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TILAK'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

Freedom struggle is a greatest event in the history of modern India. In this movement great patriots of this country sacrificed everything for the nation. Among them Bala Gangadhar Tilak was one. He was source encouragement and boldness. He was born in 1856 and died in 1920 his life was full of events.

Foundations of Tilak's Political Thought

If political philosophy means the speculative construction of an idealistic utopia, then Tilak has not given us any picture of the politically perfect society in this sense of the term political philosophy. He does not discuss the features and possibilities of the best State as Plato, Aristotle and Cicero do. He does not create the architectonic of the conceptually perfect State in the manner of Hegel and Bosanquet. His main problem 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 of the term. He was never a political pragmatist. He was deeply versed in ancient Sanskrit philosophy and 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.

The dominant. Metaphysical assumptions of Tilak also influenced his political ideas. He was a Vedantist. The metaphysics of non-dualism of the Vedanta implied, according to him, the political conception of natural rights. Because the spirit is the supreme reality and because all men participate in that absolute essence, hence all have the same autonomous of Hence, Advaitism taught him the concept freedom.¹ "Freedom was the soul of the Home Rule movement. The divine instinct of freedom never aged. . . Freedom is the very life of the individual soul which Vedanta declares to be no: was as to separate from God but identical with him. This freedom principle that could never perish. Thus freedom according to-Tilak was a divine attribute. Freedom was equated with the autonomous power of creativism. Without freedom no moral and spiritual life was possible. Foreign imperialism kills the soul of a nation and hence Tilak fought against the British empire. Thus there were philosophical foundations for the political struggle for liberty in which Tilak was engaged.

Tilak's nationalism was also influenced by the western theories of national independence and self-determination. In the famous trial speech of 1908, he quotes with approval John Stuart Mill's definition of nationality.² In 1919 and 1920 he accepted the Wilsonian concept of self-determination and pleaded for its application to India.³ Hence, Tilak's philosophy of nationalism was a synthesis of the Vedantic ideal of the spirit as self-contained freedom and the western conceptions of Mazzini, Burke, Mill and later on of Wilson. This synthesis he expressed in terms of Swarajya, a Vedic term which was used in Maharashtra to indicate the Maratha polity of Shivaji.

Because of his spiritual approach, Lokamanya regarded that Swarajya was not only a right but a Dharma. He also gave a moral and spiritual meaning of Swarajya. Politically, Swarajya meant. Home Rule. Morally, it meant the attainment of the perfection of self-control which is essential for performing "one's duty" (Swadharma). It also had a 'spiritual significance because its in the realization of spiritual inner freedom and contemplative deli ht. Tilak defined the spiritual connotation of Swarajya in these m "It is a life centered in self and dependent upon self. There is Swaraj in this world as well as in the world hereafter. The Rishis stance who laid down the law of duty betook themselves to forests, because the people were already enjoying Swarajya or people's dominion which was administered and defended in the first instance people who by the Kshatriya Kings. It is my conviction, it is my Swaraj in the life to come cannot be the reward of a people who have not enjoyed it in this world.⁴ Hence, Tilak wanted boyh political liberty and spiritual freedom.

Nationalism, Revivalism and Hinduism

Tilak's nationalism had a revivalistic orientation. He wanted to bring to the front the message of the Vedas and the Gita for providing spiritual energy and moral enthusiasm to the nation. A recovery of the healthy and vital traditions of the old culture of India was essential. He said: "a true nationalist desires to build on old foundations". Reform based on utter disrespect for the old does not appeal to him as constructive work. "We do not want to anglicize our institutions and so denationalize them in the name of social and political reforms.⁵ Hence, he pointed out that the Shivaji and the Ganapati festivals had been encouraged by him because they served to link- contemporary events and movements with historical traditions.



