Tilak’s major thrust, as an activist, was on generating the sentiment and spirit of nationhood among the Indians. He believed that a freedom struggle cannot effectively emerge unless and until the common people shed their apathy and realize that they form a nation. In fact, his major plaint against the Indian political leadership of his contemporary generation as well as the preceding one was that it had not grasped the real problem, namely, regeneration of the spirit of nationality. Stimulating national consciousness among the common people, according to Tilak, was a must for the resurrection of India. He, naturally, laid an all-out emphasis and concentrated his energies on imparting national consciousness to the people.

Tilak’s role as an effective activist has quite naturally attracted the attention of the scholars. Impressed by Tilak’s contribution to the Indian National struggle, these scholars tend to assess Tilak’s views on ‘Nationalism’ only on the basis of his strategy.

For a correct understanding and assessment of Tilak’s views on Nationalism, these need be evaluated against his theoretical perception of the concept and phenomenon of ‘Nationalism’. It must not be forgotten that what Tilak tried to do for achieving the task of nation-building—his actions and strategies—was, in many ways, circumscribed by the then existing conditions as
also by his own assessment of the situation. Any judgements about Tilak’s position, based only upon his strategies, are bound to be partial and incomplete.

It is, thus, essential to study Tilak’s views on Nationalism in the context of his conceptual understanding and evaluation of the concept and phenomenon of Nationalism, in its various aspects.

An attempt is made in this chapter to study and analyse Tilak’s views on Nationalism, in the light of the following points: (I) Tilak’s approach to the concept of Nationalism; (ii) Tilak’s approach to the position, “My nation, above all”; and (iii) Tilak’s understanding of what constitutes a ‘Nation’.

There are ample references in Tilak’s writings which help one in forming one’s opinion in this connection.

The idea of Nationalism reached the Indian soil in the 19th century. Exposed to the invigorating and modernizing ideologies of the West and eager to learn the secrets of Western ascendancy, the educated Indians were too willing to receive the ideology of Nationalism. Evidently, Tilak also shared the view that awareness of nationhood acts as a foundation necessary for progress-in to-day’s terminology’ modernization’. Tilak, naturally, felt it necessary to investigate into the nature and character of ‘Nationalism’ and to identify the essential components of a ‘Nation’.

At the outset, it must be noted that Tilak did not look upon Nationalism as some ‘Spiritual’ phenomenon. It is true that Tilak himself was an ardent believer in the Advaita philosophy; it is also true that he was proud of Hindu philosophical heritage. However, even a cursory study of his argument makes it
evident that he did not furnish a spiritual-metaphysical--explanation of Nationalism. Nationalism, for Tilak, did not represent any mystic force. To him, ‘Nation’ was, therefore, not a manifestation of some World-spirit. Accordingly, in Tilak, one does not come across with the ‘deification’ of ‘Nation’.

Tilak looked upon ‘Nation’ as one form of secular social organization among many other such organizations. He described these organizations as forming concentric circles, one bigger than the other, each relevant in its own sphere of influence. ‘Nationalism’, for him, was thus a stage between smaller social organizations and the ultimate goal-Universal Brotherhood (Vishwa-Bandhutva).¹ He, further, argued, “The desire to work for the cause of one’s nation, going beyond that of the immediate family welfare, is definitely indicative of the broadening horizons of one’s mind. Thinking of bringing about the welfare of the humanity as a whole would come as the next step. Realization of the Ultimate Truth, i.e., Brahma, is of course, the ultimate aim of human life.”² As he observed else-where, “Affinity for one’s family, community, religious group and nation would facilitate to comprehend correctly the lofty ideal that the ‘whole world forms one family’ (Vasudha eva Kutumbakam).”³ “This ascending scale of understanding is helpful”, he continued, “just as the worship of God in the form of an idol helps in understanding and realizing the ultimate ‘Nirgun-Mrakar’ Brahma.”³ He believed, “All these steps are needed like the rungs of a ladder or the lower storeys of a multi-storeyed building-where one cannot think of removing the
lower ones. At the same time, however, Tilak recommended that one should give ascending priorities to these loyalties. He, thus, observed, “In case a conflict of interests arises in respect of loyalty to one’s family, nation and, ultimately, to that of humanity, one should forgo one’s duties and obligations towards the lesser ideals for the sake of the higher ones.”

It is interesting to note that Tilak was not only aware that nationalism is a secular concept, but he also perceived that the awareness of a separate national identity is, many times, a consequence of some political calamity, e.g., period of subjugation. He further observed that the concept of nationalism would not have emerged in the history of mankind if no nation on this earth had suffered from the foreign subjugation or had been living under such threat. Tilak did not elaborate this point. Yet his arguments clearly indicate that for him, Nationalism was a secular phenomenon. As Nevinson has so rightly pointed out, “To Tilak, nationalism was mainly a political agent, a means of material improvement.”

It is, thus, evident that Tilak’s approach to Nationalism was quite distinct from that of Aurobindo Ghose and other extremist leaders-especially, those from Bengal. It must be remembered that “The writings of B.C. Pal and Aurobindo are characterised by an exalted, inspired and fervid emotionalism. In Aurobindo, there is a passion for metaphysical abstractions and theological symbols.” The concept of nationalism of both Aurobindo and Bipin-Chandta Pal was spiritual in character. Both ofthiiflóked upon India not only-as the land of their birth but also as the very incarnation of the Divine Mother.” As
Karan Singh elaborates, there was in India the tradition of worship of ‘Prithivi’.

“Sri Aurobindo’s contribution was to take up this mystic and religious conception; adapt it to the political requirement of India.” Karan Singh explains, Aurobindo Ghosh further integrated his concept of Indian Nationalism with his philosophy of Spiritual Evolution. Unlike Aurobindo, Tilak did not talk in terms of ‘Super-mind’ and the ‘Yogi’ bringing the power of the Supra-Mental itself on this earth. It may be recalled that Annie Besant’s approach to Nationalism could also be described as spiritual and mystic. She thought it fit to describe ‘Nation’ as a “Spiritual entity pulsating with deep inner life”. “Nation”, to her, “is a spark of Divine Fire, out-breathed into the world.” Annie Besant even talked of “the special mission of the nation, the duty given to it by God in its birth hour.” Tilak, scarcely, referred to the mission of a World panorama; nor did he talk of specific functions being allotted to different nations by the Supreme God. It is thus clear that Tilak did not share this approach. It would, therefore, be wrong to bracket Tilak and other Extremists—especially the Bengali group—together, as many critics do.

It needs also to be mentioned here that Tilak’s approach to Nationalism was not Romantic or emotional. He did not look upon Nation as some ‘Ethereal Entity’. And while discussing the issue of nationalism, he did not use poetic and flowery language. To him, national glory was not some imaginary thing—it was necessarily linked with the welfare of the people.

