

ROLL OF BALAGANGADHAR THILK CONTRIBUTION TO THE INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Tilak's role as an effective activist has quite naturally attracted the attention of the scholars. Impressed by Tilak's contribution to the Indian National struggle, these scholars tend to assess Tilak's views on 'Nationalism' only on the basis of his strategy. "Religion and practical life are not different. To take Sanyasa (renunciation) is not to abandon life. The real spirit is to make the country your family work together instead of working only for your own. The step beyond is to serve humanity and the next step is to serve God. The Swadeshi movement started by Tilak at the beginning of the 20th century became part of the Independence movement until that goal was achieved in 1947. One can even say Swadeshi remained part of Indian Government policy until the 1990s when the Congress Government liberalized the economy.

Keywords:- Tilak's Nationalism, freedom fighter, Indian National Congress, Lokmanya Tilak: Creator of Modern India.

Introduction :-

Bal Gangadhar Tilak , born as **Keshav Gangadhar Tilak** (23 July 1856-1 August 1920), was an Indian nationalist, journalist, teacher, social reformer, lawyer and an independence activist. He was the first popular leader of the Indian Independence Movement. The British colonial authorities called him "Father of the Indian unrest."

He was also conferred with the honorary title of "Lokmanya", which literally means "Accepted by the people (as their leader)".

Tilak was one of the first and strongest advocates of "Swaraj" (self-rule) and a strong radical in Indian consciousness. His famous quote, "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it!" is well-remembered in India even today. He also formed a close alliance with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, later the founder of Pakistan, during the Indian Home rule movement.

According to historians, Tilak was Bhishma Pitamah of nationalism. He was a staunch supporter of Advaita philosophy and considered Vedanta as the basis of free humanity, according to which no moral and spiritual life is possible without freedom. Foreign imperialism kills the soul of a nation and therefore Tilak fought against the British Empire. He believed that the messages of the Vedas and the Gita were capable of giving spiritual energy and moral strength to the nation. The revival of India's ancient culture is essential for healthy and vital traditions. And building true nationalism is possible only on the old ideological foundation. He called this old foundation spiritual nationalism. Bankim Chandra, Swami Vivekananda, Maharishi Arvind were also of the same opinion. It can be said that Tilak had a systematic philosophy of nationalism. He felt that the roots of Indian nationalism should be reflected in the sentiments and culture of the people, not just in the intellectual appeal of Western theories.

Tilak was also opposed to the Anglicisation of Indian society in the name of political and social reforms. He wanted to nurture the nationalist movement on the foundation of a strong cultural and religious revival. So he tried to take nationalism to the masses through the festivals of Ganapati (Pune, 1892) and Shivaji (Fort Raigarh, 1894) in Maharashtra. In this endeavour, he got unprecedented success. These festivals still draw strong attendance every year.

Indian National Congress

Tilak joined the Indian National Congress in 1890. He opposed its moderate attitude, especially towards the fight for self-government. He was one of the most eminent radicals at the time.

Despite being personally opposed to early marriage, Tilak opposed the 1891 Age of Consent bill, seeing it as interference with Hinduism and a dangerous precedent.

The act raised the age at which a girl could get married from 10 to 12 years.

During late 1896, a Bubonic plague epidemic spread from Bombay to Pune, and by January 1897, it reached epidemic proportions. British troops were brought in to deal with the emergency and harsh measures were employed including forced entry into private houses, examination of occupants, evacuation to hospitals and segregation camps, removing and destroying personal possessions, and preventing patients from entering or leaving the city. By the end of May, the epidemic was under control.

Even if the British authorities' measures were well-meant, they were widely regarded as acts of tyranny and oppression. Tilak took up this issue by publishing inflammatory articles in his paper Kesari (Kesari was written in Marathi, and Maratha was written in English), quoting the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, to say that no blame could be attached to anyone who killed an oppressor without any thought of reward. Following this, on 22 June 1897,

Rand and another British officer, Lt. Ayerst were shot and killed by the Chapekar brothers and their other associates.

Tilak was charged with incitement to murder and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment. When he emerged from prison in present-day Mumbai, he was revered as a martyr and a national hero. He adopted a new slogan, "Swaraj (self-rule) is my birthright and I shall have it."

Following the Partition of Bengal (1905), which was a strategy set out by Lord Curzon to weaken the nationalist movement, Tilak encouraged the Swadeshi movement and the Boycott movement.^[7] The Boycott movement consisted of the boycott of foreign goods and also the social boycott of any Indian who used foreign goods. The Swadeshi movement consisted of the usage of goods produced by oneself or in India. Once foreign goods were boycotted, there was a gap which had to be filled by the production of those goods in India itself. Tilak, therefore, rightly said that the Swadeshi and Boycott movements are two sides of the same coin.

