

Lokmanya Tilak's Concept of Swarajya leads to Overall Development of the Nation

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Abstract:

The paper attempts to study the multi-faceted personality of Lokmanya Tilak. It tries to study the realistic vision of Tilak with reference to freedom struggle. It studies the views of Lokmanya Tilak on various facets such as political, society, law, media, culture, education etc.

Keywords: Lokmanya Tilak, Swaraj, national education

Lokmanya Tilak was a towering, multi-faceted personality who championed the cause of Swarajya and advocated Rashtriyatva. He was a scholar of Sanskrit and astro-mathematics, a philosopher, the author of a commentary on the Shreemad Bhagwat Geeta, and a selfless Karmayogi. Those who wanted to criticize him, sarcastically called him "Father of Indian Unrest" and words which meant a leader of low working class- ordinary people (TelyaTambolyanchePudhari) which actually became true and turned into titles of honor that described him most appropriately as "Lokmanya".

Mahatma Gandhi described him as the "Maker of Modern India". Lokmanya Tilak sacrificed his personal life and dreams and his basic scholarly and intellectual pursuits for the greater goal of achieving swarajya and propelling the nation into the modern era who at that time was a visionary indeed.

On this occasion, I salute this great freedom fighter that ignited the spark of patriotism and freedom, with his quote "Swarajya is my birth right and I shall have It". This inspired millions of Indians to join the freedom struggle. This clarion call came as a breath of fresh air, for our people and a nation's straining at the leash of subjugation. It summoned from the depths of their hearts, unprecedented energy and courage to stand up before the British rule.

Tilak fought throughout his life for man's right to control his own destiny. This fight is going on in many parts of the world and likely to continue for generations to come.

After hundred years, why do we feel to memorize the sentence or clarion call of "Swarajya"?

We are gathered here to discuss contemporary relevance of a sentence "Swarajya is my birth right and I shall have it" by a visionary leader Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Lokmanya's "Swarajya" means "for the people, by the people and of the people". According to him, people should have right to decide their future.

Lokmanya Tilak was a realistic optimist. His vision not only saw the goals but also the means. He was convinced that a few educated intellectuals or revolutionaries would not be able to sway the British, but a unified population of millions would. He also preached that we should use every means possible to press our just demands for independence simultaneously.

His desire to achieve Swaraj, through the mobilization of common people constituted a turning point in our struggle for independence. The Home Rule Movement that he started with Ms. Annie Besant forced the British to concede that introduction of responsible Government was their final objective. His activism and his passionate advocacy, especially through various medias, inspired an entire generation.

The Swaraj that Tilak conceived in December 1917, and wanted to achieve was meant to liberate us, both from the yoke of foreign rule and from the exploitative wealth, and social satva from our country.

Philosophy

Tilak authored 'Geeta Rahasya' - a critical interpretation of Bhagvad-Geeta and provided the bedrock to the freedom fighters and the freedom struggle. Tilak's view on swaraj origins from the basic ethics i.e. swaraj or freedom which co-relates with equality, justice and peace.

Lokmanya, urged people to rise for what truly is theirs Self Respect, Self Prosperity, and hence Self Rule.

"Freedom is the soul/spirit of a nation. The indestructible soul persists so as the spirit of freedom. Without freedom, there is no life. Freedom is my birth right. The swarajya or freedom is not perishable. One cannot kill or burn the concept. The spirit of freedom dwells in my heart and it shall never die."

Lokmanya's Geeta Rahasya-Karmayog Shastra tells us his views about the work he aimed i.e. Swaraj and the philosophical backdrop of freedom.

Swarajya or Freedomism

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi and many other leaders use and support the word Swaraj (self rule). The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means.

Vedic Religion tells us about the freedom from adharma - the ethical action. Tilak-advocate of karmayog, comments about the fruitless action of a human being for welfare of the society. Vaidik dharma tells us the rules and regulations to maintain harmony in society. So ultimately welfare of society and nation help the liberalization of action.

According to Tilak, God and Nation are the same. Any action for God or nation takes you to ultimate moksha or oneness to God. This shows "if there is nation as a body, idea of freedom is the soul".

Vedas tell us to keep harmony and progress in nation or society. Action for betterment of nation is new vedant.

