CHAPTER-III

THE ROLE OF TILAK IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, born as Keshav Gangadhar Tilak (23 July 1856-1 August 1920), was an Indian nationalist, journalist, teacher, social reformer, lawyer and an independence activist. He was the first popular leader of the Indian Independence Movement. The British colonial authorities called him "Father of the Indian unrest." He was also conferred with the honorary title of "Lokmanya", which literally means "Accepted by the people (as their leader)". [1]

Tilak was one of the first and strongest advocates of "Swaraj" (self-rule) and a strong radical in Indian consciousness. His famous quote, "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it!" is well-remembered in India even today. He also formed a close alliance with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, later the founder of Pakistan, during the Indian Home rule movement.

Early life

Tilak was born in a Chitpavan Brahmin family in Ratnagiri, headquarters of the eponymous district of present day Maharashtra (then British India). His father, Gangadhar Tilak was a school teacher and a Sanskrit scholar who died when Tilak was sixteen. Young Keshav graduated from Deccan College, Pune in 1877. Tilak was amongst one of the first generation of Indians to receive a college education.
In 1871 Tilak married Tapibai. After marriage her name was changed to Satyabhamabai.

Tilak actively participated in public affairs. He stated:

"Religion and practical life are not different. To take Sanyasa (renunciation) is not to abandon life. The real spirit is to make the country your family work together instead of working only for your own. The step beyond is to serve humanity and the next step is to serve God."

After graduating, Tilak started teaching mathematics at a private school in Pune. Later due to ideological differences with the colleagues in the new school, he withdrew and became a journalist later.

He organized the Deccan Education Society with a few of his college friends, including Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Ballal Namjoshi and Vishnushastri Chiplunkar. Their goal was to improve the quality of education for India's youth. The Deccan Education Society was set up to create a new system that taught young Indians nationalist ideas through an emphasis on Indian culture.

The Society established the New English School for secondary education and Fergusson College in 1885 for post-secondary studies. Tilak taught mathematics at Fergusson College. He began a mass movement towards independence that was camouflaged by an emphasis on a religious and cultural revival.
Political career

Indian National Congress

Tilak joined the Indian National Congress in 1890. He opposed its moderate attitude, especially towards the fight for self-government. He was one of the most-eminent radicals at the time.

Despite being personally opposed to early marriage, Tilak opposed the 1891 Age of Consent bill, seeing it as interference with Hinduism and a dangerous precedent. The act raised the age at which a girl could get married from 10 to 12 years.

During late 1896, a Bubonic plague epidemic spread from Bombay to Pune, and by January 1897, it reached epidemic proportions. British troops were brought in to deal with the emergency and harsh measures were employed including forced entry into private houses, examination of occupants, evacuation to hospitals and segregation camps, removing and destroying personal possessions, and preventing patients from entering or leaving the city.

By the end of May, the epidemic was under control.

Even if the British authorities' measures were well-meant, they were widely regarded as acts of tyranny and oppression. Tilak took up this issue by publishing inflammatory articles in his paper Kesari (Kesari was written in Marathi, and Maratha was written in English), quoting the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, to say that no blame could be attached to anyone who killed an oppressor without any thought of reward. Following this, on 22 June 1897,
Rand and another British officer, Lt. Ayerst were shot and killed by the Chapekar brothers and their other associates.

Tilak was charged with incitement to murder and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment. When he emerged from prison in present-day Mumbai, he was revered as a martyr and a national hero. He adopted a new slogan, "Swaraj (self-rule) is my birthright and I shall have it."

Following the Partition of Bengal (1905), which was a strategy set out by Lord Curzon to weaken the nationalist movement, Tilak encouraged the Swadeshi movement and the Boycott movement. The Boycott movement consisted of the boycott of foreign goods and also the social boycott of any Indian who used foreign goods. The Swadeshi movement consisted of the usage of goods produced by oneself or in India. Once foreign goods were boycotted, there was a gap which had to be filled by the production of those goods in India itself. Tilak, therefore, rightly said that the Swadeshi and Boycott movements are two sides of the same coin.

Tilak opposed the moderate views of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and was supported by fellow Indian nationalists Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab. They were referred to as the Lal-Bal-Pal triumvirate. In 1907, the annual session of the Congress Party was held at Surat, Gujarat. Trouble broke out over the selection of the new president of the Congress between the moderate and the radical sections of the party. The party split into the "Jahal matavadi" ("Hot Faction" or radicals), led by Tilak, Pal and Lajpat
Rai, and the "Maval matavadi" ("Soft Faction" or moderates). Nationalists like Aurobindo Ghose, V. O. Chidambaram Pillai were Tilak supporters.[8]

**Imprisonment in Mandalay**

On 30 April 1908, two Bengali youths, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose, threw a bomb on a carriage at Muzzafarpur, in order to kill the Chief Presidency Magistrate Douglas Kingsford of Calcutta fame, but erroneously killed two women travelling in it. While Chaki committed suicide when caught, Bose was hanged. Tilak, in his paper Kesari, defended the revolutionaries and called for immediate Swaraj or self-rule. The Government swiftly arrested him for sedition. But a special jury convicted him, and the Parsi judge Dinshaw D. Davar[9] gave him the controversial sentence of six years' transportation and a fine of Rs 1,000. The jury by a majority of 7:2 convicted him. On being asked by the judge whether he had anything to say, Tilak uttered these memorable words "All that I wish to say is that, in spite of the verdict of the jury, I still maintain that I am innocent. There are higher powers that rule the destinies of men and nations; and I think, it may be the will of Providence that the cause I represent may be benefited more by my suffering than by my pen and tongue". The judge sentenced Tilak to six years' transportation and a fine of Rs. 1,000. In passing sentence, the judge indulged in some scathing strictures against Tilak's conduct. He threw off the judicial restraint which, to some extent, was observable in his charge to the jury. He condemned the articles as "seething with sedition", as preaching violence, speaking of murders with approval. "You hail the advent of the bomb in India as if something had come to India for its
good. I say, such journalism is a curse to the country". Tilak was sent to Mandalay, Burma from 1908 to 1914. While imprisoned, he continued to read and write, further developing his ideas on the Indian nationalist movement. While in the prison he wrote the most-famous Gita Rahasya. Many copies of which were sold, and the money was donated for the freedom fighting.