Tilak opposed the moderate views of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and was supported by fellow Indian nationalists Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab. They were referred to as the Lal-Bal-Pal triumvirate. In 1907, the annual session of the Congress Party was held at Surat, Gujarat. Trouble broke out over the selection of the new president of the Congress between the moderate and the radical sections of the party. The party split into the "Jahal matavadi" ("Hot Faction" or radicals), led by Tilak, Pal and Lajpat Rai, and the "Maval matavadi" ("Soft Faction" or moderates). Nationalists like Aurobindo Ghose, V. O. Chidambaram Pillai were Tilak supporters.

Life after prison

Tilak had mellowed after his release in June 1914, because of the attack of diabetes and also the ordeals faced in Mandalay prison. When World War I started in August, Tilak cabled the King-Emperor in Britain of his support and turned his oratory to find new recruits for war efforts. He welcomed The Indian Councils Act, popularly known as Minto-Morley Reforms, which had been passed by British Parliament in May 1909, terming it as "a marked increase of confidence between the Rulers and the Ruled". Acts of violence actually retarded, than hastened, the pace of political reforms, he felt. He was eager for reconciliation with Congress and had abandoned his demand for direct action and settled for agitations "strictly by constitutional means" - a line advocated by his rival Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Tilak saw the spark in Mohandas Gandhi and tried his best to convince Gandhi to leave the idea of "Total Ahimsa" and try to get "Swarajya" by all means. Gandhi, though looked upon him as his guru, did not change his mind.

All India Home Rule League

Later, Tilak re-united with his fellow nationalists and re-joined the Indian National Congress in 1916. He also helped found the All India Home Rule League in 1916–18, with G. S. Khaparde and Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Annie Besant. After years of trying to reunite the moderate and radical factions, he gave up and focused on the Home Rule League, which sought self-rule. Tilak travelled from village to village trying to conjure up support from farmers and locals to join the movement towards self-rule. Tilak was impressed by the Russian Revolution, and expressed his admiration for Vladimir Lenin.^[11]

Tilak, who started his political life as a Maratha propagandist, progressed into a prominent nationalist after his close association with Indian nationalists following the partition of Bengal. When asked in Calcutta whether he envisioned a Maratha-type of government for Free India, Tilak replied that the Maratha-dominated governments of 17th and 18th centuries were outmoded in the 20th century, and he wanted a genuine federal system for Free India where every religion and race was an equal partner. He added that only such a form of government would be able to safeguard India's freedom. He was the first Congress leader to suggest that Hindi written in the Devanagari script

be accepted as the sole national language of India.

Social contributions

In 1894, Tilak transformed the household worshipping of Ganesha into a public event(Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav).

In 1895, Tilak founded the Shri Shivaji Fund Committee for celebration of "Shiv Jayanti" or the birth anniversary of Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of 17th century Maratha Empire. The project also had the objective of funding the reconstruction of the tomb (Samadhi) of Shivaji Maharaj at Raigad Fort. For this second objective, Tilak established the Shri ShivajiRaigad Smarak Mandal along with Senapati Khanderao Dabhade II of Talegaon Dabhade, who became the Founder President of the Mandal. Tilak started the Marathi weekly, Kesari in 1880-81 with Gopal Ganesh Agarkar as the first editor. Kesari later became a daily and continues publication to this day. Tilak said, "I regard India as my Motherland and my Goddess, the people in India are my kith and kin, and loyal and steadfast work for their political and social emancipation is my highest religion and duty."

Swaraj and the Swadeshi Movement

Historians consider Shivaji Maharaj as the originator of the principle of Swaraj, who was the source of inspiration for Tilak. In 1895, Tilak started the campaign of Swaraj. Swaraj, he believed, must precede any meaningful social reform. He reminded the people that Shivaji also considered Swaraj as the basis of social and political freedom. The principle of Swaraj was in perfect harmony with the social and political philosophy of Tilak. To give it shape, he started the Home Rule League in 1916 with Annie Besant. Tilak also thought of a federal type of political structure under Swaraj. He had chosen the example of the American Congress for the implementation of his programme. For your information, Tilak was also going to advance the principle of "nonviolent passive resistance".

There were two features in Tilak's political philosophy that distinguished him from liberal thinkers. First—Where liberals naturally wanted to bring democratic institutions, Tilak wanted immediate Swaraj.

Secondly, they were in favor of giving full rights to the public to oppose the power center which has lost its legitimacy.

The trio of Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal was also famous. Tilak was the most vocal among these three. He gave a three-point program to the nation for effective political action against the British Raj – Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education. It had changed the nationalist terminology itself.

