

Indian Political Thought (B G TILAK)

For
B.A. (Pol.Sc.(Hons.)
Degree Part-I, Paper-I

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His life and times

- Keshav Gangadhar Tilak was born on July 22, 1856 in a middle class Chitpavan Brahmin family in Ratnagiri, a small coastal town in south-western Maharashtra.
- His father, Gangadhar Shastri was a noted Sanskrit scholar and school teacher at Ratnagiri.
- His mother's name was Paravti Bai Gangadhar. Following his father's transfer, the family shifted to Poona (now Pune).
- In 1871 Tilak was married to Tapibai who was later rechristened as Satyabhamabai.

Life and times

- The British Government termed him as the "Father of Indian Unrest" and his followers bequeathed upon him the title of '*Lokmanya*' meaning he who is revered by the people.
- Tilak was a brilliant politician as well as a profound scholar who believed that independence is the foremost necessity for the well being of a nation.
- He was an eminent journalist, educator, popular leader and a freedom fighter.
- As journalist, Tilak started two important weeklies: *Kesari* in Marathi and *Maratha* in English.
- His *Geeta Rahasya* was a kind of reinterpretation to the time honoured philosophy of *Karmayoga*.

Major Contributions

- He was a vedantist. Freedom, according to Tilak was a divine attribute. Without freedom no moral or spiritual life was possible.
- An ardent social reformer, Tilak distanced himself from seeking support from Britishers in attaining the ideals. Rather, he challenged the prevalent taboo on crossing the sea, and motivated Indians to travel abroad in order to expand their knowledge-base.
- He called for the total ban on child-marriage and removal of ban on widow-remarriage in order to stop injustice against women.
- He championed the cause of women's education and vehemently opposed the practice of untouchability.
- Tilak wanted to reform the Indian society in consonance with the genuine Indian Cultural values and ethos, not to imitate blindly the western culture.

Tilak on Nationalism

- Partly metaphysical and partly psychological. He clarified that nationalism was not a concrete thing. It embodied an idea or sentiment. According to him the feeling of 'common belongingness' as sine qua non for agglomeration of people into a nation.
- Tilak's concept of nationalism was also influenced by western theories of national independence and self-determination..He cited Mill's definition of nationality to explicate the character of Indian nationalism and also supported the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination.
- Tilak's nationalism was a synthesis of vedantic ideal of the spirit as self-contained freedom and western conception of Burke, Mazinni, Mill and Wilson., aptly echoed in the *Swarajya*.

Tilak's nationalism

- It was a revivalist orientation to national spirit deeply informed by his reading of Geeta and Vedas.
- He said once that “we do not want to anglicize our institutions and so denationalize them in terms of social and political reforms.
- He opposed the education founded on Western values, but he was not opposed to opening western type schools and colleges for imparting national education to the Indians.
- His ideal Shivaji and revival of Ganapati festival, are two prime examples of his stinging support to the cultural and religious revival of Hinduism.
- He was also influenced by Naoroji and thereby aligning and substantiating his nationalism as an instance of economic recovery.

Concept of *Swaraj*

- “Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it”. Very fondly remembered for giving a clarion call to throw away the brutal Colonial government from India.
- Literally it means “self-rule”. Mahatma Gandhi, who considered Tilak as his Political Guru further expanded this by adding Swadeshi to give a distinct shape to nationalist urge in India.
- These two were the guiding principles of nationalist movement. Swadeshi means indigenous and during the movement, it intended to serve 3 purposes:
 - i. **Boycott of foreign made goods would adversely affect the economic interest of the foreign ruler;**
 - ii. **To promote indigenous industries and thus strengthen the Indian economy; and**
 - iii. **To encourage simple lifestyle to strengthen moral life.**

Swaraj

- This urge for swadeshi further expanded to other sectors of life such as preference for Indian Educational Institutions and Indian Value system.
- Tilak was so enraged that he gave a call for withdrawal of support to the British administration to paralyse its functioning.
- He once wrote that the “swarajya is the foundation and not the height of our future prosperity”.
- Swarajya, according to Tilak, was not only a political necessity but also a moral imperative. He argued that moral nature of man implies to secure political freedom which is a necessary condition for the fulfilment of his swadharma.No body can attain his self-realization until he is free from the restraints imposed by a foreign rule.
- He launched a home rule movement to attain the swaraj.

Evaluation

- Lokmanya Tilak was never an advocate of absolute ahimsa(non-violence) as upheld by pacifists.He idolized Shivaji and appreciated many of his violent actions to win the freedom or maintain independence.
- As a philosopher,Tilak put the highest premium on purification of intentions, as the external action could never be a criterion of moral worth.
- Tilak was an extremist only in the sense he insisted on taking a firm stand in pursuing the goal of national independence.
- Undoubtedly he was a great patriot wanted to bring freedom from the exploitations of Indians at the hand of Britishers.

References

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