**Life after prison**

Tilak had mellowed after his release in June 1914, because of the attack of diabetes and also the ordeals faced in Mandalay prison. When World War I started in August, Tilak cabled the King-Emperor in Britain of his support and turned his oratory to find new recruits for war efforts. He welcomed The Indian Councils Act, popularly known as Minto-Morley Reforms, which had been passed by British Parliament in May 1909, terming it as "a marked increase of confidence between the Rulers and the Ruled". Acts of violence actually retarded, than hastened, the pace of political reforms, he felt. He was eager for reconciliation with Congress and had abandoned his demand for direct action and settled for agitations "strictly by constitutional means" - a line advocated by his rival Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Tilak saw the spark in Mohandas Gandhi and tried his best to convince Gandhi to leave the idea of "Total Ahimsa" and try to get "Swarajya" by all means. Gandhi, though looked upon him as his guru, did not change his mind.
All India Home Rule League

Later, Tilak re-united with his fellow nationalists and re-joined the Indian National Congress in 1916. He also helped found the All India Home Rule League in 1916–18, with G. S. Khaparde and Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Annie Besant. After years of trying to reunite the moderate and radical factions, he gave up and focused on the Home Rule League, which sought self-rule. Tilak travelled from village to village trying to conjure up support from farmers and locals to join the movement towards self-rule. Tilak was impressed by the Russian Revolution, and expressed his admiration for Vladimir Lenin.

Tilak, who started his political life as a Maratha propagandist, progressed into a prominent nationalist after his close association with Indian nationalists following the partition of Bengal. When asked in Calcutta whether he envisioned a Maratha-type of government for Free India, Tilak replied that the Maratha-dominated governments of 17th and 18th centuries were outmoded in the 20th century, and he wanted a genuine federal system for Free India where every religion and race was an equal partner. He added that only such a form of government would be able to safeguard India's freedom. He was the first Congress leader to suggest that Hindi written in the Devanagari script be accepted as the sole national language of India.

Social contributions

In 1894, Tilak transformed the household worshipping of Ganesha into a public event (Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav).
In 1895, Tilak founded the Shri Shivaji Fund Committee for celebration of "Shiv Jayanti" or the birth anniversary of Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of 17th century Maratha Empire. The project also had the objective of funding the reconstruction of the tomb (Samadhi) of Shivaji Maharaj at Raigad Fort. For this second objective, Tilak established the Shri Shivaji Raigad Smarak Mandal along with Senapati Khanderao Dabhade II of Talegaon Dabhade, who became the Founder President of the Mandal.

Tilak started the Marathi weekly, Kesari in 1880-81 with Gopal Ganesh Agarkar as the first editor. Kesari later became a daily and continues publication to this day.

Tilak said, "I regard India as my Motherland and my Goddess, the people in India are my kith and kin, and loyal and steadfast work for their political and social emancipation is my highest religion and duty".[13]

Communal Nationalism

In 2010 Orient Blackswan published a book "Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism: Discrimination, Education and Hindutva" authored by Parimala V. Rao. A review of the book by Harish Wankhede in The Book Review states "Tilak categorically opposed all brands of social change under the pretext of confronting colonial intervention in the sacred and internal domains of the religious order. The author goes on to show that Tilak has persistently argued for the safeguards of the moneylenders and opposed propeasant legislations and other measures meant for the empowerment."
Books

In 1903, he wrote the book *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*. In it, he argued that the Vedas could only have been composed in the Arctics, and the Aryan bards brought them south after the onset of the last ice age. He proposed the radically new way to determine the exact time of the Vedas.\(^{[14]}\) He tried to calculate the time of Vedas by using the position of different Nakshatras. Positions of Nakshtras were described in different Vedas.

Tilak authored "*Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Rahasya*" in prison at Mandalay, Burma - the analysis of 'Karma Yoga' in the Bhagavad Gita, which is known to be gift of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

As noted in Shree Gajanan Vijay, he was devotee of Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon. Many reference texts of his are available in the epic.

Legacy

- The Kesari is still published as a daily newspaper in Marathi.
- The Deccan Education Society that Tilak founded with others in the 1880s still runs much respected Institutions in Pune like the Fergusson College.
- The Public Ganesh festival (Ganeshotsav) has become a central part of the culture of Marathi Hindu communities throughout the world. Increasingly, other Hindu communities are also adopting the practice.
- Because of Tilak's efforts, Shivaji, the founder of Maratha Empire is the only figure from that era revered by contemporary Marathi masses and Hindu nationalist parties like the Shivsena.
The Swadeshi movement started by Tilak at the beginning of the 20th century became part of the Independence movement until that goal was achieved in 1947. One can even say Swadeshi remained part of Indian Government policy until the 1990s when the Congress Government liberalized the economy.

Tilak Smarak Ranga Mandir, a theatre auditorium in Pune was dedicated to him.

In 2007, the Government of India released a coin to commemorate the 150th Birth anniversary of Bal Gangadhar Tilak.\textsuperscript{[15][16]}
NOTES AND REFERENCES


14. Bal Gangadhar Thilak, "Orion, or Researches into the Antiquities of the Vedas", 1893
