

Tilak and Swadeshi Movement

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Abstract

"Swarajya is my birth right and I shall have it" that was the voice, the spirit and the dictum of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, maker of Modern India. Swadeshi initially began as a primary economic counterpart to the programme of economic boycott. Swadeshi meant self-help, to rely upon Indian made goods rather than British goods. The movement quickly became popular in Bengal and rapidly spread all over India. European clothing was burnt in mass bonfires and the people turned to local Indian goods of all types.

The Swadeshi movement advocated the use of goods produced in India alone. This appealed to the people as

it aroused a sense of national pride and also enabled businessmen to start manufacturing and supplying India made goods and generated new businesses, employment, made goods available at reasonable prices and fostered the spirit of self-reliance. Boycott and Swadeshi were in fact two sides of the same coin, which together were very effective.

Relevance of Swadeshi

The Lokamanya introduced his idea of Swadeshi exactly 100 years ago, yet this concept is as relevant today as it was in 1905. The concept of Swadeshi provided the philosophical basis for the strategy of self-reliance that was adopted soon after Independence. This strategy was



implemented through the policy of import substitution. It was in a large measure due to this policy that Indian industry, which was then in an 'infant' stage, could grow and diversify. As a result, India is today almost self sufficient in industrial products.

As a result of Globalisation, there has been a large influx of foreign goods. The government is 'unable to offer any protection to domestic industry, especially small-scale industry that is most adversely affected. In this situation, it becomes the duty of every Indian to voluntarily decide to use only those goods that are produced in India by Indian companies.

Keywords: Swadeshi, Self-government, Nationalism, British rule, Indian goods.

Introduction

"Freedom is my birth right and I shall have it". That was the voice, the spirit and the dictum of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, maker of Modern India, though his enemies, like Chiral and other described him as the father father of Indian unrest. He was the real father of India's freedom movement and revolution. He was the founder, in a real sense, of the modern

independent democratic Republic. He was the Lokamanya, the Maharaj, the savior, the God himself to his mass followers of his time. If he had not been there then, to play his important role in modern Indian history, it would have been too difficult for Mahatma Gandhi to secure the freedom for India so early. He was the real 'Tilak' i.e., 'Kumkam' on the forehead of Mother-India.

The Swadeshi Movement


From 1898 to 1908, Tilak was at the peak of his political career as a national leader. He (along with Lulu Lajpat Rai of Punjab and Bipan Chandra Pal of Bengal) constituted the national leadership triad, which was referred to as Lal, Bal, Pal. (i.e. Bal Gangadhar Tilak) popularized a four-fold programme of action for the annulment of the partition of Bengal, namely, Swaraj (self-government), Swadeshi (resort to the use of Indian goods), bahishkar (boycott of foreign goods) and rashtriya shikshan (national education). Swarajya , for Tilak , had not only a political connotation (i.e. Home Rule) but also a moral and spiritual connotation (i.e. self-control and inner freedom).



The Swadeshi movement and Boycott of foreign goods shook the foundations of British power in India. Tilak said at Akola, " The rulers are much afraid of Boycott. They feel that the boycott of foreign goods will develop into a boycott of British Rule altogether". He had complete faith in the methods of the Swadeshi and the Boycott. He wrote : " The mouth is opened only by shutting the nose,...It is clear now that mighty speeches lead as nowhere; not words, but action, is wanted....determined action".

Swadeshi initially began as a primary economic counterpart to the programme of economic boycott. Swadeshi meant self-help, to rely upon Indian made goods rather than British goods. The movement quickly became popular in Bengal and rapidly spread all over India. European clothing was burnt in mass bonfires and the people turned to local Indian goods of all types. Swadeshi was the first great impetus to industrial development in India. Local industry was given the stimulus for its natural growth. But, like boycott, Swadeshi soon came to mean a great deal more than simple economic self-sufficiency. If there could be

self-help in the economic sphere, then there most certainly could be self-help in all spheres of life. The Dharma of action had taught self respect and self reliance in all things. Swadeshi was a tangible way in which to demonstrate the new spirit the Nationalists had been teaching the people. As Tilak later explained, 'The object is to bring about the spread of swadeshi (i.e., country-made) things, visible and invisible, to bring about the gradual disappearance of visible foreign things and to bring about the gradual disappearance of foreign ideas also.' He added, ' Like the bodies, our minds also should become swadeshi Swadeshi thoughts should always reign in our hearts.' The Swadeshi movement advocated the use of goods produced in India alone. This appealed to the people as it aroused a sense of national pride and also enabled businessmen to start manufacturing and supplying India made goods and generated new businesses, employment, made goods available at reasonable prices and fostered the spirit of self-reliance. Boycott and Swadeshi were in fact two sides of the same coin, which together were very effective. The British had been systematically



following a policy of selling their own manufactured goods in India in order to create total dependency. This spelt the death of indigenous skills, crafts and industry and created unemployment in India forcing a migration to the towns and cities. Prior to the movement, Tatas had attempted to raise capital for their industries from the public without success; however once the movement gathered momentum and the people became enthused, their capital issues were oversubscribed. This same wave saw the creation of several Swadeshi enterprises like the Swadeshi Bank, the chain of Bombay Swadeshi Cooperative Store, Paisa Found glass factory and a spinning mill.