Tilak was a lover of motherland of first order. He had immense love for the country. Throughout his life, he made all sorts of efforts and sacrifice for the prosperity of the country. From his very childhood, he inherited love for his own country. He wanted to make India prosperous and strong country in the world. He had deep and immense faith in Indian culture, religion, art, and tradition. He further compared our nation with God. To quote Tilak, 'God and our country are not different. In short, our country is one form of God. The love of nation like love of God has to transcend narrow provincialism and communalism'.

Political Goals

"The science of Political ethics is Swarajya. If political theory takes you back to slavery, then we reject it. Politics is country's Vedanta. You will have the soul. I am just going to revitalize it"..... Lokmanya Tilak, 1917

The political goal of Tilak was to attain Swaraj or self-government for the people of India. He said that the idea of Swaraj is an old one. For the individual, swaraj means the exercise of his lawful freedom – as a birth right, the individual cannot live without complete swaraj. He practised Swaraj as not merely a right, but as a Dharma. He also presented political, moral, and spiritual meanings of swaraj. For the attainment of swaraj, he opposed the Britishers. For Tilak, swaraj referred to both the self-rule of the individuals and the self-rule of the political community. Swaraj was both a part of the philosophy of life and the philosophy of politics. He derived the idea of swarajya from the Veda. Tilak was the most significant and dominant political personality of the early years of the 20th century who gave to the people of India the first lesson in form of the consciousness of the right of swaraj or self-rule. He defined swaraj as "people's rule". He again said, "We demand Swaraj, as it is the foundation and not the height of our prosperity".

The Swaraj of Lokmanya's conception was all-inclusive. As a visionary, Tilak's concept of 'swaraj' is multifaceted. It does not have limit to change the british rule only.

SWARAJ became a conscious national movement and brought together the nation for a common cause. It had no high political aspirations except that the visible government should have representation of Indians. Only the wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches only the citizens of India understand their diverse challenges and the possible solutions.

From local governance to national governance, we must think whether our democracy really gives us the freedom to decide. Tilak wanted the freedom for people who can have right to control their welfare. So, the questions arise are, does our democratic system help us to change bureaucracies' decisions? Can we control our corrupt bureaucracy? Does the common man can say or act against bureaucracies for wrong decisions? In politics the administration has its own role of implementation. Have we successfully implemented welfare decisions?

Lokmanya Tilak's genius is seen in using community festivals as a means of bringing people together in large numbers for a common activity, thus fostering unity. He did not waste a single opportunity to oppose injustice, oppression, and high handedness. During the great famines and plague epidemics, he exposed the callous approach of the authorities and demonstrated with his own volunteer workers what the administration ought to be doing. Thus, he brought the hope of independence and self rule to the masses which was until then, confined to the urban educated class.

His speeches cut across all sections of society, religion, and caste, unifying the population and bringing home the message that they had to unite and would not prosper and be able to live with dignity under British Rule.

After his release from the prison, he re-united with his fellow nationalists and re-joined the Indian National Congress in 1916. He also helped and found the All-India Home Rule League with Annie Besant and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He signed the historic Lucknow Pact, a Hindu-Muslim accord, with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the future founder of Pakistan.

Tilak instead advocated a policy of 'responsive co-operation' which introduced a certain degree of Indian participation in regional government.

In the Lokmanya's conception of Swarajya, there was as much space for Hindus as for people pursuing other religions. A votary of Hindu - Muslim unity, Lokmanya Tilak wrote in the journal Kesari, "When Hindus and Muslims jointly ask for Swarajya from a common platform, the British bureaucracy has to realize that its days are numbered". Thus, Tilak found no contradiction between remaining a devout Hindu and having a secular worldview. This showed his modernism and his enlightenment.

History has proved that struggle for freedom motivated by the rich, noblemen, and landowners (Zamindars) ultimately resulted in dictatorships as in African, English, and French colonies. The Indian struggle had the large number of people as the main force, and it has resulted in a genuine democracy.

Economics

Lokmanya Tilak formulated a four-fold programme which was simple to understand, could be practiced by all the people and did not create any strain on the purse. The programme in fact was not only a blueprint to obtain our independence but also to make the country economically strong. Lokmanya's vision of swadeshi or self reliance was the means to achieve a robust economic development.

Lokmanya Tilak, saw in boycott, an immensely powerful non-violent weapon that could be effectively wielded by the masses. This weapon thrust at the very economy of Britain since India was an exceptionally large market for its manufactured goods. So effective was the weapon that sales of foreign goods dropped some 80% and the textile mills in Manchester were forced to shut down. This also gave a boost to the local industry and the enthusiasm of the movement resulted in

oversubscription of shares. New spinning and weaving mills started, and the British economy came to the edge of crisis.