Boycott – By making the public aware against British manufactured goods, British business interests in India and abroad were to be harmed. Gradually it became a political weapon as well.

Swadeshi

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In 1906, in the Calcutta session of the Congress, Tilak supported the Swadeshi proposal and laid the

foundation of the economic foundation of nationalism. The Swadeshi movement soon became a symbol of national upliftment and patriotism.

National Education – According to Tilak, India's education system should have its roots in its culture and tradition. He was also a strong advocate of industrial and political education along with the spread and promotion of Indian languages in schools.

There are many proofs of Tilak's multidimensional personality. As a teacher, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Poona New English School, the Deccan Education Society and the Fergusson College. Even before becoming active in the Indian National Congress, Tilak used to disseminate his nationalist ideas through the newspapers Kesari (in Marathi) and Maharat (in English). He started both the newspapers in 1885. He formally joined the Congress in 1890. He played a decisive role in this from 1905 to 1907 and from 1917 to 1920. He advocated self-reliance at a time when some leaders looked to the British Raj for sympathy and support. At that time, Congress was mainly a middle class organization, Tilak had connected it with the lower middle class and common people.

Tilak had also given a broad definition to Sanatan. According to him, a Hindu is one who believes in the teachings of the Vedas and whose conduct is in accordance with the Smriti and Puranas. He was well-versed in ancient Sanskrit philosophy and his political thought was a confluence of Indian thought and nationalist and democratic ideas of the modern world. In the famous trial speech of 1908, he gave an example of John Stuart Mill's definition of nationalism. He is also called Loknayak.

In 1897, there were many deaths due to plague in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Pune. The situation was no longer under the control of the government. The Assistant Collector of Pune used brutal methods to contain the disease. These included incidents of burning houses and even shooting patients. In protest against this, Tilak had published articles quoting "Bhagavad Gita" in his newspaper Kesari. After the publication, the Assistant Collector and his assistant were murdered. Tilak was accused of inciting and was sentenced to eighteen months. But when he came out of jail, he had become a national hero. He came to be called by the name of Lokmanya i.e. "beloved leader of the people".

Importance of Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Indian history

He was the first leader to give importance to Indian identity. Identity was considered an archaic topic by the early social scientists. But this gradually began to change and many social scientists understood the importance of identity and identified it as a motivating factor for human enterprise.

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the first leader to advance the importance of identity in modern India. Tilak realized that identity could be a great tool to energize a dull society.

He believed that once people understood their identity, they would themselves be inspired to join the struggle for freedom.

Lokmanya Tilak: Creator of Modern India

"Swaraj is my birthright and I will have it!", this is the slogan that created political consciousness among Indians towards self-rule. · This slogan was given by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. In view of his contribution to the Indian independence movement, Tilak is revered as a leader of Indian public opinion.

His being called the "Maker of Modern India" by Mahatma Gandhi or the "Father of Indian Unrest" by the British colonial power attests to his contribution and legacy to Indian society and the freedom struggle. Tilak was the first leader to take forward the idea of Swaraj and Swadeshi. Looking at the way he has used Indian culture, education and newspapers to awaken the spirit of Swaraj and Swadeshi among the people, it can be said that his contribution as a philosopher-politician is incomparable.

Political ideas of Tilak:

Tilak firmly believed that state and king must exist for the development and survival of man. He was ardent supporter of rule of law and democracy. He argued,” to give authority into people’s hand is the best principle of administration.”¹

Again,Tilak believed that king and the people had obligationsto war deach other. Hegave the concept of Pragadroha which meant the crime of treason by the king to the people and argued that Pragadroha did not find place.

TILAK:NATIONALISM

Tilak’s major thrust, as an activist, was on generating the sentiment and spirit of nationhood among the Indians. He believed that a freedom struggle cannot effectively emerge unless and until the common people shed their apathy and realize that they form a nation. In fact, his major complaint against the Indian political leadership of his contemporary generation as well as the preceding one was that it had not grasped the real problem, namely, regeneration of the spirit of nationality. Stimulating national consciousness among the common people, according to Tilak, was a must for the resurrection of India. He, naturally, laid an all-out emphasis and concentrated his energies on imparting national consciousness to the people.

Tilak’s role as an effective activist has quite natrally attracted the attention of the scholars. Impressed by Tilak’s contribution to the Indian National struggle, these scholars tend to assess Tilak’s views on ‘Nationalism’ only on the basis of his strategy.