Tilak looked upon Nationalism as a ‘smaller version’ of a preliminary step towards-Universal Brotherhood. Nationalism, to him, was, therefore, not
antithetical to fraternity among nations. Tilak had, accordingly, expressed that after securing freedom, “we Indians would like to help other nations which have lost their freedom.”\textsuperscript{15} As could be expected, Tilak cautioned against the tendency to consider ‘one’s nation above all’ as the highest goal. For, he felt, such a consideration makes a nation go to the extent of endangering boundlessly another nation’s interests for its (the former’s) own sake.\textsuperscript{16} As will be elaborated in the next chapter, Tilak looked upon empire-building as a moral wrong and had described it as a ‘Demonic attribute’—’Asuri Sampat He suggested that in order to curb this tendency, it was essential that people should consider “welfare of humanity as the ultimate goal.”\textsuperscript{17}

Tilak’s observations clearly show that ‘Nationalism’, to him was not the ultimate end, the last thing, to be achieved. The unseemly competition among different nations could be avoided, Tilak added, only if people are taught to go beyond mere material happiness, this worldly pleasure, and seek the ultimate ‘Shreyas’ for humanity. Citing Green in support of his own argument, Tilak observed, “When material happiness is regarded as the only ultimate objective, severe competition ensues between individual and individual and, likewise, between nation and nation. This competition could result into conflicts—even wars-on international plane.”\textsuperscript{18} This discussion clearly indicates that Tilak was not in favour of aggressive nationalism. He prescribed, instead, that “every nation has a right to aspire for prosperity and progress, but this aspiration should be morally justifiable.”\textsuperscript{19}
Tilak was well aware that merely a group of people occupying a defined territory does not constitute a nation. He further pointed out that for the emergence of the feeling that they constitute a ‘nation’, it is essential that people should experience a feeling of oneness-some common affinity. Elaborating this concept, Tilak stated, “No people or community of people could be eligible to be called a ‘Nation’ unless they possess an element of some sort of religious, social or political affinity, and unless they reflect some common binding characteristics which distinguish them from other communities.” Thus, a nation, to Tilak, is a people who experience a feeling of emotional affinity.

Tilak went a step further. He wanted to locate the factors that help generate this feeling. He was well aware of the difficulties involved in this. He understood that the whole theme was very evasive-slippery-like quick silver. And it would be difficult to specify these factors. Tilak elaborated that the main difficulty, here, was that “Nationalism is not a tangible phenomenon. It is a sort of emotional experience, a psychological feeling, on the part of the people, that requires constant re-inforcement, he added.

Tilak further elaborated that one thing, however, was certain: The people should feel some element of one-ness and Sainan Flitatva-commonality of interest. This feeling among the people, that they share commonality of interests-may be common aspirations as well-was the main element of Nationalism, rather the direct cause of it. Tilak, however, stressed that for promoting the feeling of one-ness and nationhood, some other factors which
are more tangible, are needed along with the commonality of interests; to mention but a few, religion, language, territory, common history and common experience. Which of these would emerge and act as ‘the effective’ catalytic agent—the necessary fulcrum, observed Tilak, was very difficult to specify. For, in different situations, different factors, one or more, might prove effective.

This argument clearly supports the earlier observation that Tilak’s concept of nationalism was secular in character. It could be asked, if common religion is incorporated as one of the elements leading to Nationalism, how can it be claimed that Tilak’s approach to nationalism, was secular? It may be observed that, firstly, religion was mentioned as ‘one of the’ and not ‘the only’ factor. Secondly, Tilak was not in favour of a Theocratic State. Religion was considered to be important only because it helped generate affinity. Thirdly, to Tilak, ‘Nation’ did not have a God-ordained existence; nor was it an expression of some World-spirit.

What is more important for correctly understanding Tilak’s thoughts-views about Nationalism is his explanation of how the feeling of nationalism is generated i.e., the process of emergence of the feeling of nationalism. Tilak started with the proposition that a people would emerge as a nation only when they share a feeling of common identity, a sense of common affinity. It was, thus, necessary to render some evidence of one-ness which would promote group-consciousness that the people could experience. While discussing the Indian situation, he had observed that the British rule facilitated integration of India through reforms like means of communications, one common official
language, common law and administration. Never-the-less, he added, some additional cementing force that would give rise to emotional affinity among the people would be needed for the emergence of the feeling of nationalism.27 By this, Tilak was making it clear that only external devices would not suffice in generating this feeling. In addition, there should be some other factors which would help emergence of such emotional affinity and, as mentioned above, he enumerated the factors which, according to him, would help promote the feeling of one-ness. At the same time, however, Tilak was aware that neither of these would ensure the emergence of nationalism as “the commonality of interests, the main element constituting nationalism, does not depend solely upon a singe factor like religion, defined territory or language.”28 He quoted various instances from contemporary history in support of his observations.

It was thus very difficult, Tilak observed, to specify which one of these common territory, common language, common religion, common historical legacy would act as the effective catalytic agent. He further pointed out that in different societies, different factors may work. He elaborated as to how and at what stage these factors may emerge as the necessary effective catalytic agents. A people would not emerge as a nation merely because they share common religion or language or history or territory. “What is needed for the emergence of the spirit of nationalism is creation of the necessary preconditions, sort of preparation of the foreground, meaning thereby that the people are made knowledgeable, and efforts at inculcating among them a sense of self-respect and willingness to undergo self sacrifice, are undertaken.29 Once the
precondition is fulfilled, “any one of these aforesaid factors helps in developing the idea of Nationalism”.

Tilak further explained how these factors act in consolidating the feeling of Nationhood. He aptly compared this process of nation-building to that of ice-making, as was prevalent in his days. He explained, “As we know, for preparing ice, a rod has to be immersed in a flask filled with water and the temperature of the water has to be gradually reduced, thus cooling the water. While this is being done, a moment comes when the water, on being swift stirred, forms into a hard solid substance and hangs round the rid. Similar is the process of Nation building.

It was important emphasized, “that along with preparation of the foreground as above, some such fulcrum in the form of either a common language religion, history or territory is needed to consolidate the feeling Nationhood.” He was also aware that in different situations, different factors may prove more effective. He added, keeping this in mind, “for successfully generating the spirit of Nationhood among the people, the most suitable and favourable of these factors is obviously chosen as the foundation for building one’s Nation.”

Tilak not only observed that in different societies different factors may work but also pointed out that even within the same society, at different times, different factors may emerge as catalytic agents. To him, “the fulcrum, leading to the awareness of nationalism, may change with changing conditions. It can never be static.” Tilak was thus clearly indicating that the composition and character of a nation need not be rigid; it might change with the changing times. This clearly suggests that Tilak conceded that with the passage of time,
new groups might want to join and could be accommodated in the group originally constituting the nation.

Thus, Tilak was aware of the fact that formation of a nation is a live process, and that a nation may thus assume a new shape and complexion. Evidently, he was, hereby, making a very fundamental point of vital importance. Tilak’s observations clearly indicate that he was aware of the historical process of the emergence of a nation.

In Tilak, one finds a suggestion about how to manage the problems emerging in a society wherein different sub-cultures simultaneously co-exist. Tilak has not written separately on this point. But it is clear that he perceived this possibility. His approach towards the problems emerging as a result of the existence of multi-linguistic and multi-religious groups in India, helps one in getting an insight into his thinking.

