

# Progressive conservative and modern: the content and personality of Tilak's Nationalism

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## • **Abstract:**

Nationalism as a thought making process which cannot be seen but can only be felt. Tilak considered Ramayana and Mahabharata as common similarities within India which could be used for imbibing the concept of Nationalism and common desire of development and well being of the society. The present paper is an attempt to bring out the views of Lokmanya Tilak and nationalism which states that India was never one country ruled under one king or dynasty before British rule. India was divided in many kingdoms and was full of diversity of different religions, languages, regions, scripts, cultures which can help to create a nation. The paper covers various aspects related to culture, Vedas etc.

**Keywords:** Lokmanya Tilak, nationalism, Swaraj, Indian culture, history

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak is known as an Architect, Visionary and Spokesman of Nationalism in India. If we go through the history of India, India was never ruled by one king before the British rule. India was full of diversity. There were various kingdoms, religions, languages, regions, scripts, etc. There was no such reason or cause like back history, one language-one religion, and limitation of the boundary, which could create the nationalism within its citizens.

Tilak, while thinking about Swaraj (freedom movement) has studied various angles about the spirit of the nation, common cause or will to be a nation and foundation to our nationalism in various articles in Kesari and some of his speeches. Tilak has discussed all these angles about the Nation and Nationalism.

While studying the Swaraj Movement, one must know Tilak's view about nationalism. These views can not only give the understanding to know the Swaraj movement but also help us to maintain nationalism in our country.

**Similarity in culture:**

Tilak has discussed Indian ancient history and culture. In 1905, he wrote a few articles on Mahabharata which can be named as Vaidik dharma or Hindu dharma. Various Kings use to rule the country from Himalaya to Sri Lanka but it was based on religions. Arya and Anarya came together during these years. In various provinces people lived together and called it a Rajya (Tilak, B. G. Kesari 30<sup>th</sup> May 1905). There were many strong kings who used to conquer but never ruled their other Kingdoms but only asked for superiority and used to collect money from other kings and citizens and used to enjoy freedom. Even in Mahabharata, we can see existence of all other Kings and Kingdoms.

Tilak stated that, everyone in Bharat Varsh knew Ramayana and Mahabharata and citizens used to follow the ethics. So Ramayana and Mahabharata are common similarities within India which can be used for the Nationalism. (Tilak, B. G. Kesari – 14<sup>th</sup> March 1905)

**Contemporary Historical Backdrop**

In second half of 19<sup>th</sup> Century a newly educated young generation of graduates created a new thought process in India. Majority of them were attracted to western philosophy, culture, education, social atmosphere and progress. It was a routine to get educated and secure a good job and have a well settled life. They strongly believed in classless or casteless society, wanted to discard religions and wanted to bring social reforms, for the progress of the country. They thought that British rule is the God's gift and asked the British rulers to interrupt the religious rituals. (Tilak, B. G. Kesari, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1901). Western education does not include our religion, ethics, nationalism or national education. Such education does not teach us self respect or love for our Motherland (Tilak, B. G. Kesari 19<sup>th</sup> March 1901). Tilak's thoughts on nationalism are based on the practical approach. He said, India, with full of diversity, was never one country. It is the British Rule that brought all the kingdoms under one roof. During British rule, we learned two things, one King and one language for official communication (i.e. English) (Tilak, B. G. Kesari 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1895). In addition to this British Rule, it brought these provisions together through administration, law, economical decisions, army, post, railway, roads, currency, etc. Even they treated Hindu, Muslim, Shikh, Jains, Parsi, Buddha, Rajput, all religions and casts with same justice and equality. In short, there are only two classes in India, i.e. rural and citizen with salvation. This has helped us (Indians) to come together and have given us the opportunity to resolve our differences and to think as one Nation. All the people from different religions or casts must come together and to think about their progress (Tilak, B. G. Kesari 19<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1896). Tilak mentioned that religion, border, language and back history are not the only parameters for

building a nation though they help for crystallizing the idea of Nation. However, the main reason behind nationalism is, every citizen should be proud of his Motherland. They should think their progress in larger interest of a Nation. There should be a common interest of the citizens of the Nation.

### **Shivaji Jayanti Utsav**

In 1895 – 96, Tilak initiated Shivaji Jayanti Utsav. The main reason behind it was to create self respect and nationalism. Tilak stated that Shivaji is the idol of self respect, motherland and national unity. The idea of freedom was forgotten for last many years. Shivaji Maharaj established Swaraj and Swadharma. For formation of Nation, one needs such idols, which can create strength, courage and self respect. We must celebrate such festivals which will remind us about our great leaders whose life sketch can empower us to work for our nation (Tilak, B. G. Kesari 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1895).

Tilak also stated that Nationalism is not to be seen physically nor is it a physical or metaphysic thing. It is a thought, decision, desire or emotion which can be felt but not seen. Every nation has to take care that spirit of nationalism should be told and created repeatedly. (Tilak, B. G Kesari 28<sup>th</sup> April 1896).