For a correct understanding and assessment of Tilak’s views on Nationalism, these need be evaluated against his theoretical perception of the concept and phenomenon of ‘Nationalism’.

it may be recalled, the Indian Renaissance was essentially a Hindu Renaissance. Further, the beginning of Oriental studies and the religious reform movements had helped to restore the confidence of the Hindus in their own faith and cultural heritage. As a result of the new discovery of Hindu a identity, a new communal‘ consciousness which the Hindus had lacked historically, began to develop.

Even before the emergence of Tilak on the political scene, the Hindu- Muslim rift had thus raised its head in Indian politics.

Extremists and Moderates

In appreciation of this attitude, Bipin Pal, a member of the Lal-Bal-Pal group, was categorical in stating Firstly, that the principal goal of the extremist struggle was 'the abdication of the right of England to determine the policy of the Indian Government, there relinquishment of the right of the presented spotism to enact whatever law they please to govern the people of this country'.

Secondly, the Extremists were not hesitant in championing 'violence', if necessary, to advance the cause of the nation while the Moderates favoured constitutional and peaceful methods as most appropriate to avoid direct friction with the ruler.

In contrast with these means, the Extremists resorted to boycott and swadeshi that never evoked support from the Moderates. While defending boycott, Tilak argued that 'it is possible to make administration deplorably difficult and to create conditions impossible for the British bureaucracy by fighting for our rights with determination and tenacity and by boycott and strike'. Urging those associated with the British bureaucracy, Tilak further argued that with the withdrawal of the Indians from the administration, 'the entire machinery will collapse'.

Simultaneously with boycott of government offices, the Extremists also propagated for boycott of foreign goods and promotion of swadeshi or home-spun. This strategy, first 'adopted in the context of the 1905 Bengal partition agitation, was further extended to the nationalist campaign as a whole, presumably because of its effectiveness in creating and sustaining the nationalist zeal. The economic boycott, as it was characterised in contemporary parlance, caused consternation among the British industrialists more than the other types of boycott.

Thirdly, the Moderates appeared to be happy under the British presumably because of their belief that Indians were not at all capable of self-rule. This was what prompted them to support the British rule uncritically. Views of the Extremists were, for obvious reasons, diametrically opposite.

While articulating his opposition to this idea, Tilak argued that

“we recognize no teacher in the art of self government except self-government itself”.

It values freedom for its own sake and desires autonomy, immediate and unconditional regardless of any considerations of “fitness or unfitness of the people for it”. Here too, the Moderate-

Extremist distinction is based on serious ideological differences. While the former

supported a loyalist discourse, the latter simply rejected the stance in its articulation of anti-imperialism.

Fourthly, in the Extremist conceptualisation of struggle against imperialism, the ideal of self-sacrifice, including the , supreme sacrifice figured prominently while in the Moderate scheme of political struggle, this idea appeared to have received no attention.

This probably indicates two different faces of Extremism: on the one hand, there was the public appearance where the strategies of boycott, swadeshi and strike were pursued to articulate the nationalist protest; the sudden violent attack was, on the other, also encouraged to terrorise the British administration that was rattled following the incessant violent interventions by those who preferred underground militant operation. One of the preferred modes of action was assassination of 'brutal' British officials. Such acts would strike terror into the hearts of the rulers, arouse the patriotic instincts of the people, inspire them and remove the fear of authority from their minds. And it had propaganda value because during the trial of those involved in conducting violent attacks on the British officials, the revolutionaries, and their cause received adequate publicity not only in the pro- government but also in the nationalist media.

Finally, while the Moderates drew upon the British variety of liberalism, the Extremists were inspired by the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and the teachings of Vivekananda.

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Conclusion

The tone and principles of Lokmanya Tilak's demand were strategically clear and satisfactory. He wrote that "India was like a son who has grown up and matured. Now it is right that the trustee or the father should give him what is his." Today when we talk about self-reliant India, Tilak's legacy should be carried forward. Reviving the spirit of economic nationalism to promote indigenous manufacturing and striving for social integration through culture were prominent features of Tilak's strategy. This strategy of Tilak for self- reliance remains true even today.

Thus it could be safely concluded that Bal Gangadhar Tilak played a significant role in India's struggle for independence by contributing in all spheres be it political, social or religious. He was extremist as compared to moderates. He envisaged a significant role for religion in national movement but was against the misuse to divide the society. Bal Ganga dhar Tilak was an independence activist who was also a journalist, teacher, social reformer and lawyer. He died on August 1 in the year 1920. He is better known for the quote

"Swarajya is my birthright and I shall have it!" Here are some unknown facts about him that you should know: Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the first leader of the Indian Independence Movement and led to the rise of Indian nationalism. The Britishers called Bal Gangadhar Tilak, 'The Father of the Indian unrest'

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