Evidently, Tilak favoured honouring the cultural peculiarities of these diverse groups rather than imposing unity from above. Instead, he believed in assuring these cultural groups that their separate cultural identities would be retained. This becomes evident from the fact that for a culturally—diverse country like India, Tilak prescribed a federal political set-up on the lines of Canada and the U.S.A. Homogeneity of culture does not necessarily ensure but facilitate the feeling of emotional and psychological affinity. And Tilak was aware that existence of multiple cultures does give rise to certain stresses and strains. However, the remedy, according to him, was not thrusting unity upon the people. He believed that a federal political set-up would be more effective
in managing problems emerging out of the prevalence of multiple cultures. This preference for a federal political set-up means that Tilak opted for a formal political arrangement as an assurance to the different communities that their separate identities would be respected. Tilak could envisage existence of a state that could accommodate various sub-cultures and thus, would preserve the unity and integrity of the people as a Nation.

Tilak emphasized the role of Nationalism in setting a people on the road towards progress. As he put it, the feeling of nationalism is a feeling of group-consciousness leading to an awareness of commonality of interests. Nationalism is an expression of emotional affinity. And Tilak appreciated that it generates a feeling of self-respect, a group-identity within the community that inspires an individual to give up the ‘personal’ for the ‘group’, to work unitedly for the good of the whole group. Tilak perceived that progress of a people is definitely interlinked with their awareness that they form a nation i.e., with the generation of the feeling of Nationhood. Therefore, he stressed, “Those who seek resurgence of their nation, should concentrate on the measures which give rise to and strengthen the awareness of being a Nation.”

It need be noted, at this stage, that Tilak was aware of the need of conscious and deliberate efforts to inculcate the sentiment-the feeling-of oneness among the people. In other words, Tilak was suggesting that awareness of Nationhood has to be cultivated. It was not an inborn attribute. He also perceived that nationalism is a sort of emotional experience, a psychological feeling, and it requires constant reinforcement. He, thus, further added, “Those
who are anxious to realize the good and progress of their nation, think and act in such a way that all the people are inspired to devote their attention to a particular cause, so that the people begin to think that they are ‘one’, i.e., they are the individuals belonging to the same Nation.36

Tilak not only pointed out the importance of inculcating the spirit of nationalism but went further, and asserted, “A community which fails to produce a leadership that is keen to preserve the binding ties or common characteristics, is bound to disintegrate sooner or later.”37 It may be observed that Tilak’s expectations ran parallel to the experience in the West. In the West also, “through the nation and its State, people sought and believed that they found answers to their aspirations. The nation and its State became, in the minds of the theorists and moral philosophers in the West-especially in Western Europe-the way to reach the future, to progress, towards a good (or better) society, or to use a modern term, to modernize.”38

Tilak’s argument, thus, clearly indicates that he had no dreamy and romantic ideas about ‘Nationalism’. He looked upon ‘Nationalism’ as a means of material improvement and not as some mystic, spiritual, phenomenon. Nationalism, accordingly, for him, was a feeling of group-consciousness among the people that inspires among them a will to work together for some common good, i.e., commonality of interests. National good, according to Tilak, was synonymous with people’s good-their welfare. It has been stated by Western scholars that Nationalism in the West coincided with the idea of popular sovereignty and thus promoted the idea of democracy. Tilak’s
observations, as have already been mentioned in the chapters Swaraj: Mobilization, and Swaraj: Connotation, do clearly indicate that in his idea of Nationalism, people were thought of as the rightful claimants of political power. Thus, it is clear that Tilak’s conception of Nationalism is analogous to the concept of popular sovereignty—meaning thereby democratic government. Tilak’s concept of Nationalism was, thus, in no way antithetical to liberal thought.

Tilak had looked upon ‘freedom’ as élán vital of any people, and had attached primacy to India’s freedom struggle. As an ardent patriot, Tilak was actively participating in India’s national freedom movement. He had realized quite early that it is the awareness of Nationhood that generates in any people the urge to become free.

Indian nationalism, at this juncture, was just in the formative phase. The urgent task, as Tilak saw it, was to give the nascent nationalism of India a concrete shape. Resurrection of India, as a nation, thus emerged as the main objective of his life. Tilak thus concentrated his efforts on promoting the sentiments of Indian nationhood. As has been observed at the beginning of this chapter, Tilak’s role as an agitator in the Indian national movement has attracted the attention of the scholars. For correctly understanding—Tilak’s views on Nationalism, however, it is necessary to interpret his strategy of nation-building in the context of his above-stated theoretical position. Such an inquiry gives one an idea about the lines on which Tilak would have liked to proceed, if possible.
Before assessing Tilak’s exposition of Indian nationalism i.e., his strategy, it is necessary to keep in mind a few constraints he had to face: Firstly, it must not be forgotten that as an active political leader, Tilak had to take situational positions. The main task for him was that of inculcating the sense of nationhood. For achieving this, it was necessary to reach and involve the masses; it was also necessary to evolve methods that would prove most effective. Because of the situational constraints, Tilak could not always go in for that which could have been theoretically ideal. One has, therefore, to inquire whether some of the so-called short comings of Tilak’s views regarding nationalism had been situational in character.

Secondly, while interpreting Tilak, one should always remember that he did not use the term Rashira (literally translated, ‘Nation’) to convey a specific meaning. In fact, he has used the same term to convey different shades of meaning. Tilak’s main concern was appealing to and educating the common masses. Further, he was writing before 1908 when the terms ‘nationalism’ etc., as understood today, had not got fully developed. It is, therefore, necessary to take into account the general purport of his argument. One finds that Tilak used the term Rashtra, at times to convey the meaning, ‘nation’, at times, ‘nationality’, at times, a sub-cultural group, and, at times, a ‘group having some sort of cultural affinity’. It does not mean that for every such group, referred to as ‘Rashtra’ Tilak was demanding a separate political existence.

Also, one must try to understand Tilak’s views about the nature of the future Indian polity, and inquire as to whether, as suggested by some critics, he
thought of a Hindu Nation-State. Moreover, one should know whether Tilak
tool- cognizance of the multi-cultural character of India.

Last, but not the least, Tilak’s views should be distinguished from those
of the other leaders of the Extremist school-particularly, those from Bengal.

Tilak was working in a peculiar historical situation within a peculiar
socio-political frame-work. His strategy for sponsoring Nationalism was
largely shaped by the then existing conditions. Such an inquiry is all the more
important as, now-a-days, it has become fashionable in the West to dub Asian
nationalism as ‘negative’ in character-anti-rational, anti-liberal, deviant-a
perversion of the positive, original Western model. Hence, the need to
understand the peculiar Indian conditions.

The Indian political scene was characterised by (1) presence of multiple
linguistic regions, (2) a land of multiple religions, and (3) character of British
Imperialism.

Different linguistic regions existed and still exist in India, each of them
inheriting a rich culture, a developed language and literature of its own. Each
region enjoyed a sort of independent, separate, identity. It may even be said
that each of these had a ready potential to develop as a separate nationality.

