CHAPTER - VI

IMPACT OF BALAGANGADHAR TILAK ON KARNATAKA

Balagangadhar Tilak, the Father of Indian Militant Nationalism, was a Maharatta Brahmin dedicated to India's freedom from his early age. Under his inspiring leadership, Congress movement was popularised in the whole of India, particularly in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Sir Valentino Chirol describes Tilak as "One of the most dangerous pioneers of disaffection" and "to be truly the Father of Indian unrest". Tilak was the "Prince of Patriots" and "real founder of the popular anti-imperialist movement in India". Tilak had a burning love for freedom of his country. He was the fore-most fighter of Maharashtra in the fight for freedom of India. Karnataka derived inspiration from his political and social ideas. As Tilak said; Karnataka was a great strong-hold in his rousing campaign of Swaraj. It kept aloft the banner.

of freedom in the days of Tilak. He dominated the Indian political activities between 1885-1920.

After he took his LL.B. degree from the Bombay University, Tilak along with Agarkar resolved not to opt for Government services but to devote himself to the service of the motherland. Later, after 1880, Tilak started papers "Kesari" and "Maratha" to spread his national ideas of emancipating India. That was the beginning of his early political career. He roused the national consciousness and instilled the spirit of manliness and courage. He soon became the embodiment of the political desires and aspirations of the Indians.

Karnataka established a close relation with Tilak. Number of his followers in Karnataka increased, and his prestige was enhanced. His paper "Kesari" had so tremendous over North-Karnataka that a Kannada paper called "Kesari" came to be edited and published

from Hubli by Sri. Bindu Rao Hatalik Desai of Dharwar. Tilak's undaunted and fearless slogans were a warning to the British Government. As Poona was nearer its national activities exercised a considerable influence on the North Karnataka. The newspapers of North Karnataka freely borrowed and followed his ideas from the "Kesari".

Leaders of Karnataka regarded Tilak as their hero, guru, and master and his "Gita Rahasya" as their guide. Alur Venkat Rao translated "Gita Rahasya", in Kannada language. Kannada people were inspired by the noble ideal of emancipating their country from the alien rule.

Tilak first discovered in Gita the scriptural authority for his programme of activism in politics. In his remarkable book "Gita Rahasya" he has expounded

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the activist doctrines of "Gita": "Awake, Arise and Fight the battle of Dharma" which was the recurrent call of Lord Krishna. But Tilak's interpretation of the call is in no way related to the epic struggle between the Kuru and the Pandava. But it was the duty of the Indians to arise and fight against the foreign rule. To Tilak, Therefore, India was Dharma-Kshetra. He believed that Indian could break the yoke of alien rule through the message of Gita. This revolutionary view of Tilak as propounded in his book, "Gita Rahaaya", struck the intelligentsia with the force of a new message of activism and manliness.

Karnataka leaders plunged into the political arena and rolled up their sleeves to the task of building up of Karnataka which had suffered degradation since the down fall of Vijayanagar empire. During the Vijayanagar rule Karnataka had attained the height of its prosperity, in respect of art, literature, architecture, religion, science and others. The glittering tinsel of European education had enslaved the Indians. It was at this crucial period, Tilak arose to instil life and patriotism in the Marathi Muslim and Kannada folk. His wonderful intellect and lofty ideals were inscribed in the hearts and minds of his devoted
followers all over India. The dominant personality of Tilak and his teachings moulded the life of many leaders of Karnataka.

The rise, growth and impact of the fresh national awakening moulded the political consciousness of India through the leadership of Congress organisation since 1885. It gradually spread in Karnataka also. Kolashal Venkat Rao, a well-known lawyer of Bellary was the Karnataka representative to the first session of the Indian national congress in 1885.¹ Later, Karnataka delegates attended the Congress sessions and conferences in large number. Tilak's revolutionary paper "Kesari" had a tremendous political influence on lawyers, doctors, and teachers in Karnataka. It also won over the masses and provided a new channel for the pent up energies of a nation. Thus he was the fountain head of inspiration for the political activities in Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Nation as a whole. He opened a new vista of hope and promised a new land. From that time onwards, every movement that was started in Maharashtra had its reaction

¹. Ibid, p. 39.
elsewhere particularly in Karnataka.¹ Strong nationalistic ideals of Tilak caught the imagination of the Karnataka people and earned him a place of high honour in politics. He dispelled fear and instilled courage in the people in the pursuit of their object - Swaraj.