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But because Lokamanya was, partially, a revivalist, it must not be thought that he was a mere Hindu nationalist. As a person, he had intense pride in Hindu religion and culture. As a political leader he wanted to preserve the legitimate interests of the Hindu people and would not sanction cowardice and surrender. But it is wrong to say that he was a mere Hindu nationalist and was opposed to the Moslems. Zacharias says that Tilak was the spokesman of an anti-Moslem retaliation. A British historian, Powell Price, says that "The Muslim League was an answer to the Indian National Congress, necessary because the possibility of self-government raised the spirit of separation which the intolerance of Tilak had emphasized."⁶ Chirol says that due to Tilak's extreme orthodoxy the Moslem members of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha resigned from that body. Palme Dutt blames Lokamanya Tilak and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh because their identification of national awakening with the revival of Hinduism cut off the Moslem masses from the national movement. But all these are partial and even incorrect interpretations of the political thought and action of Lokamanya. Jinnah, Dr. M.A. Ansari and Hasan Imam has praised the nationalistic sentiments and spirit of compromise of the Lokamanya, because due to his wise counsel and moderation the Lucknow Pact of 1916 could be achieved. Shaukat Ali and Hasarat Mohani regarded Tilak as their political Guru. Shaukat Ali says: "I would like to mention again for the hundredth time that both Mahomed Ali and myself belonged and still belong to Lokamanya Than political party. Hasarat Mohani says: "I even at that earl age, chose the Lokamanya as the ideal Leader for me. During that period, I had ample opportunities of appreciating the thought and ability of almost all Indian political leaders and basing my remarks on that close personal study, I can state without the least fear of contradiction, that I found the Lokamanya greater and superior to every other leader in every respect; . . . When I declare that all through Tilak's life I was both intellectually and practically a blind follower of his, anyone can well judge thereby, of that love that I cherished towards him."⁷ Hasan Imam as the president of the Bombay special Congress went to the extent of calling Tilak his father in Indian politics. Imam stated: "Let me say, and it is with great pride, that Lokamanya Tilak is my father in point of politics Furthermore, Tilak had promised to support the Khilafat movement if the majority of the Moslems were behind that. Tilak had proposed the Congress resolution for the release of the Ali brothers. If Tilak would have been anti-Moslem he could never have commanded the confidence of the great Mpslem leaders. Hence it can be said, that with the profoundest regard for Hinduism in private life, as a political leader Tilak had a broad policy calculated to lead to national emancipation.

Tilak's Theory of Nationalism

Lokamanya wanted to substantiate the nationalistic movement in India by a strong cultural and religious revival of Hinduism. But he also accepted the economic arguments for nationalism. Dadabhai Naoroji made famous the "Drain Theory" in Indian economics, Both Lokamanya and Gokhale accepted that foreign imperialism resulted in the enormous "drain" of India's resources. In 1897, Tilak wrote three articles in the Kesariat the time of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria. In the article written on the 22nd June he stated that India's arts and industries had declined under the British rule. He wrote that the various economic enterprises and investments in India, under the ownership and management of the foreign capitalists, only created a delusion of prosperity. He referred to the evidence given by Dadabhai before the Welby Commission of 1896 wherein that veteran patriarch of Indian politics had shown that during the imperialistic sway of Great Britain India had become impoverished and economically ruined. He referred to the economic "drain" of India also ill the interview he gave to envision in 1907.⁸

Tilak held that the attainment of Swarajya would be a he great victory for Indian nationalism. Hence, he gave to Indians the Mantra "Swarajya is the birth-right of Indians". Although in his speeches and writings Lokamanya always said that Swarajya did not imply the negation and severance of ultimate british sovereignty, still people knew that in his heart of hearts he always wanted complete independence. He once wrote that Swarajya is "the foundation and not the height of our future prosperity. He always pointed out that the path or the attainment of Swarajyawas full of suffering and misery. During the Home Rule days Lokamanya. always was careful to say that he was not opposed to the King-Emperor but he only wanted to change the anglo-Indianbureaucracy. He confidently asserted that to preach against the despotism of the bureaucracy was not sedition. Since Lokamanya did not advocate the doing away with the King-Emperor hence Bipin. Chandra Pal says that Lokamanya was a believer in "imperial federation" which would be composed of Great Britain, Ireland and Egypt, India and the dominions, each absolutely autonomous internally but combined for the purposes of protection and progress.

We have earlier referred to the fact that Tilak was a Vedantin in his metaphysical views. His conceptions of freedom as a divine instinct in man, and of Swarajya as inner self-realization, indicate his Vedantic views. His belief in human fellowship also followed from his Vedantism. In a way, he pleaded for the reconciliation between the ideal of nationalism and the Vedantic conception of human unity. In a speech he once said: "If the Vedantic ideal is higher, it necessarily includes the national ideal which is lower. The two are not irreconcilable if you know how to reconcile them. The two are not opposed to each other. One includes the other much in the same way as. thousand includes five hundred. The two ideals are mutually consistent and both of them demand a kind of self-sacrifice and self-control. Both of them demand in addition to self-control and self-sacrifice, a kind of higher altruistic feeling by which man is impelled to ignore selfish considerations and to work for persons and for objects which



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do not in least savour of any egotistic aim. The feeling is one of love for humanity, for the equality of man before god, and it is the spirit of that feeling that governs the two ideals, Vedantic and national.