To sponsor, effectively, the spirit of Indian nationalism, it was necessary
to involve the common people most of whom were conversant only with their
mothertongues. It was, therefore, necessary to address the people in their own
language, their own vernacular. And it was precisely here that the Indians faced
a serious dilemma. As has already been observed, the new national
consciousness on an all India basis had been very much traceable to the use of English language as the common medium of instruction which provided the educated Indians with a common medium of communication, facilitating among them a meaningful and effective dialogue and promoting among them a common response to Western knowledge and influence. There is much truth in K.M. Panikkar’s remark that, had the education been imparted through the Indian languages, in other words, had English not been pressed into use as common medium of instruction, the emphasis of the Renaissance in India would have been different from region to region. The diverse linguistic units, in that case, might have emerged into so many different units (meaning thereby, separate nationalities) as there are different languages in India and would have repeated the pattern of Europe.39

The dilemma, as it presented itself, was like this: There was a great risk that use of the regional language might promote linguistic nationalism when it was necessary to retain the all-India identity which the Indians had only recently discovered. But, on the other hand, only a handful could follow English. The commoners would not have felt attracted towards the national struggle if the medium of communication was a foreign language.

Multiplicity of languages, however, was not the only hurdle facing the Indian nation-builders. India was and still continues to be a land of multiple religions. The problem had become more difficult because of the feeling of estrangement between the Hindus and the Muslims—the two major communities of India. The roots of this estrangement lay in the historical rivalry between
them which had not been conclusively resolved by the time the British usurped power in India.

The Muslims still cherished the historical memory of their political hegemony. Though in a numerical minority, they were not psychologically prepared to accept the political primacy of the Hindus. Badruddin Tyabji, an ardent nationalist himself, who was the president of the third session of the Indian National Congress, had recognized this fact when he had suggested to Hume to prorogue the working of the Congress for five years so as to reconsider the whole position. He held this opinion, “having regard to the distinctly hostile attitude of the Mohamedans, which is becoming daily more pronounced and more apparent.” It is significant to note that Tyabji had thought it necessary to make this suggestion in his letter to Hume, as early as 27th October 1888.

As for the Hindus, their memories of the Islamic rule, to say the least, were not very pleasant. They resented the hegemony of the Muslims and sought to neutralise it.

Secondly, it may be recalled, the Indian Renaissance was essentially a Hindu Renaissance. Further, the beginning of Oriental studies and the religious reform movements had helped to restore the confidence of the Hindus in their own faith and cultural heritage. As a result of the new discovery of Hindu identity, a new communal’ consciousness which the Hindus had lacked historically, began to develop.
Even before the emergence of Tilak on the political scene, the Hindu-Muslim rift had thus raised its head in Indian politics.

Alongwith the two above-mentioned points viz., multiplicity of linguistic regions and religions one, need keep in mind that the British imperialism did not have political implications only. British rule in India was not just a political event. As is well-understood, it had religious and cultural overtones as well. The British imperial rulers were claiming that they were ruling over India not by the sanction of superior weapons but because their’s was a superior culture and civilization. They were also hoping of converting the Indians, especially the Hindus, through the use of English education to Christianity. The reaction among the Hindus to this cultural facet of British imperialism was, naturally, intense.

It is also important to note as to how Tilak perceived the situation, for, it was this understanding which essentially shaped his strategy.

One gets a definite feeling, after studying Tilak, that he considered the awareness about Indian Nationalism as a new development, a recent phenomenon. He conceded that this awareness was a phenomenon emerging out of the advent of the British Raj when he observed, “There is much truth in the argument that people from different provinces have, as a result of the single unified rule of the British in India, started looking upon themselves as being limbs or constituents of one nation.” In the pre-British days, Tilak pointed out, the Indians lacked this sense of political unity-a separate national identity. Elaborating his point further, Tilak observed, “The Marathas, the
Sikhs and Rajputs did have some opportunity to consolidate themselves as Indians. They, however, failed to avail of it at the right moment. One could not, therefore, say with any certainty that these groups would ever have come together to unite and to form a nation. Tilak did not have any illusions regarding the ulterior motives of the British imperial rulers, Yet, he reckoned that, without the least intending it, Great Britain has promoted the idea of Indian unity. As he explained, this awareness of national unity was facilitated through the single rule, common laws, common language for governmental business, as well as education and the spread of means of communication under the British regime.

Tilak perceived that for the first time, the Indians, despite their diversities, had received the historical opportunity of emerging as a Nation. Now that the Indians have had the opportunity, it was necessary to utilise it to the fullest extent. Tilak, who perceived the urgency of instilling an awareness among the Indians that they constitute a nation, proclaimed the need of realizing that henceforth, “India is our motherland and the deity we worship (as Kindred) as inhabitants of a common land-India, we form a single family. And keeping this in mind, to strive for the betterment of our socio-political conditions, would be our religion, our bounden duty.”

Tilak, however, was not prepared to give much of the credit to the British rulers for the emergence of the awareness of Indian nationalism. He reminded that the British Government had only provided the external devices. The awareness of Nationalism (Nationhood) has to come from within. He
pointed out that in the Indian situation, the pre-British ‘cultural solidarity’ also
was instrumental in building up the sense of nationalism. That is why, he
opined, it was problematic whether the aforesaid effect of the British
imperialism would actually have occurred in the absence of these preceding
conditions.48 Emphasizing the need of emotional affinity—a feeling of solidarity
from within, Tilak observed, “At present (under the British rule), we have been
brought together by external devices only. But, for the emergence of the feeling
of national solidarity, it is essential to work and to develop a feeling of mutual
affinity—a sense of oneness of mind.”49

As Tilak understood it, ‘Nationalism is not a tangible thing’ and the
people need to be made aware of some sort of commonness in order to make
them feel that they constitute a Nation. Nation does not merely mean, observed
Tilak, a group of people, Lok Samudaya. There should be some binding fore.
And, it is also essential that the people should be aware of it. For achieving
this, it was necessary to reach the message of nationalism to the common man.
This, however, was not an easy task.

Tilak did perceive that in the then existing conditions, one had to deal
with three situations: Firstly, India was a nation suffering from a stifling
inferiority complex. Indians had started looking down upon themselves as
culturally-backward and had lost confidence in themselves as a people.
According to Tilak, Indians failed to understand that they need not make
assessment of their own selves on the basis of the opinions expressed by the
foreign rulers who were interested in demoralising the subject people and seeking legitimacy for their own regime through claims on cultural superiority.

Secondly, India was a land of different linguistic, sub-cultural regions, each having the ready potential to emerge as an independent nation. He reckoned “In a way, it is true to say that India comprised, different nations.” He, therefore, found it necessary to search for a unifying factor to inter-link them.50

Thirdly, India was a multi-religious land. Tilak had realized that the Indian nationalists simply cannot wish away the existence of multiple religions.

It may also be mentioned, at this juncture, that Tilak had also realized that economic deprivation was a factor, commonly suffered from, by all the Indians. He hoped that this aspect could fruitfully be utilized for inculcating the feeling of ‘Saman-hitatva’, commonality of interests, among all the communities of India; this would, in its own course, help generate the feeling of common nationhood.

