



“POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF LOKMANYA BAL GANGADHAR TILAK ”

Dharshana Devi

Assistant Professor (Pol.sc.)

Sri Vinayak Mahavidhalya. Sri Vijay Nagar,

Sri Ganganagar (Rajasthan)

Abstract

Lord Macaulay's Indian intellectuals, the leaders of Westernization in social and political reform, based their programme of social and political action almost entirely on the philosophy of life and action of nineteenth century Europe. They were truly more the products of Western civilization than Indian. Tilak was not satisfied with the western values and was not ready to reject India's own philosophy of life in order to imitate the philosophy of the British.

For Tilak there was no reason for India to feel ashamed of her civilization then compared to the west. Just the contrary, India should feel great pride. Indian values were different from but not inferior to western values.

Key words: Swaraj, multifaceted, discrimination, nationalist, numerous, generation, participate, instrumental.

From an Indian philosophy of life Tilak and the nationalist leaders began to construct an Indian philosophy of politics that was to become the political theory of the Indian Independence Movement. He became the main architect of the political philosophy of the Indian independence movement as he was one of the most important leaders of India at that time¹

“Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it” were the fiery motivating words of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, which aroused a sleeping nation to action, making Indians aware of their political plight under an imperialist rule.² That way, Tilak may arguably be credited to be first of the Indian nationalists who lit the indomitable light of radical nationalism in the hearts of common people of India. He had multifaceted personality and devoted his energies to diverse types of activities. As an great champion of the Poona temperance and educationist, he played significant role in establishing Poona New English School in 1880, apart from the Decean Education Society and the Fergussoan College.

During the days of Swadeshi Movement, he was the main leader, mover and also patron of the Samartha Vidyalaya. As a fighter against economic injustice, he played an important role in making the people conscious of their rights during the famine of 1896.³ He was opposed to any kind of economic discriminations and moved an important resolutions pertaining to economic affairs from the nationalist platforms such as the resolution on permanent settlement, decentralization of finances, etc. Swadeshi movement and its cult is closely associated with Tilak. As a political leader, Tilak played very significant role in activities having profound impact on the



life of common men. He infused the spirit of political assertiveness and patriotism among the people of the country through his aggressive nationalist policies.

He was keen to see that the public should not remain unaware about numerous happening in the region and in the subcontinent as a whole. He had the desire to give vent to his feeling in the press with the sense of complete responsibility and freedom. Therefore, he started two news papers Keshri and Maratha in 1881.⁴ To inject the spirit of nationalism and awareness among the people, he started the Ganapati Puja and Shivaji Mahotsva in 1896. These festivals were instrumental in bringing people together culturally irrespective of their caste and creed. He believed that independence is the foremost necessity for the well being of a nation and its people. In India perhaps he was the first leader to understand the importance of mass support and subsequently became the first mass leader of India. He realized that the constitutional agitation in itself have been futile against the Colonial rule but without venturing with the revolutionaries. He created and marshaled the extremist wing of the Indian National Congress which he joined in 1889 His movement was based on the principles of Swadeshi (reliance on indigenous products), Boycott and Education.

Believing that the imparting education is the best policy to serve the nation and its people, he and his friend Gopal Ganesh Agarkar who became the, Principal of the Ferguson College, decided to devote their lives to the cause of education. To impart affordable and healthy education to younger generation,⁵ they established the New English School at Pune, in and Deccan Society in 1885. They started their carrier as school teachers. However, Tilak felt that only educating young generation was not enough and that the elderly people also needed to be exposed to the socio-political and economic realities of Indian society and started two weeklies Maratha and Keshri in English and Marathi respectively. According to Tilak enriching the Indian society and its cultural values is only possible with the development of education. Tilak had great respect and love for Indian civilization. He analyzed the situation of the country and concluded that the freedom of the Nation cannot be achieved without the active support of the masses. In order to enthuse the masses to participate in the ongoing freedom struggle actively it was essential to revive their pride in the glorious past of the country and make them awake of the misdeeds of the foreign rule. Ganpati and Shivaji Mahotsava became highly successful in this regard and became a mile stone in the history of our freedom movement.

Tilak was the first political Leader to break through the routine of its somewhat academic methods, to bridge the gulf between the present and the past and to restore continuity to the political life of the nation. He developed a language and a spirit and used methods which indianized the movement and brought into the masses. Tilak had not faith in the constitutional method adopted by Gokhle and others to achieve their goal. He pointed out that the constitutional method might be very appropriate in a country like Britain where there is a constitution and a responsible government for the public. But it is totally inapplicable to a country like India where the penal



code is the constitution and the people have no democratic means to change the government. He asserted that Indian could not base their agitation on law because the law could be changed by the irresponsible and autocratic government at any point of time and in any manner it like.