Karnataka followed the foot-steps of the Maharashtra in so far as the public activities in Poona and Bombay were concerned. The new English School was founded at Poona in 1880 by Tilak, Chiplunkar Shastri, Agarkar and others. In 1882, the school bearing the same name started at Dharwar,² (Victoria High School). Inspite of several critical situations at different times the school has made progress. During this time a similar school was started at Belgaum.³ The Marathi paper "Kesari" started at Poona. In Hubli also "Kesari" nicknamed as the piece of 'Kesar' (Kannada) was started.

2. Kabbur Satkara Samiti, Dr. Kabbur Narayana-Navar (Biography), Dharwar, 1958, p. 6.
3. Ibid.
He started the Gajananotsava in 1893. His main object in starting such celebration was to infuse patriotism and discipline among people. Herein he tactfully exploited the religious sentiments of the people. Boys from schools and colleges were inspired to take part in the celebration. It also began to be celebrated in Karnataka with a view to give the universal outlook and to instil a sense of patriotism. In the same manner, Shivaji Jayanti started in 1895 to adore him as a National Hero. The youths of Maharashtra were fired with ambitions and great enthusiasm to serve the mother-land. The reflection of the celebration of Shivaji Jayanti was also seen in Karnataka. Meetings were held and political lectures were delivered. It roused a new spirit and life in the people. Thus Karnataka became a prototype of Maharashtra in all public, social and national activities.

PARTITION OF BENGAL:

Another incident that created a stir in

Karnataka was the partition of Bengal in 1905, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak sounded the bugle against the partition by the Government. Amrit Bazaar Patrika of Calcutta, Kesari of Poona stood against the measure. They gave a call to the Indians to protest against the partition. They preached Swadesi and boycott of foreign goods. Tilak undertook tour of North-Karnataka in 1905-1906. He led a widespread campaign of Swadeshi. People of Karnataka came under his influence. Observance of Swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods were, according to Tilak, the means for the attainment of Swaraj or Self-Government.

Karnataka did not lag behind in ventilating its feelings of sympathy for the Bengalis. The leaders of Karnataka had connection with the movement of the Bengalis. The protest movement sponsored and strongly advocated the extensive practice of Swadeshi. The Swadeshi movement took its rapid stride. Alur Venkat Rao, Gadgeyya Konnapuranth, Krishna Rao Mudvedkar,

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Anant Rao Dabade and others undertook an extensive tour and delivered speeches at Ranebennur, Navalgund, Nargund, Hanagal, Bagalkot and other places to boycott foreign articles and practice Swadeshi. The four-fold programme — Swadeshi, Boycott, Swaraj and National education was — organised in all places. The ideas of Swadeshi and boycott spread among the middle classes also. As a result, Swadeshi industries started in many places.

TILAK GOKHALE PARTIES IN KARNATAKA:

At the beginning of 20th century the political agitation developed on the extremist line. The new energy and consciousness began to arise. The extremist leaders of the Indian national movement denied the ideology of the moderates — Moderation in politics and public life. The extremist section was more militant and uncompromising in their hostility to the foreigners. The difference between the two groups of the Congress became wider. Tilak condemned the ideologies of the moderates and their adoration of the West. He originated the extremist idea in Maharastra. He raised a cry that Swaraj or self-government must be the
goal of the national movement. "Home rule is my birthright and I will have it". This slogan gave entirely a new colour to the movement. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande was formerly inclined towards Gokhale party. Later on he became the chief exponent of Tilak's ideology in Karnataka. Every movement of Tilak, either political, social or cultural, had a clear and vigorous reflection in Karnataka.

A meeting of Swadeshi Vastu Pracharini Sabha, under the presidency of Tilak was held at Bombay in 1906. It extolled the boycott of foreign goods and preached that the goal of Swadeshi should be accepted. The meeting expressed sympathy with the Bengalis. Karnataka leaders were determined to continue Swadeshi. Meetings were held at different places and propaganda campaign was undertaken to impress on the people to adhere strongly to the use of indigenous goods.