Lokmanya Tilak was also an advocate of National Economics. The national economics consists of trade, indigenous industries, employability, currency exchange and agricultural economics. National economics helps to retain wealth within the nation which can also help the nation or common citizens, and which can give them the liberty to enhance their wealth. According to Tilak, 80% of people depends on agriculture, so Indian economics depends on agriculture, develop indigenous products, swadeshi market. So, the importance of agricultural economics is the focal point in Indian Economics.

The economic thoughts of Tilak consist of micro economic concept. Tilak have also written about the research and development of industrial products and modernization of plants and machinery.

In 1906, Congress sprang to action after DadabhaiNouroji announced 'Swaraj, Swadeshi, Bahishkar, and RashtriyaShikshan'. He handed the people, a non-violent weapon 'Swadeshi and Bahishkar'. His popularity and success of 'Boycott' led to imprisonment of Lokmanya for the second time for anti-state activities.

Lokmanya Tilak was the only leader at that time to see how significant the role of agriculture was. He, therefore, made efforts to educate the farmers so that they would realize the benefits of modern equipment, better seeds, fertilizers and new techniques to improve their income from their limited land. He encouraged them to use food processing technology to counter the effects of famine.

He saw great benefits from cooperation, and export of agricultural products such as sugar and cotton. He was well-aware of everything which affected the life of farmers and wrote articles in his newspapers on famine, bankruptcy, moneylenders (sahukars), canal irrigation and rural economy.

Today, after 70 years of independence, we do face the problems of concentration of wealth to one percent population. We have failed in distribution of wealth to common man.

SOCIETY

At Lucknow Congress, British tried to divide citizens in two parts - Aryans and Anaryas. Tilak mentioned that, if British wants to handover rule to Anaryasi.e.Bhilla, Adivasis, give them the power to rule. After 70 years of independence, we must think - are those citizens of India brought into mainstream? Have they got their liberation? The questions of equality, gender still exist.

It must also be recalled that social and political leaders like Lokmanya Tilak placed great emphasis on gender equality and on the rights of women. That is why the people of Maharashtra, both men and women, have been at the forefront of women's emancipation and empowerment in our country.

Law

Our law provides us justice. We must think about the delays in justice. Are we successful in providing equality and justice? Does concentration of Media tycoons help common man to express

his/her views? Does media perform its responsibility as the fourth pillar of democracy? Tilak always thought of social change by changing the mindset of people rather than enforcement of laws.

Media

Of the fundamental freedoms that the citizens enjoy, freedom of speech and expression is one of the most important ones as it gives substance and meaning to 'participation' of the people.

The role of media is different from merely disseminating information and entertainment. Educating the masses for their social upliftment needs to be in its ambit as well. In a country where there is large scale poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment media has a responsibility towards developmental journalism. It has a role to play behind formation of public opinion which can force the political parties to address the core issues haunting the country's progress. It is thus referred as fourth pillar of democracy. However, public opinion can be manipulated by vested interests to serve their own goals.

Freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental right of every person. Freedom of press has played an important role in the evolution of the society. For a democratic country, where the decision of the masses is supreme, mass media is instrumental in ensuring that the people make informed decisions. Further, it is through the media that the masses can voice their opinions. Appreciation of the role of media in good governance is essential to societal development. Freedom of Speech and Expression should, therefore, receive generous support from all those who believe in the participation of people in the administration.

Education

Tilak's programme for National Education consisted of traditional subjects, importance of our traditional knowledge and modern science, and vocational as well as professional subjects. He wanted research to flourish in India, the freedom or autonomy to educational universities to mould the career of students as civilians for building strong and modern India.

The right to education, which was proposed by Tilak hundred years back, is given after 70 years of independence with lots of deficiencies. We must think that does our educational system help to create entrepreneurs or create clerks. This reminds me the part written by Tilak in his newspaper 'Kesari'- Vidyapeeth ki Hamalkhane.

According to Lokmanya Tilak, a common language is an important element of nationality. He used Hindi as the language of the movement. His speeches were either in Marathi or Hindi. He realized the need to avoid the usage of English and mentioned the same in one of his speeches. Tilak was the first leader to suggest that Devanagari script be accepted as the sole national language, a policy that was later strongly endorsed by Mahatma Gandhi. English, which Tilak wished to remove completely from the Indian mind, remains an important means of communication, but the usage of Hindi and other regional languages has been reinforced and widely encouraged since the days of British Raj. This legacy of Tilak is often credited with this resurgence. His newspaper, Kesari, founded in 1881, is still

currently published in regional language. Even his commentary on Geeta Rahasya is in Marathi. As Tilak wanted his people to understand it.