About the ineffectiveness of the Constitutional method he wrote in Kesari, "We will get nothing by appealing to or shouting hoarse in the ears of the British bureaucracy in India. It is like breaking our heads against a stone wall. He was off the opinion that the British government is unresponsive to the demands of the Congress leaders, because it was convinced that they could 'only bark and had no teeth to bite.' Thus he adopted a method of agitation which must heart the British government.

Political Philosophy

Tilak was the first Indian leader who enthused courage, confidence, fearlessness, strength and determination amongst the people of India. He was who make the people realize of their fundamental right by ensuring their active participation in Indian politics against the British Raj.⁶

Tilak's great progressive role consists first of all in the fact that he was the first Indian patriot to hoist the banner of India's independence and call the people to struggle for national freedom, for winning power, for its passing from the hands of the omnipotent British bureaucracy into the hands of representatives of the people. A dedicated fighter for his country's national freedom and democratic rights of the people that he was, Tilak justly gained prestige and was acknowledged the first popular leader of India.

N.C. Kelkar] a biographer and follower of Tilak, depicting his prominent role in the revolutionary events of 1905-08, notes:

The Government never concealed their belief that whatever might or might not happen in Bengal or elsewhere, Mr. Tilak was the cause of all political activity and that no campaign of repressive prosecutions could ever be complete unless it involved this towering leader of the New Party.⁷

A report from the Russian consulate in Bombay said that he "is with good reason held here to be the Father of the Extremists and leader of the Bengal nationalists." The Russian Consul, Baron Geiking, who attended Tilak's trial, also observed in his report that Tilak "really gives the impression of a man of extreme views, and it is no wonder that the British fear the influence he wield." Geiking described Tilak as a "keen revolutionary".⁸

Mahatma Gandhi described Lokmanaya Tilak as the maker of the Modern India.⁹ Sir Valentine Chirol called him the "Father of the Indian unrest"¹⁰ and Pandit Nehru paid his tribute as father of Indian Revolution".¹¹ Their assessments highlight only one aspect of Tilak's personality and mission. Tilak was a philosopher of Indian nationalism and a prophet of resurrection of India as a nation. Tilak's thought and leadership needs to be revaluated with historical perspective. According to V P Verma, Tilak's political philosophy has its roots both in Indian tradition as well



as in some of the currents of contemporary western political and legal thought. Tilak was a great scholar and believer of the Vedas, though there is no direct influence of the Vedic Samhitas on his political thought.¹²

If political philosophy means the speculative construction of an idealistic utopia then Tilak has not given us any picture of politically perfect society. He does not discuss the features and possibilities of the ideal state as Plato; Aristotle and Cicero. He does not create the architectonic of the conceptually perfect state in the manner of Hegel and Bossuet. His main concern in life was the political emancipation of India and hence there is an element of great realism in his political ideas and outlook. However, he was not a realist in the Hobbesian and Machiavellian sense. He was never a political pragmatist but his political thought represents a synthesis of some of the dominant conceptions of Indian thought and the nationalistic and democratic ideas of the modern west. He was a Vedantist which taught him the supremacy of the concept of freedom. According to him freedom was the soul of the Home rule movement. The divine instinct of freedom revealed freedom is the "freedom was the soul of the home rule movement."¹³

Very life of the individual soul, which Vedanta declares is to be not separate from God but identical with him. This freedom was a principle that could never perish. For him freedom was a divine attribute. Freedom was equated with the autonomous power of creativism, without freedom no moral and spiritual life was possible.

Social Philosophy of Tilak

Tilak advocated social reforms as it would contribute to the growth of national consciousness, but several critics have lamented the alliance between the political extremism and social orthodoxy of the Tilak. It is very much true that Tilak was definitely opposed to social change on western lines, but he was not opposed to the social reforms as such according to the norms and demands of the Indian society. He was Nationalist and not the privacy of the political emancipation. His ideas of the social reforms must be seen in that order. He was of the opinion that social advancement was no criteria for political emancipation. Hence, he states that the prime need of the hour was concentration of energy for the attainment of political rights social reforms would naturally and necessarily come after political rights had been obtained.