It was on the basis of this assessment that Tilak evolved his strategy.

It is important to note that Tilak was aware that conscious and deliberate efforts need to be put in for generating a feeling among the people that they form, ‘nation’. In other words, he perceived, it was necessary to make the people conscious of their National Identity.

Nationalism has, today, attained such a universal acceptance that one is likely to forget that “It has a recent origin and that nationalism is a modern, almost a recent, phenomenon.”51 As Hayes further states, “Nationalism in its
modern sense is not a natural instinctive thing; it is artificial, and its growth and spread are traceable to artificial stimulation, in a word, propaganda. It must be remembered, further, that “Nationalism, first and foremost, is a state of mind, an act of consciousness, and that consciousness develops only with a sense of group consciousness.” These observations make it clear that conscious efforts are required to be taken for generating the awareness of nationalism.

The difficulty faced by Tilak and other patriots becomes apparent at this stage. Nationalism is an elusive concept. While there is a sort of general agreement that Nationalism is a sort of group-consciousness, a feeling of ‘one-ness’ against ‘they-ness’, “to each kind of generalization exceptions can be raised. Nevertheless, each definition of Nationalism refers to one or more types of cultural affinity. The famous definition of Nationalism by Hayes, refers to Nationalism “as an emotional fusion (and exaggeration) of two very old phenomena, of nationality and patriotism.” ‘Patriotism’ is love of country or native land, and ‘nationality’ designates a group of people who speak either the same language or closely-related dialects, who cherish common historical traditions, and constitute or think they constitute a ‘distinct cultural society’; in other words, some sort of common emotional affinity. One may as well refer, here, to Hans Kohn’s observation that “Nationalities come into existence only when certain objective bonds like common descent, language, territory, political entity, customs and traditions, and religion, delimit a social group."
“Nation”, as observed by Shafer, “became an answer to men’s anxieties, a solution to their frustrations, and a refuge in times of trouble.” Naturally, every people developed an urge for common nationhood. This urge led to a search to perceive one’s separate national identity which provided justification for their separate political existence. ‘Such a search, as Shafter adds, ‘had been all the more necessary because emergence of the feeling of nationalism presupposes people’s identification with a body far too great for any concrete experience. This is too difficult an intellectual exercise for an average man’. As Hans Kohn also observes, “Nationalism presupposes our identification with the life and aspirations of uncounted millions who we shall never know, with territory which we shall never visit in the entirety.” Hence, people tend to cling to certain perceivable factors-common objective bonds like language, religion, history and cultural identity. As Kohn further observes, “Each new nationalism, having received its original impulse from the cultural contact with some old nationalism, looked for its justification and differentiation to the heritage of its own past, and extolled the primitive and ancient depth and peculiarities of its traditions in contrast to Western nationalism and universal standards.” It may be mentioned, in passing, that this ‘type of new nationalism’ though it sought indigenous roots, need not be considered as complex, impure, deviant, as some Western scholars tend to do. This new nationalism, as well, is not illiberal, regressive and anti-modern though it differs from the so-called ‘pure and classical’ original nationalisms in the West.
While understanding Tilak’s conception of nationalism, the above-mentioned points become all the more relevant.

Tilak realized that the down-trodden country was to be made conscious and aware of its potential greatness. He hoped that awareness of Nationhood and revelation of their real identity would stir the Indians to action.

To start with, Tilak challenged the claims of cultural superiority of the West. As he rightly interpreted, the British rulers, by their claims—that they were ruling over India not by claims of superior weapons alone but because of their superior culture—were trying to give a moral foundation to their imperial rule. The British rulers, impudently, also claimed that they looked upon it as the God-given duty to spread their superior culture among the ‘ignorant’ and ‘uncivilized’ subject races. Naturally, Tilak was indignant at these arrogant claims.

Indeed, contact with the West did help the Indians to understand their draw-backs and deficiencies, as also, aroused in their minds an urge for change and reform. But, at the same time, it had also generated among the Indians a tendency to look upon the foreign rulers-Britishers—as their Gurus and beseech their guidance. This generated among the Indians a tendency of total reliance upon the foreign rulers. To Tilak, this tendency exhibited nothing else but a total lack of self-confidence.

Tilak, obviously, resented this attitude of the English-educated. To him, it was akin to accepting the Western claim of cultural superiority. It lent legitimacy, Tilak believed, to the imperial regime and, like-wise, generated
inferiority complex among the people. No doubt, the sense of inferiority itself constitutes a great source of weakness—an hindrance to progress. Tilak naturally wanted to fight back this feeling.

Tilak hoped to meet this challenge by reassuring the Indians that their ancient and rich culture still retained the power to guide the present. Hence, they could turn to their traditional heritage.

Tilak’s position, thus, had two dimensions: (a) a refutation of the Western claim of cultural superiority; and (b) a reassurance to the, people about their inner strength and capability.

Tilak is criticised for promoting ‘Cultural nationalism’, instead of Western-type territorial nationalism. It need be recalled that even in the West—birthplace of the latter type of nationalism-territory had never been the sole component of ‘Nationalism’. For creating the spirit Ow ‘We-ness’, the western societies also had relied on ‘cultural traits’ with a view of generating the necessary emotional national solidarity.

The critics also suggest that Tilak was more concerned about the medieval type of Swaraj that the Indians had lost; and, therefore, instead of making people look forward to a bright and glorious future, Tilak made them look to the past glories. While examining Tilak’s position, it, however, need be kept in mind that a fallen people need reassurance about their inherent capacity to achieve—a feeling or an awareness that they had, at one time, proved their worth. Such an awareness restores people’s self-confidence. Tilak expected this love and pride of the rich cultural heritage to play a constructive role in the
process of India’s nation-building by restoring the self-confidence of its people. In not recognizing this positive character of Tilak’s cultural nationalism, one feels, agreeing with Gowardhan Parikh, that “we are doing injustice to Tilak.  

It is further said that instead of emphasizing the issue of common subjection, Tilak concentrated his appeal on the cultural factors. He did concentrate on the cultural factors but that was because he believed that appeal to the ancient cultural legacy would prove to be the most effective force. He expected that awareness of a separate cultural identity would lend an edge to the urge to throw off the foreign yoke.

This, however, does not mean that Tilak side-tracked the issue of common subjection. This point would be discussed in details, later on, in this chapter. It is evident that awareness of this phenomenon of cultural aspect of nationalism prompted Tilak’s search for cultural affinity. Tilak pointed out, obviously with a view of supporting his argument, that other newly-emerging national societies have begun - to realize the importance of a search for some national cultural identity that would effectively sustain the feeling of nationalism.  