Culture

Tilak was admirer of our rich culture which was a creative use of a religious festival for, the larger cause of nation-building and social mobilization. That is why, Lokmanya Tilak used the Ganesh Festival and Shiva-jayanti for promoting the spirit of nationalism among people.

His religion was nationalist Hindustani. Lokmanya used religion to unite people rather than dividing them. He used religion to seek freedom, not spread hatred. Those who use religion to divide people and to promote hatred must learn from the constructive lessons of Lokmanya Tilak's life and work. After the 1857 war of independence, British authorities had decided not to interfere in matters involving religion. Lokmanya Tilak took advantage of that policy and used the Ganesh festival and Shivaji Jayanti for political and secular mobilization of people in the cause of freedom from colonial rule. Lokmanya Tilak was admirer of Vedic Knowledge about Astrology, Society, Ayurveda and Ethics. He believed that vedic dharma provides us rich culture and gives us the liberation to develop oneself along with society, to balance social engineering and nature. It helps human being to maintain harmony with seasons.

Tilak in his book "Orion" have researched the importance and origin of Vedas.

According to Tilak, Swaraj was not only a right but also a dharma or religion. He believed that self-rule under Dharmarajya either existed fully or did not exist at all. He, therefore, wanted complete swaraj. He thought of a federal type of political structure under Swaraj. Tilak thus rightly said that 'no nation can be strong and healthy unless it is free'. Further Tilak gave the following views on Swaraj -

- " Firstly, swaraj meant that the ruler and the ruled must belong to one group and one nation.
- " Secondly, swaraj referred to as rule of law. The State should be governed by law.
- " Thirdly, government must be elected by the people and must be responsible to them.
- " Lastly, Swaraj means the State should be established for the overall development of the individuals.

Here I would like to reiterate..... In the words of Swami Shraddhanand, "when Tilak entered the Congress pendol, there was a warm welcome from all the congress representatives. When he stood up to speak and greeted the Congress workers, the overwhelmed spectators clapped for a long time welcoming the national leader. People looked at him in awe, and then the historical words "Swaraj is my birth right, and I shall have it at any cost" motivated each one in the pendol and the place reverberated with claps for a long time and Tilak had to pause for some time."

Later, Tilak drafted an agenda /manifesto which is a reflection of his idea of a free India. This is also considered as the 'Political will' of Lokmanya Tilak.

What is the result of Lokmanya's last struggle?

This question can be answered that Lokmanya's struggle undoubtedly inspired the whole nation. His struggle brought back the dignity in the lives of millions of Indians and taught them to fight the British bureaucracy. It helped people to view ethics like freedom, equality, justice, and peace.

The Congress was given a tool for struggle and opposition. A direction was given to the future generation. Most important of all, the British Empire decided to grant conditional freedom to India.

During the period between 1881 to 1920 i.e., 40 years, Lokmanya struggled for his dream of nation's freedom. He inspired and motivated the whole country. Tilak wove a dream of Progress and prosperity in the eyes of millions of Indians. He himself sacrificed his life and walked on the way of Nishkam Karmayog.

Today, after 105 long years, his words "Swaraj is my birth right" compels contemplation. It is time to introspect if we really are enjoying or experiencing the freedom that Tilak had envisioned for all of us. The idea of freedom today, brings to fore the challenges such as gender discrimination, equality, independence, secularism, corruption etc. The quest for solutions to these challenges directs us to the doctrines laid by Lokmanya.

We then choose Swaraj and today we are on this side of the history as a free independent, developing and progressing nation. The stage set is different, but the battles remain the same. Our enemies have changed, but sufferings are the same. Terrorism, civil wars, global warming, unemployment, malnutrition, diseases and so on. Our weapons have changed, such as, nuclear weapons, technological warfare, and media. Is Swaraj still relevant? Can Swaraj win our battles? Are we free to the true sense of freedom? It is our collective responsibility to contemplate all these aspects sincerely.

The great freedom fighter and the people's leader through his 'Swaraj, Swadeshi, Bahishkar and National Education' had drawn the map of India's progress and development in true words.

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