Edward Shillito has written a book entitled nationalism: man's other religion. In that book there is a chapter entitled, "The two Tilaks". Shillito says that Narayana Vaman Tilak, the Christian poet, was a believer in the kingdom of god on earth while Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a strong believer in a Swarajya. Shillito has presented an imaginary dialogue between the two Tilaks. But Shillito's interpretation is inadequate. Although Lokamanya Tilak was a great patriot and a convinced nationalist he definitely states in his commentary on the Gita that love of the country is only a step to cosmopolitanism. He quotes part of the famous Sanskrit Shloka which means that for the wise man of generous feeling the whole world is one big family.⁹

Tilak and the Moderates

Lokamanya Tilak has won lasting fame by creating the vital foundations of an assertive nationalism. He was an extremist and there were several factors responsible for that. Temperamentally he was buoyant and represented the aggressive vigorous spirit of manhood. He had been inspired by the careers and exploits of Shivaji and the other Maratha heroes who represented struggle and fight and successful victories. His extremism had also been influenced by his growing disillusion at the coercive and repressive techniques of the bureaucracy. But although an extremist, he believed in legal methods of agitation. He was twice elected to the Bombay legislative Council. He contemplated election also a third time. He formed the Congress Democratic Party in 1920 for contesting elections. But although Tilak accepted the framework of the existing law he wanted to use the areas of action left free by the law of the British government to intensify the nationalist movement in the country. Ranade, Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale went to the extent of regarding the British rule in India as part of divine dispensation, but the leaders of the extremist party always believed in the independent destiny of India. In speech in 1909 Gokhale defended passive resistance¹⁰ but although Tilak and Gokhale might in times have used the same words and might have put their faith in the same political objectives still there was fundamental difference in their political techniques. The activities of Lokamanya in the famine agitation of 1896, in the movements of 1905 to 1908, and during the Home Rule days were calculated to train the people in organized action. He wanted to infuse a spirit of dynamic activism and assertiveness among a people who had grown enervated and prostrate. His advocacy of no-rent campaign in 1896, his stress on national education, his advocacy of picketing for the purpose of stopping the sale of liquor and his firm support of Swadeshi and boycott definitely showed that Lokamanya wanted that the national movement should have its strong roots in coordinated and united action by the Indian people. Before Tilak came into active prominence as a leader, the Indian nationalist movement was committed to a philosophy of intellectual discussion on occidental lines. He taught the gospel of Indianization of the nationalist movement. Hence his techniques of political action and his philosophical defence of the nationalist movement were oriented to the historical heritage of the people of India. If some of the important moderate leaders looked only to Burke, Mazzini and Spencer for intellectual inspiration, Tilak also looked to Shivaji and Nana Fadnavis and the Bhagavadgita. Tilak's attempts to Indianize the policy and orientation of the nationalist movement brought to him the support of Lala Lajpat Rai who in several respects closely associated himself with Gokhale. Lalaji in distinguishing the techniques and ideas of Tilak and Gokhale writes: "Tilak was the man of the people. Gokhale was the man of the intelligentsia. Tilak was a hero for all times to come. His heroism at times verged on recklessness and regardlessness of consequences to himself and his co-workers. Gokhale was a careful politician, weighing every word before he uttered, and balancing every thought he gave expression to, always trying to say the right thing but in a way most inoffensive to the authorities that be, and the people that he criticised. Tilak was a blunt incisive speaker who never minced matters, spoke few words, but gave out the truth free from all embarrassment of language and all the covering of diplomacy. Gokhale was an accomplished speaker, full of pathos, who prepared everything beforehand, and realised the significance of every word that he uttered. Gokhale's ethics would not sanction any violence in politics. Tilak would not only justify it but even press it under certain conditions."¹¹ The latter history of Indian nationalism, however, showed the efficiency of the methods of Tilak.

Conclusion

Lokamanya, as a political philosopher has given us a theory of nationalism. He did not have the time to elaborate upon the other conceptions of political science like sovereignty, justice, property, etc, although he has referred to these. His theory of nationalism was a synthesis of the teachings of both eastern and western thinkers. He was a thorough believer in democracy and that was the secret of his unique hold on the masses. He did not adopt an idealistic or conceptual and speculative approach to politics. He belonged to the school of realism. But he never tolerated the excess of realism into the apotheosis of the cult of power, force and success, Hence, his school of political thought can be characterized as nationalism founded upon "Democratic Realism".



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