Tilak believed that in the then existing conditions, “When we Indians have lost all our glory and freedom, the only sustaining force that we could claim as our own, is our rich heritage-our Religion. It was, thus, his search for some cultural affinity that led him, one finds, to Hindu identity. But, then, as K.M. Panikkar has rightly pointed out, “Indian history is predominantly the history of Hindu people-what is distinctly Indian has been Hindu.”
Tilak expected Hinduism also to play a unifying role—of providing a common link he was in search of—in the peculiar diverse linguistic conditions of India. As has already been noted, he had precisely grasped the peculiar dilemma presented by this diversity. Tilak was aware of the potential of any language to act as an effective mobilizing force. English was a foreign language. Only a few could follow it and they formed a very thin crust of the society. Naturally, English could not be used effectively as the medium of communication with the common man. Tilak was, therefore, convinced that for inculcating the sentiment of nationalism in the masses, it was necessary to make use of the vernacular languages. Yet, he was also aware that India was a land of multiple languages, each of them enjoying primacy in a fairly well-defined area, and experiencing a sort of separate regional linguistic identity. As can be recalled, Tilak had been very keen not to lose the unique historic opportunity for India to emerge as a nation. He, therefore, was in search of some factor that would act as a binding force for the various linguistic regions. And in Hinduism, he found this option.

It may be re-emphasized, at this stage, that Tilak was equally aware that every achievement was to be made with the help of the people coming from all castes and religions as also all regions. Likewise, he believed that “there need to be some other factors than Hinduism to unify the thirty crore people of India.” But, at the same time, he pointed out, “One should not lose sight of the fact that the factor which could be sighted as common to or binding the people from different provinces of India is Hindu Religion ... in each of the provinces,
Hindus form a majority. The force binding them commonly, we find, is Hinduism. And, as he further stated, “because of this common Hindu culture, there is seen unanimity of thought and the people of India. This speaks of unity of India.”

Tilak clarified that at that moment, he was not talking about the Muslims and the Christians, thereby, clearly suggesting that eventually, it would be necessary to find out ways and means, some measures, to accommodate people of all religions. Yet, he felt that one would neglect the fact that it was Hindu tradition and culture that was lending cultural homogeneity to India only at the peril of Indian unity. “Under such circumstances”, observed Tilak, “in the interest of consolidation of the Nation, retaining the ties of Hinduism is convenient, feasible and also necessary.” He, therefore, cautioned that “Indians would fall apart like grains of sand if, through oversight or negligence, efforts are not put in to strengthen these cementing forces.”

It may be noted, here, that the issue of the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims attracts more attention since the emergence of Pakistan. For Tilak, however, the dimension of the problem was different. What really concerned him was the multiplicity of linguistic regions. His appeal to Hinduism should thus be understood as an effort to locate the highest common factor.

What is equally, if not more important, and as such, noteworthy, is Tilak’s perception that the multi-lingual character of India should be accepted and honoured as a fact of Indian political life. As he was in favour of accepting
this diversity, he did not suggest any measures for imposing uniformity. Instead, he observed that he was one of those who held that the development of India will be facilitated if vernaculars are developed and provinces redistributed according to language. “We can appeal to our people better through vernaculars than through English. English can never hope to be the language of the people. We must appeal to them through vernaculars.”71 That is why he observed, “it is impossible for us to give up our vernaculars and you can never wipe out all vernaculars and make substitutes for them.”72 Tilak, therefore, advocated the necessity of accepting the multi-lingual character of Indian society and the need for respecting the regional sub-cultures.

Another noteworthy feature of Tilak’s argument is that though he keenly felt that Indians should exploit the unique opportunity to emerge as a nation, he did not insist on uniformity. He clearly perceived, “Even after the successful culmination of the efforts put in by institutions like the Indian National Congress to bring about unity of the people, the people of different linguistic regions, e.g., Maharashtrians, Rajasthanis, Sikhs, and all others, would wish to perpetuate their respective ethno-cultural characteristic, and traits.”73 Tilak was, hereby, suggesting that this perpetuation need not stand in the way of the political and national solidarity of a people. It appears that Tilak felt that the promise and the prospects that their cultural peculiarities would be properly respected, would better prompt people to stay together and aspire for a commonly, shared future. To quote him, “In fact, a perpetuation of such identity is crucial for bringing about the unity of the people. And we can say
that in no way does it go against the ultimate solidarity of a people (as a nation).”

Tilak even went to the extent of suggesting that “India can only be like the United States. Small states all over India. and each state having a language of its own and all united together by a common language like the English or Hindi.”

Multiplicity of languages was, however, not the only hurdle facing the Indian patriots. India was and also continues to be a land of multiple religions. Tilak was very much conscious of the fact that while Hinduism provided some semblance of psychological unity of cultural solidarity, it was necessary to ensure that the non-Hindus were not alienated. Tilak understood that it was neither possible nor desirable to wish away the presence of other religions. It was necessary to accommodate them. It appears that Tilak hoped that a way could be found out to solve this dilemma and that “it was possible to unite the Hindus without in any way antagonizing and creating hatred towards the people of other religions (in India).”

To accomplish this task, Tilak suggested the following measures:

Firstly, Tilak thought it necessary to emphasize the inherent catholicity of Hindu philosophy towards other faiths. He quoted, time and again the old Hindu precept “Ekam Sat, Viprah Bahudha Vadanti” (“The Truth is one though the Enlightened ones describe it differently”). Tilak explained that the Hindu religion looks upon the other Faiths just as different ways at arriving at the Ultimate Truth which, according to him, was the essence of Vedanta. It is significant to remember that this was an effort on Tilak’s part to ensure that the
awareness of being Hindus was not to be allowed to generate a feeling of antagonism towards the people of other religions.

This was not only an assurance to the peoples of other religions but, at the same time, a reminder to the Hindus that Hinduism expects “everyone to follow one’s religion faithfully and through it, to achieve, to seek, the ultimate solace—the Biss.”

In this context, referring to the Hindu-Muslim relationship, Tilak observed, “The element of animosity, generally prevalent among the Hindus and Muslims, can never be overcome unless the latter get educated and are willing to absorb the essence of Vedanta to some degree at least.” This observation needs to be understood in the light of the foregoing discussion. It should be appreciated that by ‘Vedanta Tilak did not mean ‘thrusting’ Hindu religion, as some critics would like to suggest. He was only suggesting that this Vedantic approach, namely, that the different faiths are but different ways of arriving at the Ultimate Truth, is absolutely necessary-specially in any multi-religious community. Tilak felt that the existence of multiple religions need not obstruct Indian nationhood if this need of respecting the multi-religious character of India is perceived.

Secondly, Tilak emphasized the significance of common inhabitance occupying the same territory for generations together. He precited that love for the land of one’s birth and inhabitance Hayes’ words, ‘love for one’s native land’, is instinctive. Tilak wan to utilize this instinct as a ‘binding force’. He, therefore, thought to remind both the Hindus and the Muslims that they were,
to generations, inhabiting the same land. This experience, he maintained, should and could generate a feeling of affinity and commonality of interests. He further advocated that both should behave in such a way that others would come to sense, to feel, that the Hindus and the Muslims are ‘one’ excepting their religion. Tilak tried to explain his point in the traditional idiom. He entreated them to remember that both the communities have been nurtured on the same soil. Tilak used the Marathi term ‘Pind Vadhane’. This term does not connote only nurturing of body; it connotes the traditional belief that food helps nurturing of total personality. He suggested that the food that they (the Indians) have commonly consumed was bound to generate a feeling of emotional affinity prevailing among the near kin. Tilak, here, used a typical traditional Hindu idiom Sapind Bhav-spirit of affinity prevailing among closest relatives-to convey this meaning.

