stated that the Khan seized Shivaji's neck by the left hand and drawing him to himself caught him under his left arm and that Shivaji then aimed his blow when the ^rteachery was discovered. The use of the dagger is not mentioned because when the hands were engaged in the way stated, no dagger could be drawn. This is an obviously exaggerated statement. No two Mahratta accounts of the event exactly tally and what really occurred has to be imagined more than noted as observed facts. One story tells that ten men on each side accompanied the Khan and Shivaji, in another story the number is even smaller and the names are differently given. In the recent bakhar obtained from Tanjore, we find the writer saying honestly that "God alone knows what really occurred'. This Tanjore narrative differs from both Sabhasad and Chitnis. As stated in my previous letter ^{the matter} is of no importance in its details of attack and repulse. It is on the previous negotiations and preparation and on the final success of one over the other, on the natural qualities of the two men, that we must depend in deciding what might really have happened".

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According to Parvate, Ranade was a combination of all the three - politician, statesman, prophet - without ever having any of the possible blemishes of a politician. In that he pre-dated Mahatma Gandhi. Indeed he was a Mahatma in his own way. We have the testimony of no less than Gokhale to this effect. Ten years after the passing away of Ranade, Gokhale wrote to say that "born a few centuries

ago, Ranade would have found his place by the side of saints like Tukaram or Eknath". Gandhiji met Ranade face to face but once - in 1896-and was impressed. Gandhi then was about 27 years old and Ranade 44 years old. Long afterwards Gandhiji wrote : Justice Ranade awed me. I could hardly talk in his presence". Gandhiji was to learn that his 'master' Gokhale almost revered Ranade and this could be seen "every moment". In all matters Gokhale accepted Ranade's authority as final. Gandhiji said on another occasion : " As the late Gokhale used to say, nothing escaped Ranade's eagle eye and nothing that would benefit the least of his countrymen was ever too trifling for his consideration". Long before Gandhiji thought of the charkha, Ranade had found its uses and noted its prevalence in the Indian villages. And he wanted improvements made of the charakha. As parvate has noted : "Had Ranade lived long enough and opportunity for closer contacts with him been vouchsafed to Gandhi, they would certainly have found that they were kindred souls such as no two other persons had ever been".

For Gokhale, Ranade was almost a God. He wrote of his hero : "It is no exaggeration to say that younger men who came in personal contact with him left as in a holy presence, not only uttering nothing base, but afraid of thinking unworthy thoughts while in his company". On another occasion Gokahle wrote: "He (Ranade) was one of those men who appear from time to time in different countries and on different occasions to serve as a light to guide the footsteps of erring humanity".

Ranade was a patriot of the purest waters. His patriotism was loftily conceived and was of the highest order. As Parvate has remarked, Ranade's faith in the potentialities of his countrymen was so great that he sincerely believed that India had the ability and the potentiality to be the master of the world humanity by reason of her great achievements in the past. Ranade once

declared : I profess implicit faith in two articles of my creed. This country of ours is the true land of promise. This race of ours is the chosen race! On another occasion he said : "We could not break with the past, if ^{we} would. We must not break with it, if we could". Such was his faith in India. Importantly, Ranade had the great power to inspire young workers who came into personal contact with him. To them, as to Gokhale, Ranade's word was law and his approbation, their highest earthly reward. Even Englishmen like Allan Octavius Hume, Wedderburn, Cotton Norton and Selby were charmed by Ranade. Nearly twenty five years after Ranade's death, Surenendranath Bannerjee in his A Nation in the Making wrote : "Mr. Ranade was, in regard to all public movements in the western presidency, the power behind the throne. A public servant, loyal to government, with that true loyalty not born of personal motives, but having its roots in the highest consideration of expediency and the public good, he was the guide, friend and philosopher of the public men of the western presidency; and all public movements, were they political, social or religious, bore the impress of his masterful personality".

It was not that Ranade did not have his detractors. But even in their criticism of Ranade they were most respectful. Tilak often differed from Ranade and once mounted a frontal attack on the latter. All that Ranade had to say about this in a letter to a friend was : "It is a genuine struggle between earnest men!"

Tilak reciprocated such sentiments. Once in an unguarded moment Tilak exclaimed : "Can we except a peer of Ranade to be born within a hundred years after him?" That showed with what respect and honour Tilak regarded Ranade.

The Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri would say that the only correct epithet for Ranade was **"Father of Modern India"**.

Speaking at a meeting of the Servants of India Society in Madras in 1936 Sastri said : "Ranade was an unrivalled figure and he ^{had} what few leaders have, the marvellous gift of attracting young and promising men and giving that turn to their minds and hearts which renders them great instruments of public welfare... his figure could always be seen in the intimate discussions of the Subjects Committee of the Congress. Every difficulty was referred to him. At every crisis he would interpose with his great authority and the Congressmen of those days, giants though they were, were proud to acknowledge that many a time Mr. Ranade kept them straight on the road of progress...."