2. Ibid.
The followers of Tilak from Karnataka, attended the Surat Congress Session in 1907. Among them, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, Sreenivas Rao Kaujalgi, Alur Venkat Rao attended the session. The educated youths of Karnataka who were interested in the Congress activities used to attend the Congress session every year which provided an opportunity to imbibe the passion for freedom, love and devotion for the Congress. Tilak, with his iron will, passion for freedom, with his learning and eloquence had established a leading position among the men who moulded the public opinion in his day. He had become popular, especially among the educated youths who wanted to elect him the president of the Congress of 1906. A large number of people had gone to attend the Congress session, from Karnataka in 1907, along with Tilak. Alur Venkat Rao, in his "Nanna Jeevana Smritigalu" (Vol. II, pp. 64-65) gives an account of the crisis in the Congress session at Surat when Tilak rose to speak. The session broke up amidst

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scenes of tumult and violence, on account of the fact that, the Congress was divided into two camps — the moderates and the extremists. The division was more of method than of ideal. The genesis of Extreme Thought in Indian National Congress is traced to Tilak. He made the voice of extremism heard through the columns of "Kesari" and spread his views far and wide.

The imprisonment of Tilak sent a thrill of excitement and indignation in the hearts and minds of Kannadigas. He was released in 1914. His release gave rise to further political activities. His release in 1914 was a signal for further activity and a session of the Provincial Conference at Belgaum in 1916 heralded a union of the moderate and the extremist schools under one banner. The Home Rule Movement under the lead of Mrs. Besant and Lokamanya Tilak found ready response. In 1916 the provincial conference

2. Ibid, p. 77.
was held at Belgaum. In the same year under the presidency of Barister Baptista, the Bombay provincial conference set up the Home Rule League in 1916.¹ Mrs. Annie Besant spread the movement in all the provinces.² Alur Venkat Rao tried stupendously to secure an independent branch of the Home Rule League to Karnataka.³ He secured success in his efforts. Gangadhar Rao became the President of Home Rule League. An effective propaganda was conducted in the regional language in all parts of Karnataka. Karnataka Sabha founded at Dharwar in 1916 strongly advocated the unification of the entire Kannada speaking areas.

Besides North Karnataka, the other portions of Karnataka also came under the influence of Tilak. Ammembala Srinivas Pai led an agitation for freedom in the districts of South Kanara and Bellary.⁴ He spread

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² Ibid., pp. 38–39.
³ Ibid., p. 39.
⁴ Ibid.
the aims and objects of the Congress among the middle classes. Ammembala Subbaraya Pal was one of those who undertook the four-fold programme of the Indian National Congress.¹ He spread the ideas of Swadeshi and boycott among the middle classes. Swadeshi industries were started in South Kanara and Bellary districts. Few other leaders who led the freedom movement in the districts of Bellary were Kolachalam Venkat Rao and Sabhapati Mudliar.²

There was a good deal of political agitation in Mysore. The Representative Assembly and the Legislative Council were successfully functioning under the benevolent rule of the Maharaja. The people of Mysore demanded further political reforms, as they were educationally and politically advanced. His Highness was sympathetic towards his subjects and their demand. He was prepared to go to the utmost extent possible consistent with the general interest of the State. So he is regarded as a staunch nationalist.

¹. Ibid.
². Ibid.
in the Indian politics. But the State of affairs in
the Kannada districts of Hyderabad Karnataka was
different. Kodagu also practically sailed in the
same boat.

Thus the impact of Balagangadhar Tilak, on
Karnataka was indeed great. The leaders of Karnataka
held Tilak in great reverence. He roused them to
action. They drew inspiration from him. He was to
them a great source of strength. Karnataka loyally
stood by Tilak and received a substantial political
guidance. Tilak passed away in 1920. Mahatma Gandhi
came on the scene. His leadership and teachings
attracted the masses to the congress in great number.
"It was with the advent of Gandhi and Gandhism that
the masses of Karnataka were brought actively into the
political arena. So far as Karnataka was concerned,
Tilak's appeal was principally to the intellectuals,
though the masses held him in devotional reverence."¹

¹ D.P. Karmarkar, Nationalism in Karnataka,
in Karnataka Darshana, R.S. Hukkerikar
The period was an important epoch in the growth of nationalism in Karnataka. The Karnataka people were, so to say, trained by Tilak in the art and science of Indian Nationalism. He taught the leaders of Karnataka how best they could contribute their mite in India's struggle for independence. A band of stalwarts and public workers came to the forefront because of Tilak, and they became the outstanding pioneers of National Movement in Karnataka. They went on building a sound and solid political structure over which a superstructure of nationalism came to be constructed. Tilak did not merely remain as a great worker and leader of Maharashtra, but he had also the credit of being a great worker and eminent leader of India. He worked incessantly for the cause of India's independence. He preached the people to take courage and confidence in themselves and to break the doors of freedom if it is bolted from inside. It is for these reasons that an epithet of "Lokamanya" came to be used with reference to Tilak.