Tilak appealed to the Indians not to lose this feeling of affinity. He added, “If bearing this kinship in mind you undertake the task as members of a single family, God will help you”. He tried to emphasize that ‘India’s struggle for national freedom does not involve anything that pertains to religion’.

At this juncture, it would not be out of place to review Tilak’s position regarding the National Festivals-the Ganes Festival and the Shivaji Festival.

An objection is, at times, raised that these festivals were sectarian in character; they not only appealed to the Hindus alone, but also helped to strengthen the anti-Muslim feeling. It is noteworthy that Tilak himself took cognizance of this aspect and tried to underplay Shivaji’s image as a Hindu
leader, and to emphasize more of his image as one who opposed tyranny and oppression. Tilak’s observations, in this context, need be referred to in the original. These bring out, convincingly, the genuineness of his concern. The foreign government was not slow to understand the real import of the festivals. As has already been observed, the National festivals were used to propagate the secular issues of Swadeshi, Boycott and Temperance.

Further, it must be added here that Tilak had not expected these festivals to emerge as all-India festivals. These were, however, designated as ‘national’ because they were supposed to inculcate the spirit of nationalism. Tilak expected the other provinces or regions to have parallel festivals that would attract the local people. It is, however, worth noting that even the Shivaji Festival had its appeal beyond Maharashtra\textsuperscript{83}.

The same can be said about Tilak’s preference for regional language as medium of instruction. In a multi-lingual nation like India, the choice of medium of instruction always poses a dilemma. In such a situation, it would be wrong to suggest that Tilak fostered regional loyalties and parochial fidelities as against national loyalties and considerations.

Tilak was, further, hopeful that sharing common experiences would help strengthen the feeling of ‘Saman-Hitatva’-commonality of interests-the basic ingredient of nationalism. By ‘common experiences’ he meant, the feeling of anguish resulting out of common subjection to the imperial rule, the consequent material exploitation and waging a struggle against the foreign rulers.
To intensify this feeling, Tilak was keen on initiating secular movements like Swadeshi, Boycott and Temperance. Through these movements, he wanted to emphasize that the Indian people shared common interests. As he observed, “Hindus and Mohammedans, Christians, Jams, Parsis and Buddhists could be combined if they brought Swadeshi into their religion. Swadeshi taught them to hold their own against other nations.” He also argued that both the communities could be involved in a common freedom struggle against the foreign rulers. This was because, the Muslims also were the sufferers. Participation in the freedom movement would lead to the feeling of unity, of common interests.

Thirdly, Tilak thought it necessary to put the issue of Hindu-Muslim relationship in its proper perspective. He appealed to the Muslims that “they need not feel humiliated by the fact that they, forgetting that they were the erstwhile conquerors, have to behave with the Kafir Hindus on an equal footing,” and should reconcile with the changing times. Tilak stressed that both the Hindus and the Muslims should realize that the foreign rulers were interested in the infighting between these communities. He tried to establish the evident link between the increasing reluctance on the part of the British rulers to part with political power on the one hand and the rising incidence of Hindu-Muslim riots on the other. He added, “Any thinking person would realize that unless all the three parties involved (the Hindus, the Muslims and the British rulers) are taken into account, one cannot trace the real causes of the Hindu-
Muslim riots. Significantly, Tilak was, perhaps, the first Indian leader to speak of the ‘third side of the communal triangle.’

As has been rightly observed by Mom Shakir and J.R. Shinde, Tilak was of the opinion that “If the majority must accommodate with the just demands of the minorities, so should the minorities meet the majority with a spirit of understanding and adjustment.” In a multi-religious nation like India, Tilak insisted, a strictly impartial treatment should be meted out to all concerned.

Most importantly, Tilak proposed that a multi-religious nation like India should look forward to a ‘federal form of polity’ as being a possible solution. As early as in 1893, Tilak suggested that in his opinion, “the Hindus and the Muslims should live together, just on the lines of the people in the United States of America who live together even though they have different religions and belong to different ethnic stocks.” Tilak had also the Canadian example in view where the English-speaking and the French-speaking had opted for a federal set-up.

Tilak’s suggestion of a federal polity needs to be understood in a proper perspective. It shows that Tilak thought not of total assimilation-complete fusion-of different cultural groups but of adjustment and understanding, i.e., reconciling diversity with unity. This indicates that Tilàk thought it feasible that though culturally diverse, such groups could join in a common polity, and in that process, they would develop the feeling of commonality of interests.

Tilak, hereby, advocated what may be called a sort of ‘composite nationalism’-a nationalism which accepts and honours cultural diversities and
identities without imposing uniformity from above. It believes that the only solution to the challenge posed by diversity is a willing acceptance of the reality-an assurance convincingly extended-that the diverse sub-cultures would be respected.

Composite nationalism, moreover, seeks an answer, in political terms, through federal polity wherein the distinct cultures can find legitimate expression to their identity.

Composite nationalism, besides, advocates a search for some common cementing forces. In a multi-religious country, it envisages the use of certain secular forces.

It is true that Tilak was greatly attached to the Hindu Culture and was proud of its ancient heritage. He did perceive in this rich cultural heritage a great promise for the future. He also expected that once the foreign yoke was overthrown, the main cultural threat to the Hindu society would be done away with. And Tilak welcomed this possibility. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude, as Wolpert does, that “Tilak wanted to restore Hindustan to Hindu rule, that is, re-establish Swaraj.”

It has become fashionable to describe Tilak as an anti-Muslim Hindu revivalist, and, as such, Tilak’s nationalism has come to be labelled as, ‘Communal’, in character. Hence, it is necessary to discuss the issue of Tilak’s anti-Muslim image. Tilak’s writings are mainly in Marathi. As observed by Gowardhan Parikh and A.B. Shah, the misunderstanding might have been due to the failure of the critics to refer to the original Marathi
writings of Tilak in general and their reference to Chirol in particular Shah’s argument is revealing in this context.\textsuperscript{92}

These critics also do not take proper cognizance of the already-discussed situational constraints that Tilak, as an activist, had to face. It can, thus, be claimed that such critics have failed to evaluate Tilak’s argument in its total perspective.

At this stage, it is felt necessary to discuss one more point of criticism: Tilak is, most often, projected as a proponent only of cultural nationalism, thereby suggesting that he had totally ignored the economic aspect of nationalism. But, as has already been observed in an earlier chapter, one of the main reasons why Tilak wanted to give primacy to the issue of Swaraj, was India’s growing poverty. The issue of Swaraj, Tilak considered, was basically the problem of assuring bread to the common masses. He lamented that while Inuaia was bleeding white as the result of the colonial exploitation, the Indian leaders were interested in making issue of relatively unimportant matters such as “changing costume styles, deciding on the age of consent, etc.”\textsuperscript{93} Tilak, furthermore, attached highest importance to the issue of decadence in the industrial sphere. He emphasized that the significance of this phenomenon should be properly appreciated. He stressed the need of organizing ‘an industrial movement parallel to the political movement launched by the Indian National Congress.’\textsuperscript{94} It may be reminded, here, that Tilak had deliberately used the term ‘Industrial Subjugation’ (Audyogic Paratantya) to describe India’s conditions. He, thereby, wanted to emphasize that the Indian national problem
has an economic dimension. With the same view in mind, Tilak had put in efforts to give a viable foundation to the Swadeshi movement.