Lokamanya Tilak's vision of Swadeshi or self reliance was the means to achieve a robust economic development. He was the only leader at that to see how significant the role of agriculture was and Indian economy depends on agriculture revenue. He therefore made efforts to educate the farmers so that they would realize the benefits of modern equipment, better seeds, fertilizers and new technologies to get more income from limited land and to use food processing technology to fight famine. He

saw great benefits from co-operation and export of agriculture products like sugar and cotton. He was very keenly aware of everything which affected the life of farmers and wrote articles on famine, money lenders (Sahukars), canal irrigation, sugar mills and rural economy. Throughout his propagation of the ideas of Swadeshi, Boycott and National education, Tilak was, in fact, spelling out a programme for directly involving the masses in the freedom struggle.

Economic Roots of the Swadeshi Movement

The Swadeshi movement in India had assumed a spiritual and political character. It had become a movement for the liberation of the spiritual energies of the nation for the sake of political emancipation of the land. But in its economic roots it was the movement for the growth and expression of early capitalism in India. The growing destruction of small industries in India and the forcing back of the people only upon one resource - agriculture - had been the consequences of England's economic policy of free trade.

Tilak emphasised the economic



dimensions of the Swadeshi movement, which indicates his awareness of the economic roots of Indian nationalism. Tilak recognised that with an alien government in political control of the country, state protection of economic activities was not possible, but still people could work towards the spirit of protection on their own initiative. In 1907, Tilak pleaded for a protective tariff of our own by the boycott of foreign goods. He acknowledged that the British government had given to the country peace and a certain degree of liberty, but it was essential to make further progress if the nation were to survive. The salvation of the country would be attained not by waiting for the bureaucracy to act and sending petitions to them but only by the concerted efforts of the people themselves. He, therefore, exhorted the nation to work for the concrete realisation of the resolutions on Swadeshi, boycott and national education, which had been passed at the Congress session of 1906 at Calcutta.

In his speech at this session, he emphasised that the practice of Swadeshi did not require any sacrifice from the poor. He said, 'We the middle classes are the greatest offenders

in this respect. The poor Kunbi villagers require not many foreign articles, probably none at all. It is we, the middle classes, who are the consumers of foreign goods; and since this government is not going to stop the drain by imposing a protective duty it becomes imperatively necessary to adopt a measure by which we can do ourselves what the government is bound to do and what the government ought to have done long ago.... Swadeshim is a forced necessity in India owing to the unnatural economic conditions in India.' To make swadeshim succeed, he called for 'self-help' and 'determination' from the people.

The Swadeshi movement became tremendously successful and curbed the monopoly of the British manufactured goods by encouraging Indian industry. It awakened the self respect of the people and showed that British domination could be broken by determined resistance and self-help. Swadeshi meant an actualizing of the national self-consciousness and the national will and the readiness to sacrifice which would fix them in the daily mind and daily life of the people.

The First Swadeshi Sammelan: The



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First All India Swadeshi Sammelan was held on the 2nd of January 1907 under the auspices of the Bombay Swadeshi Vastra Pracharini Sabha. The Hon.Nawab Sayed Mahomed Bahadur of Madras presided.

Mr. Tilak moved the following resolution:

1. That this Sammelan considers it desirable to appoint Provincial Committees where such do not exist at present.

(a) To preach the doctrine of Swadeshim and promote the work of Swadeshi movement in every possible direction;

(b) To assist in starting Swadeshi shops where such do not exist; to issue certificates of honesty to shops selling Swadeshi articles.

(c) To secure necessary information in connection with the industrial and commercial survey of the country, at present the scope of work being restricted to textile industries and sugar.

In doing so, he said that they had come there not to discuss the propriety or impropriety of Swadeshi, but for doing practical work. They wanted to , start, enthusiastic workers in different provinces; to start Swadeshi shops and to collect information, in

order to spread knowledge of the aims and objects of the Swadeshi movement, which was a movement of self-help.Swadeshi had been accepted all over the country. He hoped that all of them would co-operate with each other on the lines suggested in the resolution. What was required was work. If the resolution were followed the movement was sure to succeed.

