



THE LAST BATTLE OF LOKMANYA

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ABSTRACT The present paper is an attempt to study the last battle of Lokmanya Tilak i.e during 1914 to 1920 and foundation laid by him for Swaraj. It presents the history of Freedom Movement and various achievements of Lokmanya Tilak's in the political sphere. It presents the various reforms laid down at the foundation level. It concludes with the result of Lokmanya's last struggle for freedom.

KEYWORDS : Lokmanya Tilak, Swaraj, freedom struggle

Introduction:

Lokmanya was a visionary leader. During the period between 1897 and 1920, Tilak was recognized as a national leader except by the moderates and he was considered as the only leader of Hindustan. The idea of "People's Strength" was introduced by Tilak to the Indian politics. He connected people from every social stratum and made them aware of importance of freedom struggle and people hence forth christened him Lokmanya.

Lokmanya was prepared to give up anything and everything for 'Swaraj' which was his goal from the very beginning. He put his wealth, mental peace, opportunity to education at stake for a greater cause of 'Swaraj'. He began his work with National education. He plotted the blueprint of freedom struggle on the pillars of his four fold formula, Swarajya, Swadeshi, Bahishkar and Rashtriya Shikshan.

Lokmanya Tilak and Freedom Struggle

Congress, back then was an organization led by a few educated men presenting their views and demands once a year. However, Lokmanya was sentenced to one and half year rigorous imprisonment for his revolt against the government. The common people were ignorant and nation's industry and economy were reeling under losses. The educated were impressed and favoured by the new facilities such as Railways, Post, Judiciary and English medium schools turning a blind eye to the financial dependency created by the British. Indians forgot the true meaning of independence and submitted to the British as their fate. What was left was the cadaver of a nation! Soulless! All leaders in true awareness of the prevailing situation, decided to play risk-free convenient politics.

Lokmanya, through 'Kesari' and 'Mahratta' awakened the masses and educated them of their rights. He vehemently criticized the British bureaucracy. Lokmanya faced the British wrath as rigorous imprisonment and huge monetary losses. But he gained people's trust. Lokmanya's appeal for 'Swaraj' was not only emotional. Tilak grew popular nationwide after the first trial of sedition. He travelled across India and grouped the like-minded (extremists). He commanded respect of scholars from various states India through his numerous meetings. Moderates, who sought favours from the British, outnumbered the extremists. Nevertheless, the youth supported Tilak. In the words of Tilak 'the winds of injustice and poverty set Bengal on fire'. Tilak breathed life into the sloppy Congress with the help of tremendous support from the common people. In 1906, Congress sprang to action after Dadabhai Nuroji announced 'Swaraj, Swadeshi, Bahishkar, and Rashtriya Shikshan'. He handed the people, a non-violent weapon 'Swadeshi and Bahishkar'. His popularity and success of 'Boycott' lead to imprisonment of Lokmanya for the second time for anti-state activities, As Lokmanya Tilak served his sentence, (1908-1914), Congress remained inactive while the British arrested the extremist leaders. New laws strangulated the Press rights. The nation saw a few political reforms followed by a long silence. After his return from Mandale Jail (Burma), popular as a critique of the Shreemad Bhagwat Geeta i.e Geeta Rahasaya Lokmanya took time to gauge the prevailing political system in India (Kelkar, N. C). In 1916, Tilak founded the Home Rule League (Swarajya Sangha) and the Vidharba leader Dadasaheb Khaparde was its first President. Tilak was a

visionary leader. Knowledge of Vedas, Math, Sanskrit, Law, History and western sciences allowed him to envision a powerful and modern India.

Even when freedom was a distant dream, Lokmanya was critically analyzing the elements for free and independent India. Mahathma Gandhi rightly called him 'The Architect of Modern India'. Tilak relentlessly worked for India's freedom, though he was aware of the time it would take to accomplish independence. His visionary work set the path for independence and he remained dedicated to this cause for his entire life. Hence it is important to understand the deep rooted meaning of his texts and speeches. In the word 'Swaraj', Swa means people and Rajya means Government; Government of People.

Tilak advocated Democracy for the benefit of the nation where people hold the right to abolish or change bureaucracy. On advocating total freedom and its development of man, he says, freedom too must have its boundaries. Seamless freedom has its own disadvantages. Lokmanya has presented deep insights into the idea of a nation and nationalism (Daily Kesari, May 1916).

Lokmanya simplified the idea of 'Swaraj' for the common people. He said, 'We know better how to run and take care of our home'. Tilak upholds that freedom is the predominant goal of one's life and that these aspirations should be accomplished. He illustrates, 'It is only half the goal to see flowering on a mango tree, the fruits are the goal', for people in the shackles of slavery must aspire for freedom (Tilak, D. J).