He was of the firm opinion that whatever reforms were necessary should be introduced gradually through a process of education. Tilak's conception, the medium of instruction was to be the mother-tongue. If true Hinduism was taught to Hindus and true Islam to Muslims, he argued, the inevitable result of such education would be toleration and respect for each other's faith.¹⁴ Tilak like Jyotiba Phule and Raja Rammohan Roy also advocated social reforms and that would contribute to the growth of national consciousness. He also wanted to strike hard at the root of social evils. Tilak did a great work in the political sphere by reinterpreting the Bhagwad Gita (Gita Rahasya) and imputing a political meaning to its message which is relevant to the contemporary India.



Tilak was opposed to untouchability. He tried to eradicate this problem from Indian society through religious celebrations as in the Ganpati celebrations, the lower caste people were allowed to take their statues of the god Ganesha in procession along with the status belonging to the higher caste. Tilak was firm that untouchability must go. Addressing the first conference depressed classes on 25 March 1918 in Bombay, said that all Indians were children of the same motherland. There could be no spiritual and moral defence of untouchability.¹⁵ He said in thundering words " if God were to tolerate untouchability, I would not recognize him as God at all".¹⁶

Some critics have described him a conservative because he was opposed to remarriage of widows and marriage among the various caste. No doubt he was conservative but he adopted himself to the changing situation to analyse Tilak's social philosophy we have to bear in mind that social situations are changing and it will not be proper to apply the standards of modern social egalitarianism to a leader of a tradition bound country. Tilak was a democrat and he wanted the people to follow him. He along with Lala Lajpat Rai of Punjab and Bipin Chandra Pal of Bengal is referred as Lal, Bal, Pal, popularized a fourfold programme of action for the annulment of the partition of Bengal namely Swaraj, Swadeshi, Bahishkar and national education. Hence he believed in organic and gradual growth in matters of social change. Tilak generally stood for the traditional socio religious system as against westernizing tendencies of social reformers like Ranade and Agarkar.

Conclusion

Tilak was one of those leaders who asserted themselves ever since the beginning of the freedom struggle to argue for India's right to Swaraj or national self determination. Such ideals as these can be achieved by fostering strong feeling of patriotism and self respect among the people by moulding public opinion and by bringing pressure to bear on the British authorities for granting political rights. He concentrated his efforts throughout his life for the attainment of this single aim. He was the first leader of the Indian National Congress to be incarnated for his political writings. Valentine Chirlot, the British journalist, aptly expressed the reactions of the rulers when he called Tilak "the father of Indian unrest". During the trial of Tilak in 1908, the prosecution counsel argued that Tilak's articles contained a "covert threat of mutiny" and that his real message was "Swaraj or Bomb". But the Britishers' envy was pride of the Indians. The way Tilak nurtured the values and feelings for nationalism in the poor folks of the country went a long way in reinforcing the struggle for independence whose fruits were actually obtained in 1947, much after the death of Tilak. Yet, when the country became independent, in the galaxy of Indian leaders whose mammoth efforts lay at the root of independence of the country, the name of Tilak and the other people of his ilk will remain inked in indelible colour.

References



- 1 Ravi Rajan & M.K.Singh- **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, K.K. Publication, New Delhi, 2001, PP302-303
- 2 Tilak Slogan
- 3 M.H. Syed, **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, Himalyan Book Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 2001, p. 290
- 4 The Newspaper started Keshri and Maratha in 1881
- 5 N.C.Kalkar, **Life and Time of Lokmanya Tilak**, Delhi, 1957, p. 17
- 6 M.H. Syed, **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, Himalyan Book Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 2001, p. 232
- 7 N.C. Kalkar, **Landmarks in Lokmanya's Life**, Madras- 1924, PP. 132-33
- 8 TRFPA,(**Tsarist Russian Foragn Policy Archive**) *ibid.*, p. 65, Report from Russian consulate in Bombay, July 21 (Old Stle), 1908, signed by Chaikin.
- 9 M.H. Syed, **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, Himalyan Book Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 2001, p. 233
- 10 Valentine Chirol, **India**, Landon, 1926, P.63
- 11 J.L. Nehru, **Discovery of India**, Kalkata, 1947, P.295
- 12 V.P. Verma, **modern India Political Thought**: Laxmi Narayan Aggarwal, Agra, 1961, P.191
- 13 Lokmanya Tilak, **Geeta Rahasya**(Hindi edition), 1950, P. 399
- 14 Ram Gopal, **Lokmanya Tilak: A Biography**, Asian Publication House, New Delhi, 1956, P. 245-46
- 15 Times of India, 26 March, 1918,
- 16 V.P. Verma, **modern India Political Thought**: Laxmi Narayan Aggarwal, Agra, 1961, P.191