Findings

The Swadeshi movement quickly outgrew its economic and political nature and became a movement for national regeneration. The Nation called for swadeshim in dress, in diet, in habits, in life, in arts, in literature, in science, in religion and philosophy. Swadeshim thus became an all pervading spiritual movement directed against the western civilisation which the British government represented and symbolised.

Tilak's immense popularity due to 25 years of courageous, self-sacrificing work resulted in the whole-hearted adoption of swadeshi throughout the country. There were swadeshi meetings in every village and swadeshi shops in every town.

The swadeshi spirit stimulated the establishment of several industries,



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hitherto starving. Swadeshi shops were opened everywhere. Swadeshi exhibitions were held to popularise the work of the new industries. The Paisa Fund, originally started by a Mr. Kale, became under Tilak's guidance, the most popular means of collecting funds for starting suitable industries. Education and temperance received a great impetus.

The moral force the movement roused was simply astonishing. Under the reactionary regime of Lord Curzon, disappointment and a sense of humiliation hung like a pall over the country. The swadeshi-boycott movement dispelled all these clouds. It created hope and enthusiasm in the minds of Indians. The national self-respect was fully awakened. People refused to take insults lying down. They refused to allow the foreign bureaucrats to be arbiters of their destiny. A hopelessly disorganised nation began to organise itself. The land of disunity was slowly closing up its ranks. Even the 'depressed' classes joined, heart and soul, the movement and a spirit of equality and unity was abroad.

This movement gave a deathblow to all the free trade theories in which the generation represented by the majority of the then leaders was trained.

People clearly came to realise how England had strangled Indian industries and they were determined, in the absence of any protective tariff in the interest of Indian manufactures, to boycott English goods.

Swadeshi was the first assertion of the spirit of independence. It could no longer be popularly argued that India could realise its rights through transmitting resolutions to the government and requesting reforms. The Nationalists had taught India to become self reliant, independent in all things and thereby to earn all those privileges and rights of free men. The Swadeshi movement quickly became a movement of national regeneration. Swadeshi was a practical application of the love of one's country. It was an economic, political and spiritual weapon.

Beyond the attainment of Swaraj , which was always their goal, the Nationalists saw a higher vision of free India. These were men of foresight. They sought to visualise an emerging India, self-respecting and free, an India leading the world to an even higher destiny. This is why Tilak repeatedly said, "Swaraj is the foundation and not the heights of our future prosperity".



Research Methodology

The study is a descriptive and analytical one. By and large historical approach has been adopted in the description. All the writings and documents of modern Indian history and its culture in Marathi and other languages constitute the primary sources. Books, Research articles and critical evaluations by experts and other scholar's opinions constitute the secondary sources.

Implications

The Lokmanya introduced his idea of Swadeshi exactly 100 years ago, yet this concept is as relevant today as it was in 1905. The concept of Swadeshi provided the philosophical basis for the strategy of self-reliance that was adopted soon after Independence. This strategy was implemented through the policy of import substitution. It was in a large measure due to this policy that Indian industry, which was then in an 'infant' stage, could grow and diversify. As a result, India is today almost self sufficient in industrial products. Secondly, India adopted the policy of liberalisation and globalisation in 1991 and hence Indian markets were opened to foreign companies and to imports of foreign goods. In 1994,

India became a member of the World Trade Organisation and hence is bound by its rules that demand lowering of import duties, quotas and other protective barriers. As a result, there has been a large influx of foreign goods. The government is unable to offer any protection to domestic industry, especially small-scale industry, that is most adversely affected. In this situation, it becomes the duty of every Indian to voluntarily decide to use only those goods that are produced in India by Indian companies. This is exactly what Lokmanya Tilak had in mind. He was not against trade, but was protesting against exploitative trade that was not only draining away India's resources but was destroying the talents entrepreneurship and the livelihood of millions of Indians.

India is facing a similar situation today. Since the government is unable to offer protection to Indian industry, Tilak's concept of voluntary acceptance of Swadeshim becomes the only way to ensure the survival and growth of our domestic industry in the face of stiff competition from cheap imported goods. It is up to the Indian people to not only support our own industry but to take pride in our



own products.

Conclusion

Tilak was the father of the Indian Freedom struggle, the maker of the Indian National Congress and one of the architects of modern India. He was a terror and nightmare to the British Government. At every trial, his influence spread wider and his personality loomed large on the political horizon of India. India will always remain grateful to Tilak for the deathless struggle he launched for the deliverance of his countrymen from political bondage and endless sacrifices and sufferings he made to the cause of his motherland.

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