Tilak and Swaraj

Lokmanya's thoughts were modern and yet pragmatic. He believed that India, that was made of numerous kingdoms, religions, languages was stringed only by the ancient Vedic culture. He proposed that a democracy as that of the US alone will serve the interest of a united India. He convinced people about regional democracy and self-sufficiency. Swaraj is to have a secular government and provide equal opportunities. The British convicted Lokmanya for the third time on sedition charges, for his 'Home Rule Movement'. The winds changed and the judge ruled that demanding 'Swaraj' or criticizing bureaucracy was not treason. The first world war stood at the doorstep of the British, and Lokmanya took advantage of this situation. He instigated people to fight for 'Swaraj'. He said, "Go tell everybody boldly, I want Swaraj" (Daily Kesari).

Tilak travelled far and wide with meager facilities and poor transportation to spread the message of 'Swaraj'. He ignored himself completely and fought for freedom. Tilak authored 'Geeta Rahasya' a critical interpretation of Bhagvad Geeta and provided the bedrock to the freedom fighters and the freedom struggle. Similarly, he offered the Vedic foundation to the Home 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 spirit of freedom dwells in his heart and it would never die (Tilak, B. G). Tilak offered alliance to the British in the First World War. A staunch political strategist, Lokmanya demanded equal representation at UN in return of the alliance, after all, one lakh soldiers stood for the British. Tilak's four-fold formula (Swadeshi, Swaraj, Boycott, National

education) empowered nation with a non-violent weapon to fight the British. Boycott of foreign goods crippled the British economy completely as the finished goods from England remained unsold in India. The principle of 'Swadeshi' was based on developing Indian agriculture and other agrarian industries, domestic economy, technology etc. Tilak advocated an amalgamation of ancient and modern knowledge through his doctrine of 'National Education'. Tilak wanted the people of India to work selflessly, diligently, upholding national interest. Tilak identified the possible hindrances to 'Swaraj' and decided to sideline the issues such as gender, caste and creed. After sowing the seed of 'Swaraj', Tilak refused the Congress presidency and made up his mind to visit England to gather support for his struggle back home. He befriended the leader of the labour party and extended a generosity of Rs. 2500 for the election campaigning. Tilak lost the legal battle against the journalist 'Chirole' which led to heavy debt. But the people of Maharashtra stood by him and paid his debts.

1916 was an important year in the History of Freedom Movement and Lokmanya Tilak's political achievement. In 1916 he founded Home Rule League, reunited Congress, compromised with Muslim League and his most important achievement was that within the span of seven months' convinced common people of India for thrust of 'Swarajya'.

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

Reforms at the Central level (Kelkar N. C):

1. To veto/forbid Rowlett act, Press Act, Arms act. The convict, especially a political convict should be tried in his homeland jury. Abolish rigorous imprisonment for political offences, amend the British system of treatment and discipline in the prison.
2. To have a policy for befitting wages for agricultural and factory workers, to provide shelter for the labourers, to resolve differences between factory owners and workers to provide impartial justice to establish an organization for the above mentioned aims.
3. Restrict the shortage and the over pricing of the day to day essentials such as food, drinks etc. by adding export duties and octroi.
4. Railways to be managed by Indians; to determine railway fare to redevelopment of industries and discard the partial system of special allowances.
5. Cutting down expenses in all government departments, particularly in military, impose new taxes only if required based on the monetary strength of the individuals, companies and organization.
6. Provide financial help from government and take other steps to encourage Swadeshi movement and domestic industries.
7. To raise an army of national volunteers under the charge of Indian captains, providing training in military forces, appointing Indian nationals in all military services impartially
8. Select capable candidates by conducting competitive exams in India for all departments in Indian Government.
9. To achieve national solidarity /promote use of common language in all religions, make peaceful dialogue among people of all faiths and religions; work for Hindu- Muslim unity,
10. Formation of states on linguistic basis.

Regional Reforms (Kelkar, N. C):

1. Regional freedom/democracy without any delay.
2. The tax on agriculture should be partial and permanent.
3. The Grampanchayat should have rights on Wood and other rare things important for farming with having rights on reserved and protected forest.
4. The employment with partially and daily payment based should be banned.
5. The education should be in national language to the highest level of education.
6. The education for boys and girls should be free of cost and to make this happen quickly the regional fund should be provided to municipalities and local board with increased manner.
7. The Gramapachayat should have revival and should be provided with the rights of implementation with law and other important things.
8. Alcohol should be totally banned.
9. Gender partiality should not be there and voter region should be increased.
10. Health minister should be appointed and his / her supervision the

health in the nation should be improved.

11. The improvements which were being suggested by the people rights should be implemented on immediate basis. For example/ Agricultural improvement, increase in water harvesting, cooperation movement. The technical and business education which can be helpful for the welfare of the nation. The facilities of medicines and motivation to local young doctors are vital. The above 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 Indian and taught them to fight the British bureaucracy.

During Lucknow Congress a majority consensus established Congress as a political party. 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.

Conclusion:

Today, after 100 long years, his words "Swaraj (Home rule) is my birth right and I shall have it" 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.

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

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