Then there is the evidence of C.Y. Chintamani who said in a lecture delivered at the Andhra University : "Ranade was mighty in intellect, a man ~~of~~ of prodigious industry and of vast and various learning; a profound thinker and an ardent patriot. Hadicapped as he was by having been in Government Service all his life, he was a keen political worker, a religious reformer and a still more ardent~~x~~ social reformer, one of the greatest authorities on Indian economics, a great educationist, the inspirer and instructor of younger men who flocked to him. With all these rare accomplishments, Ranade was the most modest, simple, courteous, unassuming of men, full of piety and the humility which is the invariable accompaniment of true greatness".

(8)

Ranade was a progressive in social matters and was sometimes forced to pay for his views. When he transferred to Pune he joined the local Prarthana Samaj; the Samaj had as its aims the discouragement of idol worship, the obliteration of caste differences and encouragement of widow re-marriage among caste Hindus. Ranade subscribed to these aims fully. He was also respectful of other movements such as the Arya Samaj movement that was then gaining momentum in north India, especially Punjab. Once, its

founder, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, had come to Pune and the leading citizen there decided to honour him. Among them was Ranade.

But there were others who were opposed to the idea and were determined to disrupt a procession that was being taken out in honour of the Swami. Ranade participated in the procession which was stoned; mud was flung at him. Ranade stuck it out, determined to hold on to his convictions. The police, meanwhile, had succeeded in nabbing the miscreants and the question arose as to what to do with them. Ranade was in favour of forgiving them and allowing them to reform their ways. That was characteristic of the man. He believed in change of heart. On a larger level he advocated social evolution. In an address to the Social Conference held in Allahabad in 1892 he defined his views in concrete terms. The change he sought, he said was:

from Constraint to Freedom;

from Status to Contract;

from Authority to Reason;

from Unorganised to Organised Life;

from Bigotry to Toleration and

from Blind Fatalism to a sense of Human Dignity.

That, said Ranade, was what he understood by social revolution both for individuals and society in India.

Such was this man. He was essentially a man of peace and goodwill who normally shunned confrontation. He was singularly bereft of ambition. Success, such as it was, came to him unasked. He did not enter into competition with anybody for anything. As Gokhale once said, the first person singular just did not exist in Ranade's vocabulary. He was not meant for heroic action. Heroics was furthest from his philosophy. He was temperamentally aloof from that sort of thing. He could be vehement in his expressions but he was more known for his calmness and ~~steadiness~~ of mind, his forbearance and his equanimity. He readily forgave, bore

no ill-will towards anybody, was not resentful and always chose the path of conciliatory cooperation. Gokhale was to sum up his guru's character in these words : "His saintly disposition, even more than this intellectual gifts, won for him the devoted admiration and attachment of large numbers of his countrymen throughout India".

(9)

When your Principal came to invite me to deliver the Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Lecture he was magnanimous enough to say that I could speak on any subject I fancied. Perhaps he said, I could speak on Journalism, which, after all, is what I have been engaged in these forty five years. And that is a long time. But some time in November 1991 I became aware of the **sesquicentennial birth anniversary of Mahadev Govind Ranade** and I decided that his life and thought would provide me ample material for organising a lecture. We have come a long way in these 150 years. When Ranade was born conditions in India were chaotic. the British had yet to consolidate their hold on the country. The revolt of 1857 was thirteen to fifteen years ahead. The great universities were still to take shape. Railways, Telegraphs, roads, bridges were yet to unite India as never before. Travel was a torture. Medical attention was primitive. Communication was slow. Opportunities for advancement were few and far between. It was in such times that Ranade lived. Today, a hundred and fifty years after his birth we need to remember him with gratitude for the high examples he set for us. He was the initiator of social reform. Today when inter-caste, inter-religious marriages are if not common, certainly not unheard of, when child marriages are more of a joke than an everyday reality (save in some areas of the country), when no one would give second thought to whether a widow is remarried or not and when society accepts divorce as a fact of life, it is difficult

to conceive of a time when a brahmin might be ostracised from society or even excommunicated for taking a cup of tea with a Christian!

It is good to remember the changes that have taken place and to chart out a plan for the future, based on the past. The past is always with us. It cannot be erased from memory, nor should we try. To know the past is to hope for the future.

Ranade's life should inspire us for creating a better, more humane society. There still are social evils that need to be eradicated. Untouchability is still with us. Poverty mocks us at every step. Inequality is a daily fact of life. There are distortions in our politics that need to be straightened out. In speaking to you about Ranade's life it is my earnest hope that somewhere somehow I have lit a lamp of courage and endeavour in your minds. Hopefully from among you, a Ranade will spring who will be a shining model for others to follow as the country moves forward to the twenty-first century and beyond.

Thank you.