In 1895 during Congress Convention, Tilak mentioned that during Congress Convention, representatives from Bengal, Punjab, Madras, Sindh, Parsi, Muslim, etc. had come together with a single view to resolve political problems for betterment of all. This itself is an example of unity of the nation and future nationalism. (Tilak, B. G.) (Kesari 6<sup>th</sup> August 1895)

**Federal State Nation** According to Tilak as India has diversity of religions and languages it can be like the United States of America. Additionally, Various Provinces in India should come together with a spirit of nationalism. 'We are like part of a human body where if eyes have some problem that does not mean that hands should not help putting the eye drops into the eyes. If all the body parts do not function together, body will die'(Tilak, B. G.).

- **Vedanta:**

Lokmanya Tilak was an admirer of Vedas and our oriental knowledge. Tilak wrote commentary on Shrimad Bhagvat Geeta, i.e. Geetarahasya – Karmayog Shastra. While explaining Nishkam Karmayog he wrote that a person should not act just for himself but for the benefit of the society. He should think in ascending order like himself, his family, society and nation. According to

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Tilak, if you work for betterment of the nation as you are the part of the nation, you can progress with your nation, like one rupee includes 100 paise. The spirit of nationalism originates to help others. When this act is limited for a nation, it is called nationalism or love for the nation. The idea to help others can be widened for the World or all human being. There is a nation between human being and persons. All the citizens in the nation have a common cause to prosper. If the Nation prospers, everyone gets room to prosper. Similarly, if the nation suffers, everyone suffers. Global Nation is an attractive idea. But we do not see any examples in the history. Things like love, equality are accepted by all. However, practically we cannot find such examples (Tilak, B. G. 1906).

On 61<sup>st</sup> Birthday, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1917, Lokmanya Tilak said, 'our Motherland has some expectation from us and this is why I appeal all of you to come together and work for our Nation without any differences. We should treat the Nation as God (Rashtra Dev)' (Kelkar, N. C.). The idea or feeling of freedom is like Atma (soul) which never dies. If there is no spirit of Nationalism, the nation will become a dead body. In short, the concept of nationalism and freedom is mandatory for the Nation.

- **Hindu – Muslim**

Tilak wanted Hindu and Muslim to unite. Hindus are in majority in India. Hindutva is one of the common criteria which can help to build the nation. All Hindus or Muslims or people from any other religion who are born and brought up in India should consider India as their Motherland. Hence, all their ambitions rest in the prosperity of India. (Tilak, B. G. 1899). Tilak wanted everyone to keep their egos, doubts or misunderstandings aside and come together to form a Nation. He wanted diversity with unity. For which he worked hard, convinced all the leaders from various religions and united them at Lucknow Congress on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1917 where the lion roar “Freedom is my birth right and I shall have it” was proclaimed. Famous Lucknow Pact brought Hindus and Muslims together to unite and asked for freedom.

- **Secular Nation:**

Lokmanya Tilak always spoke about parliamentary democracy. While developing the concept of the Nation, he based it on Vedic philosophy. He believed that Vaidik dharma asks to help each other or to work for others. Vaidik dharma accepts other's thoughts. For thousands of years, all these citizens have accepted each other's point of views. In fact, India, as a Nation includes all the religions, thoughts, cultures, etc. and brings 'unity' in diversity.

On 5<sup>th</sup> May 1905, Tilak clarified his opinion: “The first duty of an Indian patriot is to ask if the

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people of India are of one nation. The answer that came to the lips of everyone is that India was one nation. The task of an Indian patriot is not easy, he should not be daunted by difficulties for the development of character consisted in conquering difficulties which are after all the human creation. There is no conflict between Vedantic ideals and patriotic ideals. Progress means that adapting to the changed circumstances at each time. Society being a living organization, it was unnatural if it could not adapt itself to altered circumstances.

“The social organization in India is not surely dead, it is probably slumbering and sleep is no death and there is sure to be a waking sooner or later. Patriotism in India involves nationality and welding of races. The limits should be widened; the ideal of a composite patriotism should be attained” (Mahratta) In 1919, Tilak addressed one small gathering at Dr. Velkar's house in Mumbai. Many prominent leaders like Bipinchandra Pal, Satyamurti from Madras, Chakkarang Chitti from Andhra, Harchand Vishambar Sindha, Divan Chamman Lall from Punjab, Dr. Gopinath Bardoloi from Asam were present.

Tilak said, “We have got a lot of differences in Hindustan. If, we, with all differences start travelling to England in one boat, till Eden Port we can see that very few differences remain. When we travel the Red Sea through Suez Canal, few more differences will disappear. When we travel further, no differences remain. We are in bondage, our Nation is in slavery. That is the only common problem lingers in our mind”. Lokmanya Tilak's words give us an insight of secularism, inclusiveness and nationalism. (Lele, P. R.)

Many people may not know that despite thousands of years of vaidik tradition “India” as a nation is a comparatively new concept in the nineteenth century. Lokmanya Tilak while thinking of its progress analyzed and spoke on various angles of the nation. Tilak tried to identify common factors and spoke about nationalism. Tilak's thought on Nationalism were based on practical, realistic and visionary approach for modern, strong, democratic and secular India.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The object of this paper was to study the views of Lokmanya Tilak and nationalism. It has been viewed from various angles ranging from the concept of secularism, spirit of oneness, democracy, federal nation, self- development in the national growth, unity of nation and concept of Swaraj. The quest for nationalism directs us to the views laid down by Lokmanya Tilak.

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