It is true that Dadabhai Naoroji also had, convincingly, put forward his Drain Theory and thus helped laying the economic foundations of Indian nationalism. But, to Dadabhai, this phenomenon was un-British and he hoped that the British would be both willing and desirous, when properly approached, to do India justice. To Tilak, however, the phenomenon of Indian poverty was the inevitable consequence of a colonial relationship between an industrially advanced imperial nation and a backward subject nation. He not only understood the inevitability of such an exploitation but also realized and appreciated the necessity of enlightening the masses. Tilak hoped that awareness of this truth, as also a struggle on the part of the Indians to get a better economic deal from the foreign rulers, would create among them a consciousness of solidarity.

Tilak, thus, endeavored to give a concrete shape to the forces of economic nationalism in India that could cut at the very roots of the British imperial rule. Tilak was thus not only aware of the economic implications of the national movement but also stressed that economic emancipation was the most important way to political, cultural and moral emancipation of India. It can, therefore, be said that Tilak considered not only the cultural dimension but also another-and very important-the economic one.

For intensifying the freedom movement and for inculcating the sense of Nationhood among the masses, Tilak did appeal to cultural aspects as well.
Nevertheless, his ‘Nationalism’, had its roots deeply embodied in India’s secular issues like her colonial exploitation and poverty.

The picture, as it emerges, is somewhat like this: Tilak was trying to find a way out of a difficult situation. The situation needed a reassurance to a fallen people suffering from an inferiority complex and over-awed by the so-called superiority of the ‘West’. The situation was made complicated by the presence of multi-linguistic and multi-religious communities.

Tilak, well aware that nationalism is an abstract idea and has always to be kept alive, thought it necessary to make the common people identify themselves with the abstract feeling of nationhood through some perceivable attributes. That is why he wanted to utilize religious and cultural symbols.

It is often suggested that, as compared to the ‘Nationalism’ of the Indian Liberals, Tilak’s ‘Nationalism’, was ‘narrowistic’, ‘less liberal’ and ‘obsessed with gorification of the past’. These critics, it appears, have failed to take cognizance of the basic difference between the approach of the Liberals on the one hand and of Tilak on the other. Involvement of the masses in the process of nation-building, it must be remembered, did not form a part of the scheme of action of the Liberals. In fact, for the resurgence of India as a ‘Nation’, they were looking forward to the Imperial rulers. Tilak was, however, more concerned with the task of nation-building, by involving the common masses, and he shaped his strategy accordingly. Aware that ‘territory’ never acted as the sole component of Nationalism—a fact borne out, it may be recalled, by the various definitions of Nationalism—Tilak thought it essential to rely on India’s
cultural heritage in his scheme of nation-building. As aptly highlighted by Parikh, “In an ancient country like India, it was impossible to build nationalism and national movement by looking to the past, negatively.”

India, as a land of multiple linguistic regions, besides, needed some common unifying factor. Looking to Hinduism as the highest common factor, Tilak expected it to play this unifying role. At the same time, it must not be forgotten, he wanted to ensure that the non-Hindus are not alienated. And this, he hoped to achieve, by having recourse to the following measures:

Firstly, emphasizing the catholicity of Hinduism, thereby extending an assurance to the minorities that there need not be a feeling of antagonism, as also reminding the Hindus of the essential core of the Vedantic approach.

Secondly, initiating secular movements, thereby forming a common national front; and finally, and most importantly, proposing that in a diverse country like India, people should look forward to a federal form of polity as a possible solution.

It is high time that Tilak’s views on Nationalism should be studied impartially-without any pre-conceived prejudices.

To conclude, even a glance at Tilak’s writings brings out, quite clearly, that he had perceived precisely the historical process of the emergence of a nation. He appreciated that with changing times, new groups could be accommodated. It is thus clear that Tilak’s idea about ‘nation’ was not rigid. It seems, he believed that national identity, once formed, may change its point of attachment.
Tilak looked upon Nationalism as a secular concept and not a spiritual entity. Naturally, unlike Hegel, Tilak did not exalt the Nation-State to a mystical height. Neither was ‘Nation’ the ultimate end for him. A nation, according to Tilak, was one of the other concentric circles of social organizations.

What is even more, and basically, important, is that Tilak was in favour of respecting the cultural diversities. He took a positive view of cultural diversities. This can be assessed as one of the important contributions of Tilak. Experience of other multi-cultural societies proves that societies which, somehow, have failed to come to adjustment with the cultural diversities, found it either difficult or impossible to stand united.

Tilak expected this acceptance of the different cultures to be reflected in the proposed political set-up. He, accordingly, proposed that a multi-cultural nation like India should adopt a federal form of polity that would ensure this.

While examining Tilak’s views on ‘Nationalism’, his role as a promoter of Indian Nationalism should not, thus, be allowed to overshadow his contribution as a thinker.

As an activist, Tilak was facing constraints of the said complex situation. One should not, as well forget that Tilak was operating in a subject nation. At times, he was forced to take situational positions. One does feel that even when aware of the limitations because of these situational constraints, Tilak could not translate his ideas into reality. But, at the same time, and significantly, Tilak thought it necessary to suggest certain correctives.
One cannot claim that Tilak did provide a solution which could resolve, fully and satisfactorily, the problems arising out of the stresses and strains unavoidable in a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multicultural society. But experiences of other multi-cultural societies amply prove that nation-building, in such conditions, has never been an easy task. One could say, with certainty, that Tilak was alert to the intense complexities in a country like India. He never lost the context of plurality of Indian society. He was also aware that there would be no easy and ready-made answers. He, however, did perceive that conscious and painstaking efforts need be put in. And this awareness is important.

It is, thus, evident that though Tilak’s ‘Nationalism’ had emerged in opposition to the ‘alien’ Western type, it was by no means anti- liberal and anti-rational in character. Further, as the discussion in the previous chapter amply brings out, Tilak’s ‘Nationalism’ was analogous to the concept of popular sovereignty. It need also be noted, in this context, that urgency of the situation did not provoke Tilak to make passionate emotional appeals to his people.

Although Tilak was not set out to write an academic treatise, his Nationalism does reflect a positive dimension. His ‘composite nationalism’, reconciling unity with diversity, could be considered as a fundamental contribution.

It can, thus, be said that Tilak’s concept of Nationalism is both valid and relevant even to-day.
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93. KesarL( 11th August 1899.

95. Please refer to Chapter—International Relations: Tilak Outlook.

96. For a detailed discussion of Tilak’s argument, please refer to the Chapter—Swaraj: Mobilization.